

MATTHEW ALEXANDER POINTS TO THE ABUSE STILL PERMITTED BY THE AFM APPENDIX

Jeff Kaye has been telling us for years that the Army Field Manual which the Obama Administration adopted as its standard for all interrogation still allows a great deal of abuse. (See his three part series from earlier this month, for example: one, two, three.)

Today, former military interrogator Matthew Alexander joins in Jeff's calls for more attention to what is allowed by the Army Field Manual on the NYT op-ed page.

The adoption last year of the Army Field Manual as the standard for interrogations across the government, including the C.I.A., was a considerable improvement. But we missed a unique opportunity for progress last August when the president's task force on interrogations recommended no changes to the manual, which was hastily revised in 2006 in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal.

For example, an appendix to the manual allows the military to keep a detainee in "separation" – solitary confinement – indefinitely. It requires only that a general approve any extension after 30 days. Rest assured, there will be numerous waivers to even that minuscule requirement.

[snip]

The Army Field Manual also does not explicitly prohibit stress positions, putting detainees into close confinement or environmental manipulation (other than hypothermia and "heat injury").

These omissions open a window of opportunity for abuse.

The manual also allows limiting detainees to just four hours of sleep in 24 hours. Let's face it: extended captivity with only four hours of sleep a night (consider detainees at Guantánamo Bay who have been held for seven years) does not meet the minimum standard of humane treatment, either in terms of American law or simple human decency.

And if this weren't enough, some interrogators feel the manual's language gives them a loophole that allows them to give a detainee four hours of sleep and then conduct a 20-hour interrogation, after which they can "reset" the clock and begin another 20-hour interrogation followed by four hours of sleep. This is inconsistent with the spirit of the reforms, which was to prevent "monsterring" – extended interrogation sessions lasting more than 20 hours. American interrogators are more than capable of doing their jobs without the loopholes.

The Field Manual, to its credit, calls for "all captured and detained personnel, regardless of status" to be "treated humanely." But when it comes to the specifics the manual contradicts itself, allowing actions that no right-thinking person could consider humane.

Alexander calls for a revision to the Army Field Manual to—as he puts it—stop giving al Qaeda a recruiting tool.

Thanks to Jeff for his persistence on this issue and Matthew Alexander for now championing the issue. As Alexander points out, it has now been a year since Obama promised to end the practice of torture. It's time to look at what we do

permit and consider whether Obama has really met his goal.