

ONCE AGAIN, OBAMA EMPOWERS STATE DEPARTMENT TO LECTURE OTHERS

Almost a year ago, Obama celebrated the anniversary of the Convention against Torture by promising to have the Department of State look at other countries' use of torture.

My administration is committed to taking concrete actions against torture and to address the needs of its victims. On my third day in office, I issued an executive order that prohibits torture by the United States. My budget request for fiscal year 2010 includes continued support for international and domestic groups working to rehabilitate torture victims.

The United States will continue to cooperate with governments and civil society organizations throughout the international community in the fight to end torture. **To this end, I have requested today that the Department of State solicit information from all of our diplomatic missions around the world about effective policies and programs for stopping torture** and assisting its victims so that we and our civil society partners can learn from what others have done. I applaud the courage, compassion and commitment of the many people and organizations doing this vitally important work. [my emphasis]

And while the specific requirements of the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act mandate action from the Department of State, it still feels pretty hollow when, less than two weeks after DOD banned four reporters from Gitmo for

printing information that's in the public domain, Obama is again directing the State Department to lecture others about issues the US has problems with itself.

Here's what transpired when Obama signed the Act:

THE PRESIDENT: Well, hello, everybody. I am very proud to be able to sign the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act, a piece of legislation that **sends a strong signal about our core values when it comes to the freedom of the press.** All around the world there are enormously courageous journalists and bloggers who, at great risk to themselves, are trying to shine a light on the critical issues that the people of their country face; who are the frontlines against tyranny and oppression. And obviously the loss of Daniel Pearl was one of those moments that captured the world's imagination because it reminded us of how valuable a free press is, and it reminded us that there are those who would go to any length in order to silence journalists around the world.

What this act does is it sends a strong message from the United States government and from the State Department that **we are paying attention to how other governments are operating when it comes to the press.** It has the State Department each year chronicling how press freedom is operating as one component of our human rights assessment, but **it also looks at countries that are – governments that are specifically condoning or facilitating this kind of press repression, singles them out and subjects them to the gaze of world opinion in ways that I think are extraordinarily important.**

Oftentimes without this kind of

attention, countries and governments feel that they can operate against the press with impunity. And we want to send a message that they can't.

So this legislation, in a very modest way, I think puts us clearly on the side of journalistic freedom. I want to thank Adam Schiff in the House and Senator Chris Dodd in the Senate for their leadership. And I particularly want to thank the Pearl family, who have been so outspoken and so courageous in sending a clear message that, despite Daniel's death, his vision of a well-informed citizenry that is able to make choices and hold governments accountable, that that legacy lives on.

So we are very grateful to them. I'm grateful to the legislative leaders who helped to pass this. It is something that I intend to make sure our State Department carries out with vigor. And with that, I'm going to sign the bill.

(The bill is signed.)

There you go. Thank you, everybody. Appreciate it.

Q Speaking of press freedom, could you answer a couple of questions on BP?

THE PRESIDENT: You're certainly free to ask them, Chip.

Q Will you answer them? How about a question on Iran?

THE PRESIDENT: We won't be answering — I'm not doing a press conference today, but we'll be seeing you guys during the course of this week. Okay?

True, with Obama's election the US rose significantly on the index of press freedom (though that was before William Welch's crusade against stale national security leaks). But it'd

be nice if he paid attention to the press
intimidation happening within his own
Administration, before he lectures other
countries about this.