

Torture Is Not In America's Best Interests.  
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Americans are debating several complex moral issues:

- ? Does torture produce essential information at a time of terror activity?
- ? Does torture do moral damage to the torturers themselves?
- ? Does imminent danger warrant violating US law?

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. The 9/11 attack really frightened this country and the government went into emergency mode to find out if more attacks were on the way. This is the ticking bomb theory: do anything necessary to prevent more terror attacks. And more terror attacks had been planned but were thwarted over the 13 years since 9/11.

When normal FBI or CIA vigilance can protect us as it has, we need to revisit "enhanced interrogation" (torture) as a means of getting information. There seems to be a majority view, even of operatives, that torture too often gets false information and the occasional truth could be obtained by other means. The Feinstein Report delivered on December 9 was a cry from the heart that America should not be doing such things and that we should admit we did, understand why, and resolve never to do it again. Her report was not advocating a witch-hunt against the intelligence community for what they did; torture had already been stopped by President Obama's order.

I agree with Feinstein's position, and it is obvious from some of her documentation that Americans charged with conducting torture were sickened by it. This speaks well for them because around the world, most other countries do not have such qualms. This was why most of this unpleasant business was outsourced to Lebanon or Egypt. The "World's" revulsion about the CIA's torture is pure hypocrisy! Anti-torture zealots warn us that ISIS will read the report and use these tactics against hostages. Baloney! Isis uses a blunt instrument: decapitation. What information can they get from aid workers or tourists?

History of Torture.

Torture has been a judicial artifact from antiquity to today. From Assyrian times 4000 BC, we can see murals on their palace walls showing torture and decapitations. These were clearly propaganda tools to frighten anybody attempting resistance to their rule.

Rome used torture to punish people who threatened the state. Crucifixion was their public means of lingering execution, used after slave rebellions and most famously in Judea, when Jesus was swept up with other potential revolutionaries and crucified.

From the collapse of Rome to the 18th century in Europe, torture was a regular tool of the state to force prisoners to name accomplices or to ascertain the guilt of the prisoner. Trial by fire was such a mode. It was thought that an innocent person would not be burned. Obviously, there were no innocent persons.

There were periodic spasms of craziness in the late Middle Ages too: the Inquisition was the tool of the Spanish Catholic church to uncover insincere forced converts (Jews and once Muslims). After torture, the victims were burnt at the stake (further torture ending in death) with celebrating audiences watching. Eventually, the Inquisition deteriorated to torturing people accused by their jealous neighbors; the Church was also complicit because the accused's property could be confiscated.

The Protestant revolution brought with it a terror of witches. Hundreds of thousands of women---most old, some demented, and other victims of enemy neighbors---were hanged or burnt at the stake. The last case happened in New England: the Salem witchcraft trial. This spectacle sickened the new American colonists and it never happened again.

By the 18th century, along with a campaign to end the global institution of slavery (the Quakers did this) came a campaign to end judicial torture. Western civilization was the only place to do this. Torture remained in Islam, China, India, Russia. Torture returned hideously under the Nazis and USSR; the US disavowed this practice after the Cold War until 9/11. Fear made us revive it.

The greatest danger of any conflict is that the good guys start resembling the bad guys. We must not let that happen. Our interrogators just have to be smarter than the terrorists they question. Torture, which is morally repugnant, is not needed.

679 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at [Lfarhat102@aol.com](mailto:Lfarhat102@aol.com) or [www.globalthink.net](http://www.globalthink.net).