

When we use torture, we become who we are fighting against

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group is concerned by Margaret Wenté's column entitled "Can you ever argue about torture?"

We live in a country which values freedom of expression but also life, security, bodily integrity and the rule of law. So yes we can argue about torture but, after examination of the facts, the conclusion is inevitable: torture is unreliable, globally damaging, and profoundly immoral. For these reasons, the international *Convention against Torture* does not allow any derogation from its absolute ban on torture.

The fact that Ms. Wenté was not shocked by the scenes of "enhanced interrogations" or "torture lite" in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* - and the fact that such expressions are now mainstream - actually supports the position that not only the movie contributes to shaping the "public opinion in a disturbing and misleading manner" but that [this is actually not a new phenomenon](#). The choice to only show certain acts that could be identified as "enhanced interrogation" or "torture lite" - and the choice to use those words - is creating a distinction between different types of torture which gives the illusion that some are more acceptable than others.

She writes that, even if torture was not key in finding Osama bin Laden, "it did yield some valuable information". Although that is possible, torture is not the only - nor a reliable - way to achieve such a goal. [Maher Arar reminds us](#) that the invasion of Iraq was mainly based on false intelligence that was derived through torture. He adds that "what *Zero Dark Thirty* obviously omitted to show is that the CIA agent Maya, the central character in the film, was the same agent who was behind misidentifying El-Masri as a terror suspect."

To implicitly suggest, as Ms. Wenté has, that we are basically saving lives by allowing torture because the former CIA head Michael Hayden stated that "we have made it so legally difficult and so politically dangerous to capture that it seems ... the best option is to take the terrorist off the battlefield" is troubling, and incorrect. After all, Obama's drone assassination program is ongoing and even expanding. Once governments have broken the law - and that is met with little consequences - what is stopping them from taking it a step further?

If the fight against terrorism is not black and white, how is it possible to frame the issue, as Ms. Wenté did, in terms of the good guys versus the bad guys? She excuses the "good people (who) sometimes do bad things in the shadows", but don't good guys become bad guys when they do bad things? Maybe it is different when we are (made to be) scared for our safety and when it is mostly brown men on the other side of the world enduring just "10 seconds of waterboarding" or having their "pants (taken) off". But more importantly, guilt or innocence should not determine whether an individual deserves to be tortured or not.

Ms. Wente suspects “the general public is not as horrified by these questions as the movie’s critics are.” However, a recent poll as shown that [most Canadians are not willing to give up civil liberties to combat terrorism](#). I believe it is safe to assume that they are also not willing to condone torture.

And thanking God that we do not have to do the “dirty work” of Canadian and American agents shows a stunning lack of compassion for men who have endured horrible things, and a mind-boggling de-responsibilization on her part.

Finally, remembering history does not mean accepting the horrible acts and the violations of the rule of law and civil liberties perpetrated for a “good cause”. Canada has ruined many lives in its involvement in the war on terror by adopting lax attitudes towards torture, using information obtained through torture, and sending individuals to countries where they were tortured because of erroneous information provided by our government. To this date, Canada still refuses to apologize and compensate the victims: Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad El Maati, Muayyad Nureddin, Benamar Benatta, and Abousfian Abdelrazik.

Our cause, however good we think it might be, becomes morally bankrupt as soon as we use terrorizing and life shattering methods such as torture. We become who we are fighting against.

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