

Calcutta Notebook

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Is it playing with death? Or, with life? Is it a show of arrogance and indifference of a system? Or, show of a system devoured of human senses? And, of brutality? The questions emerge as the news comes up:

"US soldier admits killing unarmed Afghans for sport", was the headline of a news carried by guardian.co.uk, March 23, 2011.

Army Specialist Jeremy Morlock has told US military court, the news said, "he was part of a 'kill team' that faked combat situations to murder Afghan civilians."

"An American soldier", the news said, "has pleaded guilty to being part of a 'kill team' who deliberately murdered Afghan civilians for sport last year."

Der Spiegel, the German magazine published this week three pictures that showed US soldiers including Morlock "posing with the corpse of a young Afghan boy as if it were a hunting trophy."

"The case" the news said, "is a PR disaster for America's military and has been compared to the notorious incidents of torture that emerged from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq." "Some soldiers apparently kept body parts of their victims, including a skull, as souvenirs. In a statement issued in response to the publication of the photos the US army apologised to the families of the dead." Almost a re-run of Nazi brutality! "[The photos are] repugnant to us as human beings and contrary to the standards and values of the United States army," the statement said.

Morlock described the way elaborate plans were made to pick out civilian targets, kill them and then make their deaths look like the victims were insurgents. In his confession Morlock described shooting a victim as Gibbs tossed a grenade at him.

"Morlock now stands to be sentenced to at least 24 years in jail but with eligibility for parole after seven years. That has come about because Morlock struck a plea bargain that will see a lighter sentence in return for testifying against his fellow soldiers."

The world has not forgotten the My Lai Massacre in a March day in 1968, the deaths of 300-400 unarmed Vietnamese in a sandy village. The innocent Vietnamese in My Lai were slaughtered. The American soldiers were ordered to do the killing. "No stale tears four decades later", a US press commented on the massacre, "can erase the image of little children's bodies, obscenely posed atop the heaps of mothers and grandmothers in that ditch in Vietnam. Or the evidence that some of the women and young girls were raped by the rampaging soldiers before they were executed."

The slaughter was covered up by officers at every level in the 11th US Brigade and its Division. "Richard Nixon was in the White House at the time, overseeing the deaths in combat in Vietnam of another 30,000 Americans and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese after he had been elected on a promise to end the war in South Vietnam.... Of 27 soldiers and officers charged in the murders and subsequent cover up, only Lt. Calley was convicted. He was sentenced to life in prison." "Nixon ... the president first ordered Calley into comfortable house arrest at his quarters on Fort Benning, Ga., and then commuted his sentence. Calley had done only three years in his apartment." McNamara, the then US

Defense Secretary, later said that "he was wrong about Vietnam and knew he was wrong at the time, too little far too late."

This is the way empires perceive, feel, behave, a politico-psychology, a politico-knowledge system. It is its historical limit, its weakness. It is captive to this weakness perceived as power, an ingredient for its fall. □□□