



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 \(R-OK\)](#)*