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CIA torture? For the Arab world, that's no surprise

Torture report confirms what most already knew, that the US is in denial over its hypocritical 'war on terror'.

Rachel Shabi

12/25/2014



US embassies are on alert after the release of the CIA torture report

The headlines scream of shock and revulsion. Described in UK newspapers as a "stain on America" and "the shaming of the West", and in the US as a "grim portrait" and "litany of brutality", the damning Senate report on CIA torture has, not surprisingly, evoked horror across

the

world's

media.

Few cannot be shocked by the nightmarishly grotesque details of how the CIA tortured, and how often it lied about it. And who knows how much more is contained in the bulk of the just-released, 6,000-page document of savage abuse, only some 500 pages of which were declassified.

But woven into some of the media reaction is another theme, too. It's in the [Washington Post's editorial](#), which states: "This is not how Americans should behave. Ever."



Inside Story - CIA torture: Who knew what?

It's in the many references, within the US, to the CIA torture as the antithesis of "national" and "American" values. And it is in [Vox editor-in-chief Ezra Klein's](#) observation: "We betrayed our values. We betrayed who we are".

Across the Arab and Muslim world this kind of response from the West might come over as somewhat belated and, well, maybe a little bit delusional, too. After all, "who we are" has been going on since 2001, at the very least (let's not get into the torture that was such an integral part of colonialism, or even the torture training that the CIA gifted a variety of brutal regimes during the 1970s). And "who we are" has for some time been painfully clear to those at the receiving end of it.

In the Middle East, there won't be many people who bought the much-repeated US line that only **three terror suspects were ever waterboarded** by the CIA.

The abuse of terror suspect detainees at the hands of the US is by now well documented; both the news and the harrowing legacy of such violations is widespread.

'Terror in the name of fighting terror'

Travel the Middle East and the torture - by the CIA, or the military, or facilitated by Arab regimes on behalf of western governments - always comes up as an example of the sheer hypocrisy of the "war on terror". Somewhere along the miserable line stretching from Guantanamo to Abu Ghraib, from black sites to rendition programmes, from the sweep of

innocent people to the sheer scope of arbitrary detentions, the meaning of the "war on terror" has become manifestly clear.

"The use of torture is an exercise in terror," says Rizwaan Sabir, a counterterrorism specialist at the UK's Edge Hill University. "So it's terror in the name of fighting terror - and you can't defeat something by becoming the very thing you are trying to defeat."

In this context, it is telling that the US braced for attacks at its embassies in the Arab and Muslim world in response to this damning CIA report. Tightening security at such sites may be protocol, but it is also a misreading of a region that has already reacted to this aspect of US policy - some time ago. As **Brookings Institution fellow Shadi Hamid** told the Associated Press: "Arabs were angry about US torture in Iraq 10 years ago, so if anything, this seems rather quaint that the Americans are having a real public debate about this 10 years after the fact."

So many years on, what matters more than the knowledge is a sense of accountability. "Torture is a crime," the British, **former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg** told the BBC. "Rendition ... false imprisonment, they're crimes. If you or I were to do those to anybody we'd be prosecuted by the full weight of the law. Why is it that the Americans who did this have been granted immunity?"

It should be obvious that torture can't be justified, ever, despite the best - and now renewed - efforts of "ticking time bomb" theorists, whose argument that such practices are necessary in the face of imminent terror attacks have been robustly disproved by the Senate's report.

The West's use of torture as a valuable recruitment tool for extremist groups has been warned about for years and has clearly already been occurring. But now that the US is staring its own terrible abuses in the face, there can be no more spouting of the "us and them", post-9/11 narrative. Now it has been made blatantly clear that "our values" in the western world include torture. There is no point in persisting with the ludicrous hypocrisy of a higher moral ground.