

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

http://www.times-standard.com/opinion/ci_23639835/us-torture-illegal-immoral-and-ineffective

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Trending:

Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo continue to trouble Americans of good will. Sadly, the U.S. has morphed since 9/11 from a country that once abhorred torture to one actively engaged in it. Is this change in moral posture necessary?

It isn't necessary or wise, says a 500-page report from the bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment. It finds that torture was not only illegal and immoral but also counterproductive. Torture didn't work, because the information obtained was not useful or reliable. The website detainee-taskforce.org offers the entire document.

Turning back the clock, we note that torture was authorized by our highest political leaders. Yeah, we waterboarded Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, former President Bush told an audience in Grand Rapids, Mich. I'd do it again to save lives.

Perhaps believing that it would save lives, he amended the Army Field Manual to permit waterboarding, stress positions, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement, which we had previously condemned as illegal.

Although Bush's Office of Legal Counsel opined that torture was legal, the government failed to make those opinions public. Nor has the Obama administration done so.

Contrary to the president's belief, there's no evidence that torture saved any U.S. lives.

Agreeing with Task Force findings in a Washington Post opinion piece, former military interrogator Mathew Alexander wrote he was appalled by the torture he witnessed. Using different tactics, his interrogation team got to know its enemies, negotiated with them, and adapted criminal investigative techniques to the military situation. They used traditional, non-torture techniques to hunt down, among others, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaida in Iraq.

Alexander found in Iraq that waterboarding actually cost American lives. The number one reason foreign fighters flocked there to fight were the abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. So U. S. torture served to recruit fighters for al-Qaida in Iraq, which initiated most of the attacks on coalition forces. It's no exaggeration, he notes, to say that half our losses and casualties came at the hands of foreigners who joined in because the U. S. abused Muslim detainees.

The torture trap we fell into was partly due to our own ignorance, because the government went to great pains to hide the truth from us and manipulated our ignorance to enhance fear.

Torture is just one component of the wars the Bush and Obama administrations carried out in our names. The wars costs include PTSD, military suicides and vets left jobless and homeless, not to mention billions of dollars. It's not just torture victims who bear scars, because troops who tortured victims now suffer also.

A related torture mess is Guantanamo, where even the government admits most detainees are charged with no crimes. At the same time, it claims illogically that these innocent men cannot be released. Of the 166 foreign captives in Guantanamo, 86 have been cleared for release or transfer, 106 are on hunger strike because they have no freedom to do anything else, and 45 are being force-fed.

In solidarity with hunger strikers at Guantanamo, former Arcatan Brain Willson began a hunger strike on the City Hall steps in Portland on May 12, which he had to suspend after being struck by a car. They are not worth less and we are not worth more, says Willson, a Vietnam combat veteran. Like many others, including those of almost all religious faiths, he wants torture, and particularly forced feeding in Guantanamo, stopped.

Congress has ignored the torture issue. To her credit, Senator Feinstein has opposed forced feeding, but she has declined to release a separate Senate Committee report addressing torture. Its results are probably the same as those from the Task Force noted above, and she should release it. She and our other congressional representatives, including Senator Boxer and Representative Huffman, should initiate

legislation that prevents future U. S. torture:

The government should release all the facts, including military and CIA abuses.

The government should free detainees who haven't been criminally charged, and try the rest.

U. S. law must oppose torture, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

No prisoners should be transferred again to torture countries.

Those who broke the law must suffer the consequences.

Forced feeding at Guantanamo should end.

Guantanamo should be closed.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture has produced a video Ending U. S.-Sponsored Torture Forever, A Study for People of Faith, which is available to any who wish to see it.

John Schaefer is a member of Veterans for Peace and lives in Arcata.

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