

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

https://www.nj.com/njv_guest_blog/2013/06/us_cant_remain_in_denial_of_to.html

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By George Hunsinger

A major new report has been released on how America resorted to torture extensively, systematically and without precedent after Sept. 11, 2001.

The US flag flying next to the Capitol dome in Washington, DC.

Meticulously documented, the report comes to nearly 600 pages of hard-hitting and detailed analysis. Based on more than two years of intensive research, it was signed by the distinguished Task Force on Detainee Treatment, sponsored by the Constitution Project, a Washington-based nonprofit think tank.

The blue-ribbon credentials of the task force, consisting of prominent Republicans and Democrats, enhance the reports credibility. The task forces bipartisan nature demonstrates that torture is not a partisan issue. It underscores that all Americans of good will, regardless of political affiliation, are called to face up to this, our national shame. Only so can we ensure that U.S. complicity in torture never happens again.

At least five main points are worth emphasizing from the report.

First, the United States definitively engaged in torture. Propaganda to the contrary should be recognized for what it is. The report shrewdly draws upon official U.S. documents to make its point. Again and again, the United States became complicit in the kind of torture it has often condemned when practiced by other nations.

How can we censure brutalities such as waterboarding, sleep deprivation, slamming detainees into the wall, exposing them to extreme temperatures of hot and cold, suspending them from the ceiling with shackled wrists, subjecting them to sensory deprivation, long-time standing and much else all of which we have condemned when practiced by others how can we rebuke such horrors while resorting to them ourselves?

How can we pretend that when we are the perpetrators, its not torture?

Second, the United States use of torture was illegal. Torture, as the report emphasizes, is an international crime. It also stands in flagrant violation of domestic law. The real crimes were not only committed in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. The real crimes were committed in Washington. It is important to see that torture is not just one offense among others. It is a war crime for which there is no statute of limitations.

Third, torture was approved at the highest levels of government. Our top officials, including the president, the vice president and the Department of Justice, bear heavy responsibility.

They were and are guilty of sins of omission and commission. They contributed to the spread of shocking interrogation techniques in theaters of conflict across the globe.

Other government officials and certain military leaders also have dirty hands. The real heroes, as the report notes, were those within the government and the military who resisted the order to torture, sometimes resigning in protest. They have yet to receive the recognition they deserve.

Fourth, torture produced nothing of value. No firm or persuasive evidence exists that the widespread use of torture and other outlawed forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment led to information of significant value. In fact, substantial evidence exists that much of the information extracted by abusive techniques was neither useful nor reliable. Much of it was actually counterproductive. Our use of torture has perhaps been the No. 1 recruiting tool for attracting anti-U.S. terrorists.

Finally, torture requires accountability. This is where we encounter the terrible failures of the Obama administration. It is true that President Obama has curtailed U.S. torture in its most egregious forms.

Unfortunately, it is also true that his executive orders, issued on his second day in office, all turned out to have loopholes. Torture by proxy, for example, has continued to be widespread in Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, no one in high office has been held accountable while, disturbingly, many have been promoted and rewarded.

Contrary to Obamas hope, it is impossible to move forward without looking back.

The high level of secrecy still surrounding U.S. torture after 9/11, according to the report, can "no longer be justified on the basis of national security."

I join the task force panel and the members of the National Religious Committee Against Torture in calling for the release of the Senate Intelligence Committees massive documentation of the CIAs abuse of detainees. As should by now be clear, sunshine is the best disinfectant, and America cannot remain in denial forever. To ensure a better future, we need the truth.

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