

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/homeland-security/151431-the-false-debate/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

For a civilized country in the 21st century, the use of torture should not be a matter of public debate. Torture is wrong under all circumstances. Yet, for the past nine years, since the public became aware of the torture program used on 9/11 detainees by both the CIA and the military, every effort has been made to make the use of torture a policy question. Was what we did really torture? Doesn't terrorism require extreme tactics? Don't the results justify the means?

Under a barrage of false claims by former Bush administration officials that waterboarding, stress positions, leg beatings, wall slamming and extreme sleep deprivation is not torture, the public and the press have allowed a foundational principle of civilized countries to become just another political question. Even our leading newspapers and journalists have succumbed to the political muscle. They avoid calling torture torture and instead use the cover name enhanced interrogation techniques or say that some people refer to it as torture.

This all changed over recent weeks, when the independent, bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment released its 500-page [report](#) on a two-year investigation into the treatment of 9/11 detainees by the United States. Each of the 11 members, including a former Republican congressman, a former Republican-appointed FBI director, stated without equivocation that the U.S. military and CIA engaged in the torture of 9/11 detainees in many instances and across a wide range of theaters, that they did it at the direction of the then president, vice president, and secretary of Defense, and that torture is wrong under all circumstances. Even an act as terrifying and damaging as 9/11 is no excuse for engaging in torture.

Here's what the task force had to say on the fabricated public debate about torture:

The question as to whether U.S. [officials] engaged in torture has been complicated by the existence of two vocal camps in the public debate. This has been particularly vexing for traditional journalists who are trained and accustomed to recording the arguments of both sides in a dispute without declaring one right and the other wrong. The public may simply perceive that there is no right side. In this case, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that among those who insist that the U.S. did not engage in torture are figures who served at the highest levels of government, including Vice President Dick Cheney. But this Task Force is not bound by this convention. The members, coming from a wide political spectrum believe that arguments that the nation did not engage in torture and that much of what occurred should be defined as something less than torture are not credible.

{mosads} The task force presents a thorough legal analysis that concludes with the unequivocal assertion that the abuses claimed by the Bush administration as other than torture are in fact torture, and to believe otherwise is to fall with Alice down the rabbit hole.

Why is this finding so important? For several reasons. One, we come clean with ourselves, and we come clean with the world. We are no longer living a lie, and we can begin to rebuild our moral foundation and recover the world's trust. Two, having allowed this to happen, we can take whatever steps are necessary to make sure it never happens again. Knowing we did wrong can motivate us to fix the problems that allowed the wrong to happen in the first place. Three, we can live up to our international and constitutional responsibilities and compensate the individuals we wrongly abused. Admitting we used torture both requires us and allows us to meet our international obligation to provide redress to the victims of torture.

The task force has performed a great service for this nation by sharing the truths it has learned with the public. Now the Senate Intelligence Committee, which has also finalized a report on the CIA's use of torture, [should make its findings public](#) as well. With these two reports, we have an opportunity to end the false debate and put in place the necessary protections to prevent the use of torture in the future, as we carry out our responsibilities under the U.S. Convention Against Torture to the victims.

The United States engaged in torture, and now we must own up to our actions.

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