

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/homeland-security/144813-why-the-truth-about-zero-dark-thirty-matters/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The brunt of the debate over Zero Dark Thirty is whether or not torture led to the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden. The filmmakers portray a story that says it did; the 6,000-page investigation recently adopted by the Senate Intelligence Committee, yet to be made public, reportedly says it did not. Of course the public, which paid for the three-year investigation by that committee, deserves to see the report. The committee should release it as soon as possible. But regardless of however that issue gets resolved, it leaves out two crucial and controlling points:

First, immediately after 9/11, the world was on the side of the United States. Individuals and countries across the world sought to help us locate and bring to justice the perpetrators. When we started down the road of capturing and torturing suspected terrorists, we lost that goodwill, and people who may have otherwise helped us locate bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders not only stopped helping, many grew gravely opposed to our mission. No one less than General Stanley McChrystal has told us that the pictures of the prison at Abu Ghraib, which stood worldwide for our torture program, were a major recruiting tool for al-Qaida. Had we not resorted to torture, perhaps we would have benefited from intelligence from others willing to help us. And perhaps we would have found bin Laden long before we did.

Secondly, whether or not torture works, that is, whether or not a country obtains useful information from torture, is not the point. No matter its efficacy, torture is absolutely illegal and immoral. This is not a gray area in international law. It doesn't even require being a signatory to a treaty to bind a country to the prohibition against torture. Torture, like slavery and genocide, is an act considered so heinous, so inhumane, that it is illegal under any circumstance by any country. And the consequence of committing torture is that both the government of that country and its citizens must be held accountable. We cannot brush our use of torture under the rug; we cannot justify it away; we cannot look forward and not backward to avoid addressing it. We have a moral and legal obligation to bring accountability for our use of torture and to make sure that it never happens again.

The temperature in our moral pot has warmed significantly over the past few years and with the release of Zero Dark Thirty. So let's take a minute, now, and look at the thermometer. If it gets much hotter, our moral standard on torture will be poached. Let's stop treating torture as a public policy debate right now. Let's acknowledge it for what it is immoral and illegal. And let's vow right now to hold ourselves accountable for what we did and commit to never letting it happen again. We're smarter than the frog. We can save ourselves.

Gustitus is president of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

THE HILL 1625 K STREET, NW SUITE 900 WASHINGTON DC 20006 | 202-628-8500 TEL | 202-628-8503 FAX

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