

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-richard-l-killmer/release-torture-report_b_3195135.html

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Co-founder of "Shoulder to Shoulder: Standing with American Muslims; Upholding American Values

Last week, Vice President [Joe Biden](#) joined Senator John McCain in calling for the public release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's recently adopted report on torture. Biden -- a Democrat -- and McCain -- a Republican -- provide bipartisan support for public release of the report -- something many in the faith community also have been calling for since the committee adopted it in December. Facing the truth is the first step to healing a moral wrong, and our nation is stronger when it owns up to its mistakes.

While speaking about the Intelligence Committee report on a panel with McCain late last week, the vice president [said](#), "Now this voluminous study has been done. And the internal debate that goes on in the Congress and in the White House is, do we go back and do we expose it? Do we lay out who was responsible and how we got to where we are?"

McCain responded: "It (torture) offends the fundamentals of what kind of country we are, and the practical side of it is, don't think it didn't damage the United States' image in the world in ways that we'll be paying for years to come."

Biden agreed that to "excise the demons" requires learning the truth about post-9/11 torture. "The single best thing that ever happened to Germany were the war crimes tribunals, because it forced Germany to come to its milk about what in fact has happened," Biden told McCain. "That's why they've become the great democracy they've become."

Biden's words echo the fear that we in the faith community have if the truth about torture isn't revealed to the public. The United States has a history of providing important moral leadership in many areas. But by shrouding our tortured past in secret, we endanger both our country's moral legacy and our national security.

Only by admitting the reality of our own sins can we then resolve never to repeat them. The American people deserve to know the truth about torture and to understand how government leaders came to believe that torture was an acceptable policy.

The public record already tells us that our government waterboarded detainees, subjected them to extremes of heat and cold, forced them into stress positions, sexually abused them, held them in prolonged solitary confinement, subjected them to sensory deprivation, forced them to remain awake for over a week at a time, and otherwise tortured and abused them -- all in our name, acting as our elected representatives and their appointed officials. Many such acts of torture had previously been condemned by our government and, in fact, been prosecuted as war crimes.

Biden's and McCain's support for bringing to light a comprehensive record of the use of torture by the government is critical. But it is only a start. We need the report to actually be released. We need to know how and why government lawyers manipulated the law in order to claim as legal what had already been declared illegal. We need to understand which incidents of torture were intended as torture, and which were a product of an environment that encouraged the abuse of prisoners. We need to understand why our leaders decided to set aside basic values -- values that have guided our country since its founding.

In addition to knowing the hows and whys of torture, we also need to know the stories of the brave men and women, in both civilian agencies and the military, who stood up for U.S. law and American morality and argued against the use of torture. Opposing authority was a sacrifice, and these people deserve to be applauded, not chastised.

Finally, we need to know more about the practical costs of torture. Senators on the Intelligence Committee, who have prepared and approved the committee's report, say that it shows that torture did not provide critical intelligence, that it harmed our reputation, and that the use of torture was ultimately harmful to U.S. security. It is important that the public have access to and understand that information as well.

I am grateful for the excellent and comprehensive report of the high level, bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment of The Constitution Project, [whose report](#) was released last month. It describes details of past U.S. torture policies and practices. It makes clear that post-9/11 treatment of detainees was, in fact, torture and was authorized by the highest levels of government. But that task force did not have access to classified documents and did not have subpoena power. Therefore, it is critical that the Senate Intelligence Committee, which had both, release its report.

In a democracy, government is accountable to its citizens. Americans deserve to know the truth about torture so that we can elect leaders who uphold our values. Torture is always wrong, and that is a truth everyone should acknowledge.

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