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[Home](#) > [By Publication Type](#) > [Daily Analysis](#) > [By Date](#) > CIA Probe And The Torture Debate

Daily Analysis

CIA Probe and the Torture Debate

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The decision by Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. to appoint a special prosecutor to review past CIA interrogations revives robust debate over whether such a move is healthy or harmful to the United States in its counterterrorism efforts. In his [statement](#) explaining why a preliminary review was warranted, Holder took pains to note that it should not be seen as broad criticism of the intelligence community. At the same time, the release of a heavily redacted [2004 report \(PDF\)](#) from the CIA's Inspector General underscored what many see as troubling and possibly unlawful behavior by some intelligence operatives in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The report details what it called "unauthorized, undocumented, and inhumane" interrogation tactics, including the use of guns, power drills, rifle butts, choking and threats to kill prisoners' children.

Still, the *Los Angeles Times* says U.S. President Barack Obama will face [major challenges](#) as a result of the investigation's launch, noting that Obama had already stated his desire to avoid just such a probe. He is already facing charges from the political left that the announced investigation is too feeble in scope and from the right that his attorney general is being overzealous.

Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, says the investigation needs to be far-reaching to help [remove the taint \(Huffington Post\)](#) to the country's reputation of what he called torture practices. David Cole of the Georgetown University Law Center writes that a [comprehensive probe](#) is needed, "including those all the way up the chain of command who hold ultimate responsibility for launching us on a path of torture." But the *Wall Street Journal* [editorializes](#) that Holder's moves could threaten the country's ability to confront terrorists. And Jeffrey H. Smith, former CIA general counsel in the Clinton administration, lays out [six reasons](#) why a prosecution of the CIA is not in the country's best interest.

As part of a brace of moves on August 24 involving U.S. intelligence practices, the Obama administration also announced it will set up a new specialized FBI interrogation unit, effectively taking the CIA out of the interrogation business. Journalist Jane Mayer, who has reported extensively on U.S. intelligence practices, sees the move as a "[slap in the face](#)" to an agency that had primacy in counterterror interrogations in the Bush administration. But *TIME* magazine's SwampLand blog suggests that many CIA hands are quietly [relieved](#) that interrogations are no longer their responsibility. The new team--dubbed the High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group, or HIG--will consist of analysts, linguists, and experts from across the intelligence and law enforcement community. It will be limited to interrogation tactics outlined in the U.S. Army Field Manual, though a review has been ordered to explore possible new tactics.

The release of the CIA IG's report, along with Holder's call for an investigation, are sure to renew debate over the

effectiveness of certain interrogation techniques. Adding to the discussion: [recently released memos](#) former vice president Dick Cheney says prove that Bush-era interrogation techniques were effective.

Additional Analysis and Background:

The *Washington Post* looks at the Bush and Obama administrations' [distinct reactions](#) to the inspector general's report.

Politico looks at [divisions over Holder's decision](#) in Washington and in the CIA.

TIME asks [whether the harsh interrogation tactics worked](#), or if they were even necessary, and says a definitive analysis of the inspector general's report is difficult, considering how much of it was redacted.

The *Atlantic* [provides a rundown](#) of intersecting intelligence news developments.

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