

"Writing the truth  
as I see it;  
trying not to  
offend  
those who will  
disagree."

# The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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## Interrogation or torture?

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The debate continues. What is interrogation and what is torture? Are there situations in which interrogation is inadequate, situations requiring something more? In the abstract, it seems rather easy to determine what is or is not morally acceptable, what is or is not torture. But, how easy is the decision when it's personal; when the lives at risk are American, when our national security is in jeopardy? How far do we go to get information? What would you be willing to do to a terrorist if the information obtained could prevent another 9/11? If you had a family member in the World Trade Towers and you were interrogating a terrorist before the destruction, would you still find waterboarding heinous? If the mock execution of a terrorist could save the life of an American soldier would you hesitate? The urgency of these situations, according to Professor Darius Rejali of Reed College in Oregon, is "morally the only way a democratic society is able to justify torture."

The newly revised Army Field Manual defines as torture, and bans, forced nakedness, hooding, beating, sexual humiliation, threatening with dogs, deprivation of food or water, mock executions, electrical shocks, burns, and waterboarding. Are these definitions correct? Is it really this black and white? Are there situations requiring more than just interrogation, situations the current administration advocates require "enhanced interrogation techniques?" How do we decide? What are our obligations to our troops, to our country, to humanity? How do we find that line and can we cross it? Do we need to worry if torturing detainees would undermine American values or damage our image in the world? Isn't being a prisoner of war or detainee supposed to be uncomfortable, supposed to provoke anxiety, supposed to disrupt your sleep?

But do these types of pressure and discomfort become abuse and torture?

What has history shown us about the usefulness of torture? Hitler's Gestapo got their best information not from torture, but from tips, informers, and cooperation with other agencies. The torture they did employ resulted in little, if any, useful information. In France between 1500 and 1750 torture was legal including using bone-crushing splints, pumping stomachs, pouring boiling oil on the feet, among other things. Despite this horrendous abuse, most of the time they were unable to get any statement at all! Surprisingly, it is difficult to get a prisoner to say anything while being tortured. A Japanese field manual found in Burma during World War II described torture as "the clumsiest possible method for gathering intelligence." The Japanese used torture for its "proper" purpose, to create fear and intimidation, not to get information. I could not find any literature or research suggesting that torture was of any value!

But, isn't ricocheting to the other extreme equally inappropriate? Do we need to use caution so we do not over-react to reports of prisoner/detainee mistreatment, so we do not over-react to actions that may be perfectly appropriate? At 2 a.m. on November 4, 2003, a team of navy seals captured a "high-value" target during an extremely violent struggle at his home, including a stove falling on the terrorist and a seal. When the seals transferred him to C.I.A. custody he had a black eye and a cut on his face. During the C.I.A. interrogation he died; the death now under investigation by the Justice Department. The political over-reaction that followed led to military-justice proceedings against several of the seals! They were exonerated; however, this must have sent a rather chilling message to military personnel. Is this the way to congratulate a job well done, the way to

welcome home heroes? The seals weren't just capturing a terrorist; they were fighting for their lives! Can we recognize and eliminate torture while allowing our military to do its job, while understanding the realities and ugliness of war?

What about the technology and pharmacology of tomorrow? Will there be things we can use to enhance interrogation? In the near future, we may be able to use Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to evaluate the truthfulness of statements made by prisoners/detainees. There are also medications that are safe and will "reduce conversational inhibitions and the urge to deceive."

The evidence seems clear, torture simply does not work. In fact, torture may actually cost American lives by voiding the opportunity to gain genuinely useful information. Two former CIA agents probably stated it best; information is "more effectively gained by methodical, careful, psychologically based interrogation." Moreover, combining appropriate interrogation techniques with medications and MRI will allow us to secure the information we need for our troops and national security while maintaining the values of our heritage.

Our political leaders need to find the middle ground, eliminating torture while supporting appropriate interrogation, without undermining the ability of our military personnel to do their job.