



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on December 13, 2008

Senate Report Fails to Call Guantanamo Abuse Torture

The abuse of detainees in U.S. custody cannot simply be attributed to the actions of ‘a few bad apples’ acting on their own. The fact is that senior officials in the United States government solicited information on how to use aggressive techniques, redefined the law to create the appearance of their legality, and authorized their use against detainees. Those efforts damaged our ability to collect accurate intelligence that could save lives, strengthened the hand of our enemies, and compromised our moral authority.... Members of the President’s Cabinet and other senior officials attended meetings in the White House where specific interrogation techniques were discussed.



Anyone following the story would say, duhh!

The real news to report is how the Senate Armed Services Committee failed to call what happened at Guantanamo and elsewhere “torture.” Nowhere in the committee’s conclusions do the senators muster the courage to call a spade a spade.

The closest they came is a conclusion that the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel “distorted the meaning and intent of anti-torture laws” and “rationalized the abuse of detainees in U.S. custody.”

That’s a long way from calling it “torture.”

This, despite the fact that the report acknowledged that the Guantanamo “aggressive interrogations” (as well as “interrogations” in Iraq and Afghanistan) were copied from torture techniques the Communist Chinese used on American prisoners of war during the Korean War:

The techniques used in SERE [Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape] school, based, in part, on Chinese Communist techniques used during the Korean war to elicit false confessions, include stripping students of their clothing, placing them in stress positions, putting hoods over their heads, disrupting their sleep, treating them like animals, subjecting them to loud music and flashing lights, and exposing them to extreme temperatures. It can also include face and body slaps and until recently, for some who attended the Navy’s SERE school, it included waterboarding.

Note that the techniques used were designed for “false” confessions, not interrogations to produce real military intelligence.

This, like just about everything in the report, was not new. The [New York Times broke the story](#) about



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copying the Chicoms almost six months earlier on July 2.

You'd think it would be an easy call to label as torture what Chinese Communists did to American POWs in Korea. You'd think it would be easy to label as "criminal" using torture techniques designed to elicit "false confessions." But neither happened.

Why, you ask?

Here's a pretty good guess why the Senate Armed Services Committee, led by Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and Ranking Member John McCain (R-Ariz.), wouldn't call it "torture": had the so-called "aggressive techniques" acknowledged by the report been called torture, that would have been an admission that crimes had been committed at the highest levels of the executive branch. And that would have meant pressure for well-deserved criminal indictments of cabinet-level officials — and perhaps President Bush himself.

Instead, the Democrat-led Senate issued a spineless report that told us what we already knew, failed to call it a crime (which it obviously was), and failed to call for any legal repercussions against people who [tortured innocents](#).

There are no words in the English language that adequately describe this depth of cowardice. Nor are there words alarmist enough to express the danger to free government in allowing-high level torturers to violate the [Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution](#) with impunity.



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