Eminent Monsters: A Manual for Modern Torture, directed by Stephen Bennett

By Jean Shaoul
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Eminent Monsters is a documentary by Stephen Bennett involving extensive research and interviews. Focusing on the use of psychological torture that breaks the mind without physical evidence of harm, the film is a devastating exposure of the shocking and systematic abuse by the governments of Britain and the United States of their own citizens.

It has immediate relevance regarding the treatment being meted out to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, which Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, has described as psychological torture.

The film was screened at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2019 as part of a special event discussing the use of psychological torture by governments and will be used to develop International Protocols on Non-Coercive Interviewing by Member States. It is currently screening in several cities in the UK and US.

On February 28, Melzer will present his annual report, to be published on Friday, to the UN Human Rights Council. His report this year focuses on psychological torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, both of which violate the 1984 UN Torture Convention and the 1987 European Convention on Human Rights, irrespective of whether the treatment was intentional.

Melzer has criticised the UK government for its inhuman and degrading treatment of Assange that has placed his life in jeopardy. He has cited Eminent Monsters as a key factor motivating his research.

The experiences gained from each conflict were used to inform the next, even though it was clear that these techniques were useful not so much in extracting information as in terrorising and traumatising people.

Bennett interviews the families of Cameron’s private patients, who were subjected to his supposedly therapeutic work. They described their loved ones as “having completely lost their personalities.”

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in Northern Ireland used what has become known as “the Five Techniques”: wall standing, hooding, white noise, sleep deprivation, and a diet of only bread and water. It also used a sixth technique, making a prisoner wear a loose-fitting boiler suit, which in combination with the others, meant that the prisoner experienced unvarying sensory information from his environment—an effect known as “perceptual deprivation.”

One of the most well-known cases involved the 14 Republican “Hooded Men,” interned without trial in 1971. They were forced to listen to constant loud static noise; deprived of sleep, food and water; forced to stand in a stress position and beaten if they fell. Most horrifying of all, they were hooded and thrown from helicopters a short distance off the ground having been told they were hundreds of feet in the air.
British Parliament had reported that the government was involved in torture, but the government refused to investigate. We are supposed to tolerate a system of torture.” He made the comparison to the Nuremburg Trials, saying, “We punished the Nazis, but what about our own governments, when they do these kinds of things? We have a system that punished the whistle blowers like Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange, not the perpetrators of torture. This means that as a society, we identify with the perpetrators not the victims.”

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