

# TORTURE AT THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

We are now on the third day of the Democratic National Convention (DNC). I have watched most all of the major prime time speeches, thanks to the straight up coverage of CSPAN. That would correspondingly be of *no thanks* to the broadcast and cable networks, who cover so little of the convention itself that you wonder why they are there at all. The answer, of course, is that they are there because they think, in fact are convinced, that *they* are the story. The pompous, insipid and mindless babbling is simply pathetic beyond belief. It is torture to listen to.

My wife was, uncharacteristically, sitting with me watching most of Monday night's festivities, and part of Tuesday's including Hillary's video tribute and speech. Her comment when asked to give her reaction on the convention was that whoever programmed the music for the event, and specifically for the intro and exit of the different speakers, should be taken out and flogged. Considering that horrid Muzak version of "You're Still The One" that was played on either side of Ted Kennedy's inspirational appearance, not to mention most other canned music I have heard, I agree. For the most part, it has been worse than I would expect from the Republicans, much less the Democrats. It is torture to listen to.

Sadly, that is, save for a fleeting reference by Dennis Kucinich, pretty much as close to the issue of torture as has been achieved at the DNC. The torture regime that has been instituted as the unabashed official policy of the United States is perhaps the single biggest and best example, part and parcel with the Iraq War, of the criminality and moral hell the Bush/Cheney Administration has plunged us into. It is what the rest of the world knows and sees, and what we must pull ourselves up from and rise above.

Apparently it is just a little too uncomfortable for our elected leaders, party delegates and the Obama campaign to discuss though. "Change" for this crowd clearly does not include openly discussing the singularly important topic of US torture policy, the one thing that *must be changed* for the US to recover any global credibility.

There is another convention going on this week though, and it happens to be right here in Arizona. It is the annual convention of the American Legion. You know, the organization of veterans of the United States armed forces who served in wartime. And lo and behold they had Richard Bruce Cheney in front of them today, and had the temerity to bring up that which the folks at the DNC do not. The veterans that have fought, and lost their own doing so, for this country were hot under the collar about torture. From a CNN report:

Vice President Dick Cheney defended the Bush administration's record on prisoner interrogations, telling a veterans' group that its use of "alternative" techniques against suspects was legal and proper.

The local newspaper, the Arizona Republic, had this report:

The vice president prefaced his speech with a promise to avoid talk of the ongoing presidential campaign, though he reminded the group they had heard from "one of your own" the day before, GOP nominee-in-waiting Sen. John McCain.

Cheney used his remarks to the packed convention hall to review the Bush administration's work on defense and foreign policy and to defend the president for some of his actions in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"The war on terror is not a figure of

speech," Cheney said. "The only way to win is to go on the offensive and that is exactly what we are doing."

He acknowledged mistakes, most notably the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib early in the Iraqi offensive. The people found responsible for those abuses were prosecuted, but "the misdeeds of the few should never be used to slander" those who did not break the law, he said.

Cheney also defended the Bush administration's interrogation techniques, which critics say pushed and often broke through the boundaries of torture. The techniques were "entirely legal and proper and carefully reviewed by the Department of Justice," Cheney said. "No nation in the world takes human rights more seriously than the United States."

He voiced support for veterans' issues, including a new GI Bill that offers education benefits similar to those given following World War II. Although Bush signed the bill, he had opposed it and threatened to veto the measure until it passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming majorities.

In remarks following Cheney's, Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., noted that McCain and other Republicans had characterized the new benefits as too generous.

Now, granted, it may have been an opportunity for Cheney to cluck his self serving rationalization, but the discussion was being had. And Jim Webb was there to discuss further and counter Cheney. The issue was broached and discussion had. Something that *ought* to be going on at the Democratic National Convention; but, to date, has not in any substantive fashion. The Democrats should be leading the discussion on torture, not shying away from it.

In case anybody here has forgotten that the issue roils on in the real world, here are a few recent reminders:

Judge fears secret Gitmo habeas hearings. –

A federal judge overseeing cases against dozens of Guantánamo Bay detainees said Wednesday that he fears the public – and the detainees themselves – will be locked out of the courtroom when evidence in the case is scrutinized for the first time.

Poland to investigate claims of secret CIA prisons.

Poland's prime minister has requested an investigation into allegations there were secret prisons in the country used by the CIA to hold and question terror suspects between 2001 and 2004.

Algerian captive claims water torture at Guantanamo base.

An Algerian prisoner at Guantánamo Bay has accused his guards of using a form of waterboarding on him, his lawyer said Friday, marking the first allegation that the harsh interrogation technique was used at the U.S. military base.

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Ameziane, who has been imprisoned at Guantánamo since February 2002 without being charged with crimes, told his lawyer Wells Dixon that guards at the base placed a water hose between his nose and mouth and ran it for several minutes. Ameziane said they repeated the procedure several times, nearly suffocating him.

"I had the impression that my head was sinking in water," Ameziane, 41, wrote his lawyer in a letter. "I still have psychological injuries, up to this day.

Simply thinking of it gives me the chills.”

According to Ameziane’s account, during the same alleged incident the guards applied pepper spray all over his body, hosed him down and left him shackled and shivering in wet clothes in front of an air conditioner in an interrogation room.