



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

## Long-standing U.S. Bi-Partisan Opposition to Torture

*“It is my sincerest hope that we Americans, for all of our many disagreements, can nonetheless manage to agree that torture.. is unworthy of our national honor and should no longer be a matter for discussion. It is my hope that we can reach a consensus in this country that we will never again engage in these horrific abuses, and that the mere suggestion of doing so should be ruled out of our political discourse, regardless of which party holds power.” – Senator John McCain, December 2012*

**Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton Administrations, as well as Congressional leadership, shared unified opposition to torture and bipartisan support for the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention).**

**President Ronald Reagan signed the Convention Against Torture** in 1988 and urged Senate ratification: *“Ratification of the Convention by the United States will clearly express United States opposition to torture, an abhorrent practice unfortunately still prevalent in the world today.”* – President Ronald Reagan upon [signing and transmitting](#) the Convention for Senate ratification

**Reagan administration played a very active role in preparing the Convention Against Torture:** *“[The United States] contributed significantly to the development of the final Convention, especially in proposing that it focus on torture, rather than on other relatively less abhorrent practices.”* – **U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz**

**President George H.W. Bush prioritized ratification** saying the Convention was in “urgent need of Senate approval.”

**Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee enthusiastically supported ratification** of the Convention: *“We believe that prompt ratification of the convention will demonstrate the abhorrence of our Nation toward torture, and encourage more widespread prompt ratification of the convention among the community of nations.”*

**Federal anti-torture statute passed** with bipartisan support.

**Foreign policy and defense officials in the George W. Bush Administration, as well as prominent Republican legislators, publicly expressed their opposition to torture during their tenure.**

*“[The use of torture] **damaged our moral credibility in the world**, diminishing a huge asset in earning the trust and support of allies. It also places our troops in danger of being subjected to similar inhumane treatment by our enemies if they are captured.”* – **William H. Taft IV, Deputy Secretary of Defense** in the Reagan Administration and State Department Legal Adviser in the George W. Bush Administration

*“[Torture] **shatters the very foundation of our Constitution** and the values upon which our Constitution were based. These values rest on the belief that human dignity is paramount.”* – **Alberto J. Mora, General Counsel of the Navy** in the George W. Bush Administration

*"[I]n our effort to protect the nation, we must remember our greatest strength: the principles of human rights that we have upheld throughout our country's wars and conflicts. [. . .] **There must be no doubt that this great nation does not torture.**"* – [Chuck Hagel](#), [Republican Congressman from Nebraska](#), 1997-2009, Secretary of Defense in the Obama Administration

**The Detainee Treatment Act was passed with an overwhelming majority of Republican and Democratic Members of Congress.**

In 2005, Republicans and Democrats overwhelmingly supported the Detainee Treatment Act, which **passed the Senate by a margin of 90-9**. The House expressed its support for the DTA by a margin of 308-122, with 107 Republicans and all but one Democrat voting in support.

*"If we inflict this cruel and inhumane treatment, **the cruel actions of a few darken the reputation of our country in the eyes of millions.** American values should win against all others in any war of ideas, and we can't let prisoner abuse tarnish our image."* – [Senator John McCain \(R-AZ\)](#)

*"If we allow torture in any form, we abandon our honor."* – [Rep. John Murtha \(D-PA\)](#)

*"We need to have clear guidance, in law, that makes it very clear that **inhumane treatment of detainees in American captivity is absolutely unacceptable.** This problem is hurting us around the world. It's contrary to our values, and we simply must have this as part of the final bill."* – [Senator Susan Collins \(R-ME\)](#)

*"Because it has become such a high-profile issue here of late, not only around the country but around the world, I think it's in our best interests to address it. **A strong unequivocal statement that we don't apply or tolerate torture in any form is probably right now a good thing to do.**"* – [Senator John Thune \(R-SD\)](#)

**Over 100 high-level Republican and Democratic military, national security, and foreign policy experts endorsed a call for an executive order banning torture and cruel treatment in all U.S. interrogations.**

The [Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty](#) called for enshrining the opposition to torture in law, standardizing and professionalizing interrogations across all U.S. agencies, and acknowledging **"our historical commitment to end the use of torture and cruelty in the world."**

The principles [received more than 100 endorsements](#) in the military, national security and foreign policy sectors, including three Secretaries of Defense; three National Security Advisors; three Secretaries of State; and four members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. **Among the high-level Republican endorsers:**

- **Ambassador William H. Taft, IV**, former Deputy Secretary of Defense; former Chief legal Advisor, Department of State
- **Dr. John J. Hamre**, former Deputy Secretary of Defense
- **Ambassador Richard L. Armitage**, former Deputy Secretary of State
- **Secretary of State George P. Shultz**, former Secretary of State

**Despite differences on the procedural issues surrounding the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on CIA torture, Republicans and Democrats were unanimous in their opposition to torture during its adoption and public release.**

*"As a military lawyer for more than 30 years, I believe **we can and must fight this war within our values**. I supported the investigation of the CIA as the problems of interrogation policies were obvious to me. I do not condone torture and continue to believe **abusive detention and interrogation techniques used in the past were counterproductive**. I'm very happy the techniques in question are no longer utilized."* – [Senator Lindsey Graham \(R-SC\)](#)

*"We remain **strongly opposed to the use of torture**, believing that it is **fundamentally contrary to American values**. While we have some concerns about the process for developing the report, its findings lead us to conclude that some detainees were subjected to techniques that constituted torture. **This inhumane and brutal treatment never should have occurred**."* – [Senator Susan Collins \(R-ME\) and Senator Angus King \(I-ME\)](#)

*"It's important that people take a stand and representatives take a stand on whether they believe torture should be allowed. I think **we should not have torture**. [. . .] The only thing I would question is whether or not the actual details, the gruesomeness of the details, will be beneficial or inflammatory."* – [Senator Rand Paul \(R-KY\)](#)

*"No member of the Senate condones torture, and the CIA's execution of its **former interrogation and detention program has harmed the agency and the reputation of the United States**. But in the end, this report, which took six years and \$40 million to produce, will not put to rest the debate over the CIA's controversial former detention and interrogation program."* – [Senator Marco Rubio \(R-FL\) and Senator James Risch \(R-ID\)](#)

*"I agree that **some of the more extreme Enhanced Interrogation Techniques (EITs) could be considered torture**, and that in the future this country should not rely on such techniques. Yet, at the time, they had legal sanction. Readers of the report will make their own judgments about how they were implemented."* – [Senator Tom Coburn \(R-OK\)](#)

**McCain-Feinstein Anti-Torture Amendment passed the Senate with an overwhelming bi-partisan majority.**

Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016 designed to strengthen the prohibition on torture and ensure the United States never engages in torture again. The amendment [passed the Senate by a vote of 78-21](#), and a slightly modified version passed Congress with an overwhelming bi-partisan majority and was signed into law by President Obama.

*"I believe past interrogation policies compromised our values, stained our national honor, and did little practical good. This **amendment provides greater assurances that never again will the United States follow that dark path of sacrificing our values for our short-term security needs**."* – [Senator John McCain \(R-AZ\)](#)

*"Today's vote puts the Senate on record that **there can be no return to the era of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques** and that President Obama's Executive Order should be enacted into law."* – [Senator Dianne Feinstein \(D-CA\)](#)

Chair and Ranking Member of each of the Senate committees on Intelligence, Armed Services, Judiciary, Foreign Relations, and Homeland Security **voted in favor** of the amendment.

**Over 100 prominent national security, foreign policy, military and faith leaders across political lines including Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Former Secretaries of Defense William S. Cohen and Chuck Hagel, and Jim Winkler, president and general secretary of The National Council of Churches signed a [declaration](#) calling on all public**

**officials and the American public to reject torture unequivocally and without exception, in keeping with American law and values.**

**Key Trump administration cabinet members have publicly opposed torture and committed to upholding the legal ban against torture.**

During his confirmation hearing, General Mattis committed to abiding by and upholding international law, the Law of Armed Conflict, Geneva Conventions and U.S. law. The Pentagon has repeated that [Mattis's opposition to torture has not changed](#). ***"Give me a pack of cigarettes and a couple of beers and I do better with that than I do with torture."*** – [Secretary of Defense James Mattis](#)

During his confirmation hearing, Director Pompeo responded that he would ***"absolutely not"*** comply with ***an order to restart the CIA's use of enhanced interrogation techniques*** that fall outside of the Army Field Manual. He also gave his ***"full commitment"*** to complying with the law and acknowledging that the CIA is out of the enhanced interrogation business. – [CIA Director Mike Pompeo](#)

It would be ***"absolutely improper and illegal"*** for any U.S. government department or agency ***"to use waterboarding or any other form of torture."*** – [Attorney General Jeff Sessions](#)

General John Kelly said he ***"absolutely"*** intends to follow the law that prohibits waterboarding and other forms of torture. ***"I don't think we should ever come close to crossing a line that is beyond what we as Americans would expect to follow in terms of interrogation techniques."*** – [Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly](#)

During his confirmation hearing, Tillerson **agreed with his fellow Cabinet nominees that torture would not be recommended to Trump**. ***"Well, I think others have opined on that sufficiently and I wouldn't disagree with what they said. I would agree with what they've said."*** – [Secretary of State Rex Tillerson](#)

**Members of Congress from both parties denounced reports of a draft executive order that would facilitate torture or other abusive interrogation or detention practices, including a return to the use of CIA "black sites."**

***"[T]he law is the law. We are not bringing back torture in the United States of America."*** - [Senator John McCain \(R-AZ\)](#)

***"I think the director of the CIA has made it clear he's going to follow the law. And I believe virtually all of my members are comfortable with the state of the law on that issue now."*** – [Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell \(R-KY\)](#)

***"Torture's not legal and we agree with it not being legal."***– [Speaker of the House Paul Ryan \(R-WI\)](#)

***"With respect to torture, that's banned. The Army Field Manual makes that very clear, and the law now is tied to the Army Field Manual. And so we view that to be a matter of settled law."*** – [Senator John Thune \(R-SD\)](#)

***"It's currently against the law and I hope it will remain against the law."***–[Senator Rand Paul \(R-KY\)](#)

***"Those reports, as well as comments by the President, have created alarm that this administration may be preparing a return to policies and practices that are ineffective, contrary to our national values, and damaging to our national security."*** – [Letter from top Democrats on the Intelligence, Judiciary, Foreign Relations, Armed Services and Appropriations committees](#)