

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

https://trib.com/opinion/columns/transparency-on-torture/article_04330d00-a708-5307-a859-78dcbebc60e4.html

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With Dick Cheney's daughter running for the U.S. Senate, Wyoming has an opportunity to become ground zero in an important national debate about whether torture should be used in the war against terrorism. Liz Cheney defended waterboarding and other enhanced interrogation techniques, claiming they do not constitute torture, that they are valuable tools in wrenching intelligence from prisoners.

I am joining people of faith across the nation representing hundreds of faith communities as a part of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. We seek to stir the national consciousness to reject the use of torture as the policy of the American government.

Before 9/11, it would have been unthinkable that the United States would resort to torture. But we have. With little discernment and shrouded in secrecy, ours became what we were taught to despise, a nation that violates the most basic sense of what it means to be civilized.

Dick Cheney's daughter may argue that what we did is not torture. It is understandable that a daughter would defend a father but, as a candidate for the U.S. Senate, she is obligated to recognize the truth. The truth is that our nation tortures human beings.

Both the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Constitution Project have studied this matter in depth and written reports. The 6,000-page Senate report remains under wraps. The Constitution Project's Task Force on Detainee Treatment publicly released its report this year. Its bipartisan report examines the federal government's policies and conduct related to the capture, detention and treatment of suspected terrorists during the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations.

The task force was co-chaired by former Republican Congressman Asa Hutchinson, Arkansas, who served as Under Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security during the George W. Bush administration, and Rep. Jim Jones, D-Oklahoma. The task force includes former high-ranking officials with distinguished careers in the judiciary, Congress, the diplomatic service, law enforcement, the military, other parts of the executive branch and recognized experts in law, medicine and ethics. The group includes conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats.

The committee found that the United States engaged in what everyone except perhaps the Cheneys know to be torture. U.S. forces, in many instances, used interrogation techniques on detainees that constitute torture. American personnel conducted an even larger number of interrogations that involved cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The task force concluded this behavior violated international law and our own Constitution and values.

Examining public records and interviewing numerous eyewitnesses, the report describes detailed examples of torture, including several cases where individuals were literally tortured to death. The report documents how the United States used interrogation techniques it had previously condemned as illegal when used by others, including waterboarding, extreme stress positions, extended sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement.

The report contains evidence that political leaders handpicked lawyers willing to manipulate the law to render legal opinions supporting the policy. Most important, the task force found no firm or persuasive evidence that (the use of torture) produced significant information of value.

Because task force members lacked access to classified information, they were unable to completely put to rest claims made by supporters of torture arguing that classified documents show that torture was useful.

That is why it is critical the Senate Intelligence Committee make public its own recently adopted report on torture.

Unless the Senate report is made public, apologists like Liz Cheney and her father will continue to make claims that what we did was not torture and even if it was, that it saved lives. We may reach different conclusions, but we should all have the same facts. It is impossible to have a meaningful debate unless the facts and findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee are on the table.

This is not simply a political debate. It is theological. This is about our relationship with God. In a very real way, Americans must decide how much of Jesus' teaching we are willing to discard in order to pursue an immoral public policy.

The Rev. Rodger McDaniel is Pastor for Highlands Presbyterian Church in Cheyenne and a board member and past president of the Cheyenne Interfaith Council.

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