



## **Focus: Bush and Obama, the Same Evil Continues (1-2)**

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The same memo Bush used to wall himself off from the details of CIA torture is keeping Obama's drone war alive. On the second day of Barack Obama's presidency, he prohibited most forms of physical torture. On the third, a CIA drone strike he authorized killed up to 11 civilians. What was once irrational is now beyond inexcusable. There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people. Those two data points explain one of the most remarkable aspects of the Senate Intelligence Committee's summary of its report on torture and also likely point to what should be the report's larger lesson: the purported absence of presidential leadership behind either the torture or the drone programs. Wherever the hand of Bush/ Obama has meddled, the result has been destabilization, chaos, confusion, blowback and backfiring, leading more and more of the players in the region to distrust and even hate America. Wherever there have been prospects for relatively peaceful resolution of disputes, those prospects have been subverted. It's not that many of the Middle East players didn't have negative feelings about the United States before the decider came into office, to be sure. But the meddling has managed to convert allies into neutrals, neutrals into doubters, doubters into foes, mildly hostile parties into actively hostile, and enemies into sworn and even fanatical enemies. This reverse Midas touch has led Ted Carpenter of the libertarian Cato Institute to call the U.S. in the Middle East an "eagle in the china shop," flapping around and flailing its wings in a confined space that renders it confused and panicky, overturning the furniture and breaking all the crockery, turning objects of great value into worthless rubble.

To both presidents: I would be happy beyond description to be proven wrong on even one of the above statements and I would offer my most sincere apology for having underestimated your unmatched concept of torture. I am almost certain I shall not be making such an apology any time soon, if ever. The 525-page executive summary of the Senate's report, which was released to the public on Tuesday, Dec. 9, provides the most comprehensive description of the torture conducted as part of the CIA's rendition, detention, and interrogation program in support of the war on terror. (The full 6,000-page report will remain classified for decades.) The summary portrays brutal torture that was also largely counterproductive for intelligence-gathering purposes. It depicts a program so badly managed that the CIA lost count of detainees and on more than one occasion detained and tortured the wrong suspect.

But the most disturbing part of the report might not be the gruesome abuses or the gross incompetence. At least we can hope those are in the past. The biggest problem for the future that the report reveals consists of claims about the ignorance of President George W. Bush (and to a much lesser extent, Vice President Dick Cheney) about key parts of the program. The report doesn't describe events in which the White House is known to have been — or almost certainly was — involved in. The report states, for example, that Thailand (which the report refers to as “Detention Site Green” to obscure a widely known fact) “was the last location of a CIA detention facility known to the president or the vice president.” The report also states that the CIA first briefed Bush on interrogation techniques on April 8, 2006. “[T]he president expressed concern,” the report helpfully explains, “about the ‘image of a detainee, chained to the ceiling, clothed in a diaper, and forced to go to the bathroom on himself.’” In other words, the report leaves the impression that Bush remained ignorant of the goriest details of the torture his administration conducted — for almost two full years after pictures from Abu Ghraib showed abuses just as graphic. Modified from Marcy Wheeler