

from our viewpoint...

Answer to torture ought to be ‘No.’

Congress debates, the administration whines, the CIA wants this or that, but there ought to be a clear answer when it comes to torture.

No.
Sen. John McCain, tortured brutally during his years as a prisoner in Vietnam, know the score. He’s led the fight to get the U.S. away from any kind of prisoner abuse.

The war on terror is vital, yes, and the military and intelligence agencies need to interrogate captured terrorists. That should never involve torture, and hopefully the bill set to come out of Congress will set some clear guidelines.

Torture is not part of our heritage, though it once was common enough in what we like to call Western Civilization. Our constitution bans “cruel and unusual” punishment and gives criminals the right to refuse to answer questions.

The standard we uphold at home is good enough for us to uphold abroad.

One problem is defining torture.
Some of the excesses of Abu Ghrabi amounted to nothing more than sophomoric pranks, while other approached and some passed the limit. There’s no excuse for mistreating prisoners, but ours is one of the few armies in this world that actually punishes soldiers for stepping over the line.

That’s one thing. Torturing prisoners, using pain to elicit answers, is wrong whenever and wherever it’s done.

The United States should have no part in it. For one thing, prisoners will say about anything to stop torture, and the answers they give often are not accurate.

There are gray areas, too. Tactics aimed at disorienting prisoners and breaking down their will, such as leaving the lights on day and night or keeping a cell warm or cold, sometimes are lumped in with torture.

The CIA has kept key prisoners in secret lockups in eastern Europe, some inherited from the old Soviet regime Abu Ghrabi itself, a notorious Baghdad prison, came to us from Saddam Hussein.

Stalin, Lenin, Saddam.
Are those names we want to be associated with?
The Bush administration has tried to make its own rules as the war on terror evolved. That’s no way for a nation to do business.

Torture is not part of our agenda. It can never be part of our agenda.

When, as happens in any war, soldiers get out of hand, the U.S. should do what it’s always done: prosecute the violators and teach the rest a lesson.

When agencies want to go beyond what’s acceptable, we the people need to make our will clear.

And that will does not include torture in any form.
Are you listening, Washington? — *Steve Haynes*

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I traveled through storms for class reunion

Through rain and sleet and dark of night and a foot of snow, I made it to my class reunion.

Although Concordia is only three hours away, I had to take two planes to get to my reunion. I was in Colorado on vacation.

When I woke up to a foot of snow that Friday morning, I was afraid I wouldn’t make my plane. But I caught the plane in Alamosa and flew to Denver, then changed planes for McCook. From there, I drove to Concordia for the reunion.

Forty years is a long time, but 29 out of 30 of us are still around, though Sharon has suffered a heart attack. Bob’s had both knees replaced and Marcia can’t see out of one eye or hear out of one ear.

For a bunch in our late 50s, we’re in pretty good shape.

The turnout was good. We had 21 class members and three former classmates for dinner or drop by afterwards.

I graduated from Notre Dame High School in Concordia in 1966. Twenty out of 30 of us had gone to school together for 12 years. Several friends elected to go to the public high school, but we still counted them as classmates.

The award for the one who came the farthest went to Phillip from Seattle. The award for the grayest went to the homecoming queen — not because she was grayer than many others, but



cynthia haynes

● open season

because they figured that since she’s a beautiful, she should have fixed it.

They didn’t give an ugly-duckling-to-swan award, but it would have gone to Emily. She couldn’t drive as a teen-ager because she couldn’t see well enough to pass the test. She was tall and uncoordinated. She was also the only girl in the school with braces — an entirely-too-expensive luxury for most of us in those days.

Today, she is a tall, confident woman who must have had eye surgery, since she drove to the reunion from her home in Topeka.

Steve couldn’t go with me to the dinner, so I took my sister, Marie. She is six years younger than me but has lived in Concordia most of her life and knows everyone. She seemed to have a good time and was better at identifying classmates, who had somehow aged about 40 years, than I was.

I wasn’t the only one to bring my sister. Sam brought his, too. He said after the last reunion, his wife refused to return. I must have missed

GOP wake up call or Dems snooze alarm?

With the Gallup Poll showing a spike in President Bush’s approval ratings and a narrowing of the gap between Democrats and Republicans in congressional preferences, a looming question is how enduring the change. Will it last until November?

Presidential-support scores and party ballot preferences are notoriously fickle, often swinging one way or another in a matter of weeks. I recall vividly how Bill Clinton felt that his ratings had improved after his orchestration of a Mideast peace accord between Jordan and Israel one week before the 1994 elections. He returned home buoyed by the uptick and determined to campaign for deserving Democrats. But his campaigning backfired. It made the newly minted statesman seem like a party politician and his ratings dropped, paving the way for the ’94 debacle for the Democrats.

The growth in Republican fortunes is not based on any real change in either the economy or the war on terror. Very little is different in September than in June or July. The hike in Bush’s ratings and in Republican chances is entirely due to a change in voter perceptions brought about by the confluence of three events:

- The thwarting of a serious al-Qaida plan to blow up airplanes over the Atlantic.
- The renewed national debate on imprisonment and interrogation of terror suspects.
- The anniversary of Sept. 11, the Bush speech on that day, and the ABC-TV docudrama exposing the failure of Clinton’s efforts to get bin Laden.

These events have not only served to rivet public attention on the war on terror, but the domestic effort to protect our security, drawing the public’s focus from the War in Iraq. It is no longer necessary to approve of the war in order to want to keep Republicans in power to avoid dilution of our anti-terror initiatives.

The problem for the Republicans is that the voters badly want the Democrats to win when it comes to almost every issue other than domestic terror. Despite the good economy, they trust Democrats more on jobs. The deficit is shrinking, but they still trust Democrats more on the budget. And on issues like Social Security, Medicare, drug costs, education, climate change, and the environment, they trust Democrats more and always have.



dick morris

● commentary

Only on immigration do the Republicans battle successfully, but their ability to cite their efforts is undermined by their failure to get together and pass immigration reform when they controlled both houses of Congress and the White House.

So, with the underlying situation not much changed, it’s likely that the mood will pass and that the Democrats will resume their domination of the 2006 election.

The problem for the Democrats is that we really do face a huge terrorist threat and there really is a key difference between the parties in how they would handle it. A Democratic victory giving them control of both houses would, in fact, undermine our efforts to keep America safe. The need for the Patriot Act and NSA wiretapping and the need to resist Democratic attempts to undermine them is never more apparent than in the 9/11 Commission report as highlighted in the ABC mini-series.

