

Abu Ghraib and Haditha ---- Dejavu All Over Again!

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Although I did not realize it at the time, tonight's paper began in the spring of 2004 as newspaper and television reports streamed into our lives detailing the abuse and torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison. The events of Abu Ghraib raised interesting questions.

“What kind of people are allowed into the U.S. military?”

“Doesn't the military screen its applicants?”

These were real questions. We had all read of the difficulty the military was having in meeting its recruitment quota. We had also read of the military relaxing its standards of entry.

The responses from the military were quick and succinct:

“Abu Ghraib was an isolated incident.”

“The few military personnel involved were not representative of our troops.”

Two years later we began hearing the belated news coverage of the massacre in Haditha, Iraq. First we heard denials of the event. Then we heard several distorted accounts of our tangential involvement. Finally, the true story was told: on November 19, 2005, US marines went house-to-house in Haditha, killing 24 unarmed civilians, including elderly, women, and children.

Again, the questions were raised:

“Who are these marines to have done such violence?”

“How did these marines get into our military?”

Again, the military responded as it had previously: this was an isolated incident and did not represent the military accurately. Donald Rumsfeld implied it was the result of a small fraction of individuals (less than 1% of our troops) who had crossed 'prescribed' boundaries.

If the argument presented by the military and given to us via the mainstream media is correct, we can all wrap ourselves in our comfortable security blankets knowing our children and grandchildren, and the children and grandchildren of our friends and associates, when answering the call to military action, will be immune from such horrendous behaviors, for we know our kids do not inhabit this group of less than 1% who maliciously cross prescribed military boundaries.

As I read these accounts and watched the news on T.V., the questions and answers seemed surreal. Certainly, the conditions in which the guards at the Abu Ghraib prison had to live and work were deplorable. The stink, the filth, the heat, and the rations must have made the conditions most untenable. And, the constant sound of rocket and gun fire near the prison must have made the prison a frightening place in which to live and work. Just as certainly, the marines on duty in Haditha must have been under extreme stress. One of their unit, Lance Cpl. Miquel Terrazaz had just been killed, and two of their fellow marines had been wounded in a roadside bomb explosion. Insurgents had planted the bomb on a side road off one of Haditha's main streets. And, it was reasonable to assume the insurgents had fled into the city and were hiding in the buildings.

However, I kept recalling two classic studies in Social Psychology, conducted over 35 years ago,

which suggested an interpretation quite different from the one offered by the military. These two studies: Philip Zimbardo's "Stanford Prison Experiment"; and Stanley Milgram's studies on "Obedience to Authority" suggest the guards at Abu Ghraib and the marines in Haditha were not isolated psychopaths. Rather, in all probability they were normal, decent, young people thrown into a situation for which they were ill-prepared: soldiers following the orders of their superiors.

But I was busy with other things and did not pursue the topic.

Fast forward to this past spring. One evening, as with most farmers in our area, I was in my home, sitting comfortably in my recliner, eagerly awaiting the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. To my surprise, the guest for the evening was Stanford Professor Emeritus, Philip Zimbardo visiting the show to 'hawk' his new book The Lucifer Effect. This book gave a detailed account of "The Stanford Prison Experiment" and offered comparisons to the situation at Abu Ghraib prison. Immediately I knew the topic for my presentation to The Academy and the next morning I ordered the book.

The Stanford Prison Experiment: What exactly was the Stanford Prison Experiment and why was it conducted? Philip Zimbardo is a social psychologist. In the early 1970s, when this experiment was conducted, he was a professor of Psychology at Stanford University. He, along with a number of social psychologists, were examining the effects of external, or "situational" forces on internal or "dispositional" forces of people. In the Stanford Prison Experiment the situational forces were "situational power" (of guards) and "situational submission" (of prisoners) in a

simulated prison setting.

The subjects in the experiment were young men, who had agreed to be participants in a study for 14, 24-hour days, at \$15 a day. Most of the volunteers thought it would be the easiest money they could make. All they had to do was sit quietly for 14 days with free room and board and collect \$210. All of the men were pre-screened for psychological and medical issues then assigned randomly, to either a 'prisoner' group or a 'guard' group. Those in the guard group were required to work 8 hour shifts.

On a Sunday afternoon, those in the prisoner group were surprised as they were "arrested" by Palo Alto police officers and taken to the basement of the psychology building on the Stanford campus, which served as the prison. Note: those in the prisoner group did not know they would be arrested by official police officers (nor did their roommates, families, neighbors, etc.).

At the prison the prisoners were met by those assigned to be guards. The guards had been called to the prison the previous day for "orientation". (Remember, all participants volunteered without knowing the nature of the experiment. And the placement into groups (prisoners and guards) was unbiased.)

In the guard orientation 17 rules were established. Since reading all 17 rules would take too long, I have extracted a few examples.

- Prisoners must remain silent during rest periods, after lights out, during meals, and

whenever they are outside the prison yard.

- Prisoners must address each other by number only.
- Prisoners must always address the guards as “Mr. Correctional Officer” and the warden as “Mr. Chief Correctional Officer”.
- Prisoners will be allowed 5 minutes in the lavatory. No prisoner will be allowed to return to the lavatory within 1 hour after a scheduled lavatory period. Lavatory visitations are controlled by the guards.
- All prisoners in each cell will stand whenever the warden, the prison superintendent, or any other visitors arrive on the premises. Prisoners will wait on orders to be seated or to resume activities.
- Prisoners must obey all orders issued by the guards at all times. A guard’s order supersedes any written order. A warden’s order supersedes both the guard’s orders and the written rules. Orders of the superintendent of the prison are supreme.
- Prisoners must report all rule violations to the guards.
- and-on-and-on-and-on
- Failure to obey any of the above rules may result in punishment.

When the prisoners arrived, the guards were dressed in new khaki uniforms. The guards wore reflecting sunglasses (ala Cool Hand Luke) to make the interactions with the prisoners more impersonal. The guards blindfolded the prisoners and led them into the jail where they were stripped and commanded to spread their legs and face the wall. They were sprayed with a powder (alleged to be a de-louser). During this time the guards, at the instigation of the

experimenters, began to joke about the prisoners, including remarks about the size (or lack of size) of their genitals. The clothes of the prisoners were placed into storage containers and the prisoners were forced to wear smocks (without underwear).

Needless to say, the prisoners were not happy about all of these rules and began testing the limits of the simulation. And the guards, under further provocation of the experimenters, began exercising their power. The tension within the prison increased as the prisoners and guards jostled for position. Over a five day period the ‘guards’ gained control of the prisoners and gradually increased their ruthlessness as the ‘prisoners’ became more and more subdued.

By Friday (the 5th day of the experiment) the guards were feared and some appeared out of control. Disobedient prisoners were placed in solitary confinement; their food was rationed; they were forced to perform extreme exercise; and they lost toilet privileges. Several prisoners begged to be released from the prison, even if it meant forfeiture of promised pay.

More importantly to a comparison with Abu Ghraib prison, are the following two examples: by the fifth day the prisoners were forced to do push-ups over a hole in the ground. The guards commanded the prisoners to perform these push-ups as if they were ‘f--ing the hole in the ground’. And ---- the prisoners obeyed.

Additionally, a new game had been devised. Guard: “Okay, now pay attention. You three are going to be female camels. Get over here and bend over touching your hands to the floor.”

(When the prisoners did, their naked butts were exposed since they were not wearing underwear beneath their smocks). “Now, you two, you’re male camels. Stand behind the female camels and hump them.” Suddenly the ‘trophy’ photos from Abu Ghraib prison do not appear to be such an anomaly. We have volunteers from Palo Alto exhibiting the same behavior for \$15 per day.

Five days after the experiment began, professor Zimbardo realized he had to stop his study.

From the material I have read, the guards at Abu Ghraib prison, similar to the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment, were simply not trained for the role they were asked to play. The guards at Abu Ghraib, in addition to guarding prisoners, had another task: they had been commanded by their superiors to ‘make their prisoners want to talk to intelligence officers’, to ‘soften-up their prisoners for interrogation’. While many of the guards were army reserve military police, it is most doubtful they had been adequately trained as guards in a wartime situation. It is extremely doubtful they had been trained in interrogation of enemy soldiers.

There was another similarity between Abu Ghraib and Zimbardo’s simulated prison. When Zimbardo examined his data, he found his guards were more ruthless during the night- than during the day-shift. The same was true at Abu Ghraib. Perhaps there was even less oversight, less structure, and more ‘boredom’ for the guards during the night.

Zimbardo has been criticized for his lax structure for both the guards and the prisoners in his prison study. He merely sat outside his simulated prison and watched the story unfold. This

same lax oversight was seen in Abu Ghraib. Army Reserve Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was commander of the Military Police Brigade, which operated Abu Ghraib Prison. Karpinski was the only female commander in the war zone, and she had to command three large jails, seventeen prisons, eight battalions of soldiers, hundreds of Iraqi guards, and thirty-four hundred inexperienced Army Reservists She lived at Camp Victory, near the Bagdad Airport and was away from Abu Ghraib much of the time She claims those higher in the chain of command told her that Tier 1A (site of many of the problems at Abu Ghraib) was a 'special site' and not under her direct supervision. So, she never visited it. It seems she merely sat outside her prison and watched the story unfold.

There was one remarkable difference between The Stanford Prison Experiment and Abu Ghraib prison. It took Professor Zimbardo five days to see his prison spiral out of control and completely halt the study. Abu Ghraib continued for months and months without interruption. If it had not been for the digital pictures leaked to the outside world, who knows when the abuses would have been halted.

Questions from The Stanford Prison Experiment: If we were to analyze the level of responsibility within the Stanford Prison experiment, who would we suggest was most responsible for the behavior of the participants? The young men who were placed in the simulation conditions (the guards and prisoners), or the Professor who designed and implemented the study? I believe most of us would agree that in the Stanford Prison Experiment it would be ludicrous to place the entirety or even the majority of the responsibility on the guards while holding Professor

Zimbardo totally innocent.

If we were to analyze the responsibility for the behavior within Abu Ghraib prison, who would we suggest was most responsible for the behavior? In the trial that followed: 9 enlisted soldiers were convicted of crimes. A military judge recently dismissed two of the most serious charges against the only officer charged: Lt Col. Steven L. Jordan, former director of the prison's interrogation center. Two privates, four sergeants, two corporals and one captain were found guilty of crimes. Army Reserve Brigadier General Janis Karpinski and other ranking military personnel? No charges were filed. Why? We have already heard the answer from the military:

“Abu Ghraib was an isolated incident.”

“The few military personnel involved were not representative of our troops.”

(In case you are wondering, Professor Zimbardo was allowed to give testimony during the Abu Ghraib trial, but his testimony did not alter the course of the trial.)

The guards at Abu Ghraib used as their defense: “I was ordered to soften-up the prisoners!”; “I was ordered to have them ready for interrogation!”; “I was following orders!” We often associate such a defense with that given by war criminals from other countries and dismiss such comments as the indefensible cries from horrible criminals and it appears that is what happened in the trial of the guards at Abu Ghraib. However, the results of the second study I will discuss suggests such a defense might have been reasonable.

Stanley Milgram's Experiments on Obedience: The primary question of this study was first

raised in the 1950s: can we create a situation in which people will conform? A psychology professor, Solomon Asch, was a pioneer in this field. His basic research design was relatively simple. He would have four undergraduates enter a room and draw a number from a hat to determine which undergraduate was to sit in chair 1, which in chair 2, and which in chairs 3 and 4. To ascertain the degree of conformity, Asch would project a target line on to a screen plus three other lines labeled A, B, or C. He would ask the four people: which line (A, B, or C) was the same length as the target line. First, the person in chair 1 would respond, then the person in chair 2, then the person in chair 3, and finally the person in chair 4. In every situation the person in chair 4 was the only subject in the experiment. The people sitting in chairs 1, 2, and 3 were assistants of Professor Asch. Now, on select trials the people in chairs 1, 2, and 3 (Professor Asch's assistants) would all give the same incorrect answers and Professor Asch recorded the response of the person in chair 4. Did the person in chair 4 give the correct answer or agree with the answers of the people in chairs 1, 2, and 3? Not surprisingly, in many trials the person in chair 4 gave the same answer as the answer given by the people in chairs 1, 2, & 3. That is, the person in chair 4 conformed to the behavior of the three assistants.

Well Mel, how boring was that study? Who cares what answers people give to the length of lines? Who cares whether you can demonstrate conformity in such a simplistic situation? Give me a break! And, those were the sentiments of a person named Stanley Milgram.

Milgram changed the research design described above in two distinct ways:

- he created a 'real' rather than a 'trivial' situational force on behavior.

-and he removed the people in chairs 1,2, and 3 and changed the basic paradigm from a study of conformity to a study of obedience to authority.

In Milgram's research, men, ages 20 -50, from New Haven Connecticut were paid \$4 to participate in a study. The study took place in a vacant storefront in New Haven. The experiment took one hour to complete. Each man was individually brought into Milgram's research laboratory accompanied by a stranger and asked to help Professor Milgram in his research on the effects of punishment on learning a task. Two individuals were brought into the room simultaneously under the guise that one of Professor Milgram's employees was absent and Professor Milgram needed one of the two men to help him conduct the experiment. Unknown to the participants (those individuals who had volunteered and were to be paid \$4 for being in the study), the stranger who accompanied them into the room, was an accomplice of Professor Milgram. And, when the two men were supposedly randomly assigned either to a) learn the task or b) assist in the experiment, the accomplice was always assigned to be the "learner" and the participant was always assigned to be Milgram's assistant .

Through an entire series of studies Milgram would tell the participants (those receiving \$4 per hour) that one of Milgram's employees had a conflict and could not assist professor Milgram during the next hour, and would the participant assist Milgram in conducting the study. Firstly, the participant was shown an electric shock apparatus and given a mild electric shock from the lower range of possible shocks levels. Then, the participant was asked to help strap an electrode from the electric shock apparatus onto the hand of the purported learner. When the actual

learning task began, every time the learner made a mistake (remember this is a staged or scripted mistake), the researcher would give the command that the learner should be given an electric shock. And, the participant was positioned such that the participant had to throw the switch to deliver the shock. That's the heart of the study volunteers earning \$4 an hour were commanded to administer electric shock when a purported learner (who was an accomplice of Milgram) made an error. Further, the volunteer participant was commanded to raise the level of the electric shock as the purported learner made repeated errors. The researcher would say: "He made another error, give him a higher shock!" In reality, no shocks were ever administered to the purported learner. The person in the 'learning situation' only faked the reactions to shock. The only shock given was the single, mild shock received by the participant.

What were the results? Almost all of the participants in the study obeyed the commands of the experimenter and shocked the learner. Many followed all the orders and raised the level of electric shock to 450 volts. Even when the purported learner played a recording of himself screaming and kicking the walls of his learning cubicle, if the researcher commanded the participants to raise the level of shock, approximately 1/3 of the participants obeyed and raised the level of shock. In one experiment the purported learner played a recording of himself kicking and screaming as the shock level was raised, and then stopped the recording and became totally silent as the intensity of shock was increased to 450 volts. In this situation, if the researcher said: "lack of a response is an error, raise the level of electric shock" many of the participants continued to throw the switch and deliver the shock. And, they delivered increasing levels of electric shock for \$4.

After the experiment ended, the participants were debriefed?

-When the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, some wept when they learned the person they thought was being shocked was really o.k..

-When quizzed why they gave electric shock to strangers, a reply often heard was: it wasn't I. He (the researcher) told me to do it. I was just obeying his command. He was the one who was responsible. Or, to put it another way I was ordered to do it!

Again, if we were to debate the question: who was responsible for the behavior of those in Milgram's study? I believe we would agree that at least a significant portion of the responsibility would have to rest with Stanley Milgram for placing the participants in this situation.

What about the trial for the marines involved in the massacre at Haditha? Three enlisted marines within the group are being tried. What about their superiors? Four officers were charged with failing to investigate? What about those who designed the study? What about George Tenet, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Cheney, George W. Bush?

If the incident at Haditha was the first time anyone had ever heard of such horrendous activity by U.S. troops in a war zone, one might be able to label it an anomaly. However, I'm sure those my age and older clearly remember a massacre of much greater magnitude by the U.S. military in Viet Nam. Soldiers in Charlie Company invaded the village of My Lai in search of Viet Cong fighters. None were found, "but more than five hundred Vietnamese women, children, and elderly people were murdered in close-up machine-gun barrages, or burned alive in their huts,

and many women were raped and disemboweled. Some of them were even scalped”.

Why do I bother to dredge this old account from Vietnam? When the news of My Lai hit the papers, U.S. civilians were asking:

“What kind of soldiers are allowed into the military?”

“Doesn’t the military screen its new recruits?”

And the military was quick with its counter responses:

“This is an isolated incident.”

“These few military troops are not representative of our military personnel.”

During the 1970s the research by Milgram was used to help people understand how atrocities, such as the My Lai massacre, can happen When given orders, volunteers in a laboratory experiment obey. When given orders, soldiers obey: marines obey.

But in the 1970s, as today, the trial following My Lai focused on the troops not the leaders. One soldier, Lieutenant William Calley, Jr., was found guilty for these crimes. We convicted the “rotten apple” and moved ahead.

It is important for me to note I am not attempting to condone, excuse, or justify the behaviors of the guards at Abu Ghraib, the marines at Haditha, or the soldiers at My Lai. Nor am I attempting to attack a particular political party (My Lai happened during the administration of president Lyndon Johnson.) Rather, I am attempting to illustrate that these classic studies in social

psychology suggest that normal people, from normal homes, living normal lives, when placed into extreme situations under pressure from authority figures, will conform and obey. And, that the conditions of war can and will exacerbate the situation. Add inadequate preparation and inadequate guidance and it seems that relatively normal people can easily drift into behavioral patterns considered deviant and bizarre. These results have been widely distributed for over 35 years. In fact, it is my guess that if as an undergraduate, you took an introductory psychology course, if you remember anything from the class, you remember one of these two studies.

It might be argued that the ability to create conformity and obedience is limited to laboratory experiments and cannot be generalized to military operations. It is possible the current training regimen within the military really has reduced incidents of abuse to isolated situations. However, since 2003 there have been numerous reports based on accounts of Iraqi individuals; reports in sources such as the London Independent; and reports by human rights groups that atrocities during war may be more common than acknowledged by military authorities.

One detailed account is an article in The Nation (July 30, 2007) written by Chris Hedges. Hedges is the author of “War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning” and “What Every Person Should Know About War”. He has worked for 20 years as a foreign correspondent for The New York Times. Many of those years were spent in the Middle East.

Over a seven month period, Hedges interviewed fifty U.S. combat veterans of the Iraq War who were willing to speak on the record about their experiences in Iraq. Their stories “reveal

disturbing patterns of behavior by American troops in Iraq. Dozens of those interviewed witnessed Iraqi civilians, including children, dying from American firepower. Some participated in such killings. They described such acts as common and said the acts went unreported– and almost always unpunished”. Even when reported, one veteran said the colonel in her command, after consulting with the JAG officer would say: “we weren’t there. We’ll give them (the soldiers) the benefit of the doubt.”

Of those interviewed, five gave the author photographs from Iraq to corroborate their claims. According to those interviewed, home raids of Iraqi civilians were ordered by commanders who scheduled the raids between midnight and 5 am (“to catch them off guard”). Although enemy troops and weapons were seldom, if ever, found, the Iraqi families were left in stark fear and terror as the men in the family were taken away. There were numerous reports of unarmed civilians being shot or run over by convoys. “The killing of unarmed Iraqis was so common many of the troops said it became an accepted part of the daily landscape”. “It was just, like, the mentality of my squad leader was like, Oh, we have to kill them over here so I don’t have to kill them back in Colorado....”. Other interviewees reported innocent civilians were framed by planting AK-47s next to the bodies of those killed.

I could go on and on The article in The Nation recounts terror and killings of civilians in raids, during arrests, at checkpoints, while driving convoys, on patrols. All those interviewed continually reminded the author that not all soldiers participated in these deviant activities. But, the incidents were not isolated nor limited to a couple of military units.

According to the veterans interviewed by The Nation, life in the war zone is minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour, day-to-day. There is no time for reflection. There is no time for analysis. Reflection and analysis takes place after the veteran returns home. And when they return home, the nightmares begin.

We have worried, and rightly so, that our young people have not been given proper protections as they have gone to battle. We have read the reports of their Humvees not having adequate armor to protect them from roadside bombs. We have read of their vests not being sufficient to absorb incoming shells. What about their psyches?

All wars have situations where soldiers are forced to make life-and-death decisions. Training soldiers to make appropriate decisions, while difficult, is possible and must begin with those having the most authority. An example of such a methodology would be Stress Inoculation Training. Briefly, this training gives people a minuscule pre-dosage of a stressor agent to fight the effects of a later massive stress situation. Examples could include discussions of articles such as the Zimbardo Prison Experiment and Milgram's Studies On Obedience with soldiers and their officers prior to battlefield deployment. Sessions on the Ethics of Killing, or The Definition of Torture could also provide an inoculation for our soldiers and their superiors.

To deny such training for our soldiers and officers, and then for the leaders of our government to perpetuate the absurd argument that the atrocities at Abu Ghraib and Haditha are the results of a couple of 'rotten apples' who have somehow accidentally slipped into the military, and the trials of

these deviants will somehow rectify the problem is beyond ridiculous.

In a democracy such as ours, each of us has the freedom to have our individual opinions on our nation's war efforts. And we should expect a great diversity of such opinions. At the same time we should be united in our support of both the physical and emotional protection of our youth who are thrown into these conflicts. In this endeavor we have failed. We should also be united in our demands that our leaders bear the responsibilities for the atrocities committed in these war zones. In this we have also failed.

Thank You