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Trends. Tortuous Reasoning on Torture: The Ocalan Case

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As reported by The New York Times, a torture prevention group from the Council of Europe arrived on the island of Imrali to inspect the conditions under which the Kurdish rebel leader (murderer and terrorist from a Turkish Government perspective) Abdullah Ocalan is being held. However, if one assumes the intent to torture by Turkish captors, the probability of torture prevention is not high.

The immediate physical environment in which Ocalan is being held can be easily and quickly sanitized. Physical torture can be applied so as not to leave external marks. Psychological coercion can be used so that a captive will not easily divulge physical torture. And torture can be psychological as opposed to physical. In this last case the torture can even be applied in a manner that is not perceived as such by the captive or that is conducive to withholding information from a torture prevention group. Even a decision by Ocalan to completely and sincerely cooperate with his Turkish captors might not deter torture. In this case, his complete and sincere cooperation would be suspect and/or his actual and alleged transgressions would be perceived to merit immediate punishment and/or unsavory instincts of his captors would find a vulnerable target.

Much as with a security group that is entrusted to visually monitor a work detail to prevent the latter from planting "bugs" in furniture, walls, floors, or appliances, the task of a torture prevention group is basically hopeless-- except against the crudest, most unsophisticated adversaries. (See Cunningham, M., & Cunningham, J.D. (1997). Patterns of symptomatology and patterns of torture. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 31, 555-565; McCormick, J.M., & Mitchell, N.J. (1997). Human rights violations, umbrella concepts, and empirical analysis. *World Politics*, 49, 510-525; Ron, James. (1997). Varying methods of state violence. *International Organizations*, 51, 275-300; The case of Abdullah Ocalan: Interrogation, torture, and truth. (February 26, 1999). *IBPP*, 6(8); Turkey: Torture watch on Ocalan. (March 3, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A8; United States House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Relations and Human Rights. 104th Congress, 2nd Session. (May 8, 1996). Superintendent of Documents, ISBN 0-16-053418-6.) (Keywords: Abdullah Ocalan, Council of Europe, Imrali, Kurds, Torture, Turkey.)