

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/op-ed/bs-ed-torture-20131003-story.html>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Yes, America. We tortured.

And it was illegal, abhorrent and cruel. How can we ignore the facts? How can we fail to demand that the full and complete truth be provided to us?

Earlier this year, those of us who follow such news of the intelligence world learned from the Constitution Project's Task Force on Detainee Treatment that there was great evidence shared in an in-depth, 500-page, two-year study that the U.S. government engaged in torture of detainees in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. Detainees died as a result of our torture activities, and former President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were involved in authorizing the tactics that led to such results.

Other institutions, which have traditionally held longstanding commitments to integrity, such as our Justice Department, "repeatedly gave erroneous legal sanction and misrepresented facts," the report tells us. The U.S. Army modified its manual to incorporate acts of torture, and even the medical community violated its "above all, do no harm" creed.

Much of the public didn't see this report. It was carried out by a high-level, bipartisan group of former elected officials, ambassadors and members of the academic, religious and intelligence communities, and it was greatly publicized. But it's not the type of thing that draws the common reader. What's more, there's another report out there that has yet to see the light of day. The Senate Intelligence Committee has completed its own report and this time, it was based on classified and confidential information to which the task force members did not have access. That report on CIA torture was adopted as long ago as December of last year, yet it remains classified.

So, where do we go from here? Noting that democracy and torture cannot peaceably coexist in the same body politic, I must disagree with President Barack Obama's approach of looking ahead without examining the past. We must hold the government past or present accountable for its actions, and we must learn from the past in order to move forward.

The prison at Guantanamo Bay must be closed, and "forced feeding" of detainees should never occur again. The United States should not transfer detainees to countries where they will be subjected to further torture, and our legal system should resist any U.S. government attempts to invoke "state-secrets privilege" to deflect lawsuits.

The American public needs access to the complete file. This includes the declassification of CIA records, the release of the 6,000-page Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture, and the publication of internal opinions by the Department of Justice.

And lastly, let's ensure that safety systems are in place so such shameful, immoral policies are never employed again. The laws and procedures set in place before our country's torture policies began should be reinstated and reaffirmed. Those are the policies we can be proud of. American citizens should also lobby Congress in support of specific legislation that leaves no doubt that torture is an unacceptable practice in our nation.

The findings of the Constitution Project illuminate our nation's actions following the attacks of 9/11 and give us a roadmap for dealing with this less than stellar chapter of American history, emphasizing that the accountability and authority for moving forward belongs in the hands of the people.

The recent findings are a difficult pill to swallow, but the reality is, they are but the first step, merely the surface of the truth on torture we have yet to still learn. In this vein, I stand with hundreds of diverse organizations of all faiths coming together through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in calling for the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report and shed light once and for all on the realities of government-sponsored torture. With that critical intelligence made available to the American people, our country may restart the path to leading as a champion of human rights.

Susan Kerin is on the steering committee of Interfaith Action for Human Rights, a Mid-Atlantic partner of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. She lives in Rockville. Her email is susank@capconcorp.com.

Copyright 2022, Baltimore Sun

Copyright 2022, Baltimore Sun