National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/terror-torture-and-truth/2013/04/17/cc62398e-a7a5-11e2-8302-3c7e0ea97057_story.html

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

While the country struggles with the aftermath of the new terror attack in Boston, the importance of a new 500-page report, released this week by a bipartisan, high level group called The Task Force on Detainee Treatment of The Constitution Project, is cast into high relief.

The timely lesson of this new report is this: as a nation we will not avoid the mistakes of seeking revenge through human rights violations, as was done after 9/11, unless we confront the truth of that time, its continuing corruptions of our moral and legal frameworks, and change the future of our responses to ongoing terrorist attacks.

The new report by the Task Force is not just crucial, its urgent. Such practices as forced feeding, as well as indefinite detention, continue. Hunger strikes are going on right now at Guantanamo, and detainees are being painfully force fed. We as a nation dare not treat torture as something we have gotten past. Its not past. Not yet.

The report does take another step forward, however, toward the crucial moral and civic task of truth-telling about our recent national history, post 9/11, of authorizing, conducting and lying about torture. Its a long and detailed report, truly wrenching to read. But as Scripture teaches, Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

The report is all the more powerful because of the rigorously bipartisan composition of the 11-member task force. The co-chairs were Asa Hutchinson, who served as Under Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security during the George W. Bush administration and is a former Republican member of Congress from Arkansas and Ambassador James Jones, former Democratic member of Congress from Oklahoma and ambassador to Mexico.

The task force examined public records and conducted hearings with eye-witnesses and persons involved. The examples of torture, including several cases where individuals were tortured to death, are chilling. One crucial thing this report reveals is how much is still not known to the public.

There are 24 findings in the report, and accompanying documentation and recommendations for action. Some of these findings are that U.S. forces used interrogation techniques on detainees that constitute torture, that there is no firm or persuasive evidence that this torture produced information of value, that the torture was authorized by the highest level political leaders, that the Office of Legal Counsel repeatedly gave erroneous legal sanction to torture, and that medical professional violated their professional ethical obligations when they participated in the torture and coercive interrogation.

The report also documents problems that are on-going today and need immediate address: the high level of secrecy about rendition and torture of detainees is not warranted, that the Army Field Manual has been amended (2006) to arguably permit cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and should be changed, and the transfer of detainees from U.S. control to Afghanistan control has resulted in the infliction of torture in violation of international obligations.

As I noted earlier, the forced feeding of hunger striking detainees at Guantanamo should be stopped, as it is abuse. In addition, a majority of the task force finds the indefinite detention at Guantanamo abhorrent and intolerable.

One detainee lawyer interviewed for the report called indefinite detention moral despair.

Even today, do the American people want to know the truth about the torture of 9/11 detainees? Do we want to know how many actually died from torture, how many were rendered to black sites, and the legal gymnastics employed to bypass the law? Do we want to know about detainee abuse that continues even today?

Past, present and future, the only way to free yourself and your nation from complicity in great evils is to face the truth, honestly and without excuses. That is why Scripture teaches that when you know the truth it will set you free.

Telling the truth about the past doesnt change the past, but it enables you live honestly in the present, and even avoid some of those mistakes in the future.

But what has happened, since we have not rigorously examined this literally tortured past of our country, is that grave mistakes are continuing to be made. Forced feeding clearly continues at Guantanamo, as, of course, does indefinite detention.

The actual way forward is for there to be more transparency. The Senate Intelligence Committee should release its report as well. The many diverse faith-based members of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, of which I am a proud member, have been

working through an interfaith effort to encourage the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report for this reason.

The Obama administration has brought some positive change to this history, but not nearly enough as the report indicates. Also, I would argue the switch from capture and interrogate to kill with drone strikes has its own deep moral and ethical problems, as I have written.

The biggest mistake of all, after the country learned of the torture and abuse of detainees was not to have a truth commission on the all of these issues years ago, as Senator Patrick Leahy proposed.

Its not too late.

You personally, as a citizen, can take action. Read this wrenching report, and then contact your congressional representative and ask for the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report. Lets prove were a democracy.

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