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Do They Really Oppose Torture?

By Ron Paul

December 12, 2014

The Senate Intelligence Committee released its long-awaited report on CIA torture of detainees and the reaction has been strong. While some still maintain that torture is justified, the emerging details of the program have left most of the country disgusted and ashamed.

Many in the current Administration blame the Bush people for this dark chapter, claiming that President Obama finally put an end to what his predecessor started.

Senator John McCain, an advocate for war and an interventionist foreign policy, has nevertheless been one of the strongest voices opposing torture. He has recalled his time as an abused prisoner of war in Vietnam to argue the importance of facing up to the recent behavior of the US government and making necessary corrections.

He said he knows from personal experience that torture does not produce good intelligence, as the victims will say whatever they believe their captors want to hear to gain some relief from their agony. Torture is morally wrong and it doesn't work, he maintains.

I believe the Senator is sincere and that his intentions are good when it comes to the torture outlined in the report. I also believe that President Obama is sincere when he denounces the practices outlined by the Senate Committee.

But I think both President Obama and Senator McCain are being disingenuous and selective in their opposition to torture.

It is one thing to argue that people should not have their feet broken and be forced to stand cuffed to a wall, to oppose rectal force-feeding, and to condemn water-boarding a detainee 50 or 100 times. Most of us reject this kind of torture for both moral and practical reasons.

But is that the only kind of torture? Is it not torture to go to a wedding in Pakistan and watch as your family is blown up by a US drone? Is it not torture to have your village water treatment plant bombed by NATO planes seeking to overthrow Gaddafi? Is it not torture for parents of the 500,000 Iraqi children who were killed by US sanctions? Is endorsing pre-emptive war, knowing that thousands of civilians are sure to be “collateral damage,” not support for torture?

Both Senator McCain and President Obama take the moral high ground with regard to CIA torture, but both are enthusiastic supporters of past and current US military interventions that have the same effect on millions. It is one thing to oppose horrific practices that leave perhaps dozens killed or maimed. But what about practices that do the same for tens of thousands or millions?

A consistent anti-torture position would also reject sanctions, “humanitarian” interventions, regime change, and preemptive war. Anything less is missing the whole point.