Torture Is Morally Reprehensible

*Torture*, 2009

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Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself. It is basic common sense for most people. We should not expect to be treated any differently or better than how we ourselves treat others. This ... is elementary morality.

The results from an AP-Ipsos [a research and polling group] poll conducted between 15 November and 28 November [2005] gives pause to people's grasp of elementary morality. The poll reveals that in some countries there is substantial support for the notion that torture of suspected *terrorists* can be justifiable. Important to note is that the poll is not talking about convicted terrorists but rather "suspected terrorists." This is disturbing because the presumption of innocence has been dismissed. German citizen Khaled al-Masri's desperate plight speaks to this. Masri was abducted by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], transferred to another country, tortured and subsequently released after the "mistake" became apparent.

The poll raises many questions. For example, who is defining *terrorism*? Can the right to torture suspected terrorists be justified when the alleged terrorists are resisting an illegal invasion and occupation ...?

**Poll Results**

Approximately 1,000 adults were interviewed in each of the nine countries traditionally considered strong allies of the *United States*. The margin of error for each poll was plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Much of the support for justifiable torture ... is limited to "rare instances." Has anyone ever heard of the slippery slope argument?

The poll results indicate that support for justifiable torture is highest in southern Korea and the United States. There is also strong support in the United Kingdom and France with borderline results in Germany, Canada, and Mexico. Italians and Spaniards are opposed.

Whether torture is illegal or not is a side argument. *Torture* is morally reprehensible.

When respondents were asked about how they felt about the US interrogating suspected terrorists in their country, the results were strongly in opposition in every country except the US, where 63 percent indicated support.

**U.S. Torture**
Disregarding mendacious denials from high-ranking US officials, it is no secret that the United States is running a worldwide system of detention centers where torture is used on prisoners. In carrying out its so-called War on Terrorism ... the US government has contorted international laws and conventions to its own twisted aims. The US government has cowardly eluded the international protections afforded prisoners of war through the introduction of its own designation of "enemy combatants"—a designation not provided for in international law. The US is sending a dangerous signal: it is very easy to slip from the constraints of international law; all that is required is to coin new terminology.

Whether torture is illegal or not is a side argument. Torture is morally reprehensible. It debases humanity to its most atavistic level. If the US government cared for the safety of its captured forces ... then it would oppose torture and enforce an international prohibition against it. The US attempts to shield its troops from their war crimes in Iraq through questionable occupation legislation and failure to accede to the authority of the International Criminal Court ... but ... US troops are left vulnerable on the ground. The US fighters themselves should be refusing torture with all their force. Their very use of torture exposes themselves and fellow fighters ... that fall into "enemy" hands to a similar treatment. Obviously for many US troops, the appeal to morality is in vain but this does not involve morality. It is just an appeal to the self-preservation instinct.

Republican US Senator John McCain ... was himself a victim of torture in Vietnam. He is a leading proponent to ban the use of torture as well as "cruel and inhumane treatment." The anti-torture legislation was heavily approved in the Senate [in 2005] but the war president George [W.] Bush has indicated that he will veto the measure. [Bush signed the bill in December 2005 but reserved the right to bypass the torture ban under his powers as commander-in-chief.]

The questions used in the AP-Ipsos poll are leading. The poll might have asked: "How do you feel about the use of torture against people who might be innocent to obtain information about terrorist activities of which they might know nothing about?" This might have led to completely different results. Nonetheless, the use of torture is but one further instance of the regressive slope trod by the Bush government in its never-ending crusades. The sadness is that so many people in the western world would slide down this slope. It bodes ill for humanity.

Further Readings

Books


**Periodicals**


• *The Milli Gazette Online* "'War on Terror' Threatens 'War on Torture,'" June 24, 2006.
• New York Times "Notes from the War on Terror," May 2, 2008.
• The Progressive "Torturers in the White House," June 2008, Vol. 72, Iss. 6, p. 7.
• Bob Weir "Torture: Can We Handle the Truth?" The American Thinker, January 8, 2005.


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