



September 3, 2009

EDITORIAL

## Dick Cheney's Version

After the C.I.A. inspector general's report on prisoner interrogation was released last week, former Vice President Dick Cheney settled into his usual seat on Fox News to express his outrage — not at the illegal and immoral behavior laid out in the report, of course, but at the idea that anyone would object to torturing prisoners. He was especially vexed that the Obama administration was beginning an investigation.

In Mr. Cheney's view, it is not just those who followed orders and stuck to the interrogation rules set down by President George Bush's Justice Department who should be sheltered from accountability. He said he also had no problem with those who disobeyed their orders and exceeded the guidelines.

It's easy to understand Mr. Cheney's aversion to the investigation that Attorney General Eric Holder ordered last week. On Fox, Mr. Cheney said it was hard to imagine it stopping with the interrogators. He's right.

The government owes Americans a full investigation into the orders to approve torture, abuse and illegal, secret detention, as well as the twisted legal briefs that justified those policies. Congress and the White House also need to look into illegal wiretapping and the practice of sending prisoners to other countries to be tortured.

Mr. Cheney was at the center of each of these insults to this country's Constitution, its judicial system and its bedrock democratic values. To defend himself, he offers a twisted version of history:

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He says Mr. Bush's Justice Department determined that the "enhanced interrogation techniques" ordered by the president were legal under American law and international treaties like the Geneva Conventions.

In reality, those opinions were based on a corrupt and widely discredited legal analysis cooked up after the White House had already decided to use long-banned practices like waterboarding. Mr. Cheney was an architect of the decision to "get tough" with prisoners, as the bureaucrats often say to soften the outrage of this policy.

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He insists the inspector general's findings were "completely reviewed" by the Justice Department and that any follow-up investigation would be improper and unnecessary.

In reality, Mr. Bush's attorney general, Alberto Gonzales, did not appoint an independent investigator after receiving the inspector general's report, which was completed in 2004. The Justice Department decided there was only one narrow case worth pursuing, involving a civilian contractor — hardly a surprise from a thoroughly politicized department whose top officials set the very rules they were supposed to be judging.

Mr. Gonzales's team did not look into allegations that some interrogators broke those rules. Mr. Cheney may not care about that, but Mr. Holder rightly does.

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Mr. Cheney claims that waterboarding and other practices widely considered to be torture or abuse "were absolutely essential" in stopping another terrorist attack on the United States after Sept. 11, 2001.

Mr. Cheney is right when he says detainees who were subject to torture and abuse gave up valuable information. But the men who did the questioning flatly dispute that it was duress that moved them to do so.

Deuce Martinez, the C.I.A. officer who interrogated Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, engineer of the 9/11 mass murders, said he used traditional interrogation methods, and not the infliction of pain and panic. And, [in an article](#) on the Times Op-Ed page, Ali Soufan, a former F.B.I. agent who oversaw the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah, another high-ranking terrorist, denounced "the false claims" about harsh interrogations. Mr. Soufan said Mr. Zubaydah talked before he was subjected to waterboarding and other abuse. He also said that "using these alternative methods on other terrorists backfired on more than a few occasions."

Every week, it seems, new disclosures about this sordid history dribble out. This week, Physicians for Human Rights analyzed what the inspector general's report said about the involvement of C.I.A. physicians and psychologists in the abuse of prisoners. It said they not only monitored torture, like waterboarding, but also kept data on the prisoners' reaction in ways that "may amount to human experimentation."

Getting at the truth is not going to be easy. The C.I.A. destroyed evidence — videotapes of interrogations — and is now refusing to release its records of the questioning of its prisoners. It also is asking the courts to keep secret the orders Mr. Bush gave authorizing the interrogations, and the original Justice Department memos concluding that they were legal.

Americans need much more than glimpses of the truth. They should not have to decide whether to believe former interrogators, whom they do not know, or Mr. Cheney, who did not hesitate while in office to mislead them when it suited his political aims.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 4, 2009

In our editorial on Thursday about interrogations: The group Physicians for Human Rights said psychologists, not psychiatrists, were involved in the torture and abuse of detainees.

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