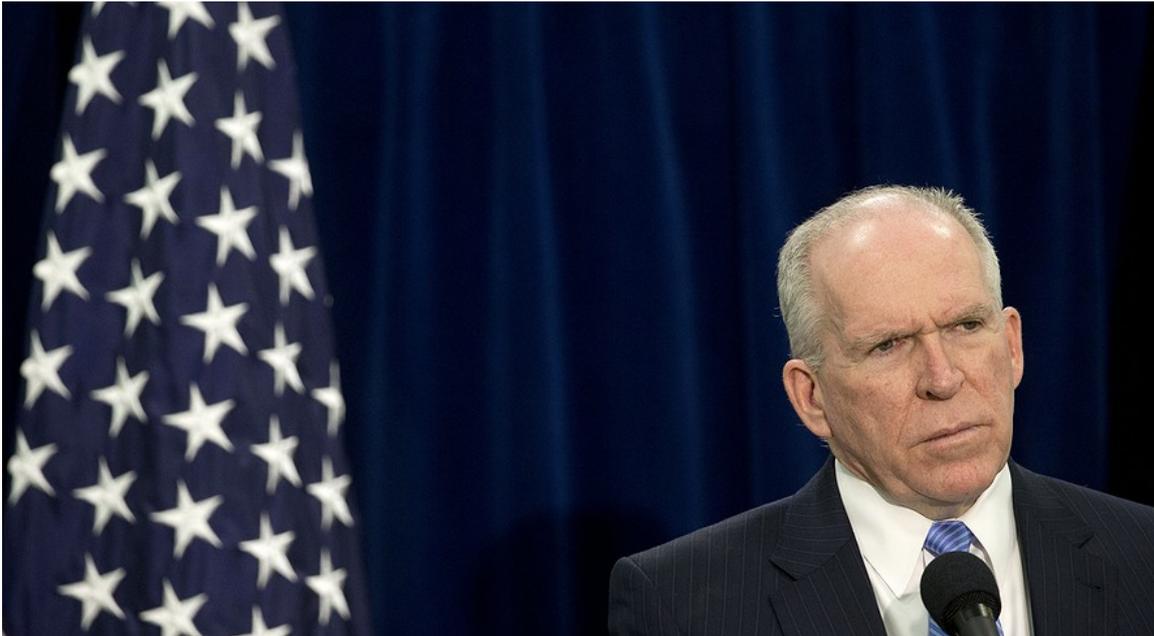


PRO/CON: Will the CIA torture report put the U.S. at risk?

By Tribune News Service and McClatchy, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.11.15
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CIA Director John Brennan listens during a news conference at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, Dec. 11, 2014. Brennan defended his agency from accusations in a Senate report that it tortured extremist suspects, with no security benefits to the U.S. Photo: AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

PRO: Report puts American lives at risk

WASHINGTON — Though they help govern the world's most important nation, our leaders in Washington can be shockingly unaware of how the rest of the world sees us. Other nations — and extremists in those nations — watch and listen closely to whatever we say or do.

Cluelessness is the only explanation for why Senate Intelligence Committee Democrats released such a violent report now. It has been 13 years since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The report describes how our spy agency, the CIA, used interrogation, or questioning, methods in the frightening months after that fateful day. It admits that our interrogation methods used torture.

Now the details of this disturbing report have been splashed across TV screens, newspapers and websites. The publication of the report will, without a doubt, put American lives at risk. It gives extremists one more rallying cry to attack the U.S. It also forces other governments and their spy agencies to show that they're keeping their distance from us.

Years After The Fact

To be clear, the report was revealing only in its raw detail of CIA activities against particular prisoners. We've known for many years that the CIA used these methods.

In fact, news surfaced years ago about the CIA's actions. We knew then that they kept suspects from sleeping, chained them to walls, threatened them with horrible deaths and so on. At the time, the government and the American public began a serious national debate over whether the United States should ever torture.

We even reached a general agreement. Most Americans believe that we should avoid any torture except in the most extreme cases. An obvious situation is if the United States faced the immediate threat of an attack that could kill hundreds or thousands of people.

Now it's years after the fact. Yet, as Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Diane Feinstein wrote in the report, the days after Sept. 11 were filled with fear that much greater attacks were coming.

In fact, Feinstein noted that, after Sept. 11, the CIA "was encouraged by political leaders and the public to do whatever it could to prevent another attack." She went on to write that the "Intelligence Committee as well often pushes intelligence agencies to act quickly in response to threats and world events."

That, by the way, is no different than how our nation's leaders have behaved at other perilous times. During the Civil War, for instance, President Abraham Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus. The Latin phrase refers to a law that protects Americans from unlawful imprisonment. What later seems horrifying often seems necessary at the time.

More Attacks Against More Americans

Feinstein says that she hopes the report will serve as a warning for the future. She hopes it will make sure that, even when facing danger, the United States never again abandons its values.

But extremists plot every day to attack America. The report gives them one more tool. They'll use it to rally their fighters and convince new ones to join them. That means more militants with more motivation to plot and launch more attacks against more Americans.

Now, governments and intelligence agencies with which the U.S. works could hesitate before giving us information. We rely on intelligence information from our allies in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

Without information to protect us from attacks, we'll be more open to plots.

America debated torture and made a decision years ago. Rather than add to that debate, the committee's report is just making American deaths more likely.

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CON: The report changes nothing

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Senate Intelligence Committee's release of its report on CIA torture is a welcome step toward openness. The methods used to wage the "war on terror" are of great interest to the public.

Horrifying details were included in the report about what was done to detainees. Despite those, the release is not likely to lead to any immediate increased risk to Americans. It is no secret that the CIA used torture in its interrogations after Sept. 11, 2001.

What causes extremists to want to harm Americans is the torture itself. The Senate report changes nothing.

U.S. Criticized By U.N.

The interrogation methods had already been called torture around the world. Last summer, the European Court of Human Rights determined that the CIA tortured Abu Zubaydah. He was captured in Pakistan in 2002 and was believed to be a member of al-Qaida, the group behind the Sept. 11 attacks. He was tortured in Poland at a site the Polish government let the CIA use.

In the case of Zubaydah, harsh tactics including waterboarding — which creates the feeling of drowning — were used. Yet, the Senate report says it did not help gain any significant information from him.

The United States has also been criticized by the United Nations for the CIA's interrogation methods. The U.S. signed onto the U.N. Convention Against Torture, a law, and we are expected to obey it.

The torture was part of an overreaction to Sept. 11 that included our mistake in invading Afghanistan.

Instead of dealing with Afghanistan's government to capture those responsible for the attacks in New York, we took over the country. Now we are trying to remove ourselves from Afghanistan. But we're leaving the country a mess, which could let al-Qaida operate there once again.

Our Arrogant Actions?

The CIA torture was carried out not just to discover threats from al-Qaida. It was also used to establish that al-Qaida and Iraq were working together, as an excuse to invade Iraq. No such connection was ever established.

It is all these actions taken together that make us a target for extremists. Not surprisingly, our actions are interpreted as arrogance.

Our position in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians does not help. Even today, we are practically alone in refusing to acknowledge Palestine as its own country. Our position on the conflict gives extremists one more reason to hate us.

It made sense to come clean about torture. It is a crime under U.S. law, after all. The U.S. signed the U.N. Convention Against Torture, making torture committed anywhere in the world a crime.

The Senate had to release this report about torture. It has a role in overseeing the actions of presidents. In the long term, the safety of America will depend on how we deal with foreign policy issues overall, not just this one.

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Quiz

- 1 Which answer option BEST explains the PRO author's point of view and how he distinguishes his argument from that of the CON author?
- (A) The Senate should not have released the torture report because it may make other countries criticize the U.S.
 - (B) The Senate should not have released the torture report because it may lead to future terror attacks against the U.S.
 - (C) The Senate should not have released the torture report because the matter was already resolved.
 - (D) The Senate should not have released the torture report because the U.S. should never release government secrets.

- 2 Which answer option BEST explains the CON author's point of view and how he distinguishes his argument from that of the PRO author?
- (A) Releasing the torture report was the right thing for the Senate to do because not doing so may have directly endangered the U.S.
 - (B) Releasing the torture report was the right thing for the Senate to do because the safety of America will depend on how we deal with foreign policy issues overall.
 - (C) Releasing the torture report was the right thing for the Senate to do because the torture was part of an overreaction to Sept. 11 that included the U.S. mistake in invading Afghanistan.
 - (D) Releasing the torture report was the right thing for the Senate to do because the U.S. position on the conflict gives extremists one more reason to hate us.

- 3 Read the claim made by the PRO author.

The publication of the report will, without a doubt, put American lives at risk.

The claim above is supported by each of the following sentences from the article EXCEPT:

- (A) It gives extremists one more rallying cry to attack the U.S.
- (B) They'll use it to rally their fighters and convince new ones to join them.
- (C) Now, governments and intelligence agencies with which the U.S. works could hesitate before giving us information.
- (D) What later seems horrifying often seems necessary at the time.

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- (A) It is no secret that the CIA used torture in its interrogations after Sept. 11, 2001.
- (B) What causes extremists to want to harm Americans is the torture itself.
- (C) Last summer, the European Court of Human Rights determined that the CIA tortured Abu Zubaydah.
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Answer Key

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