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[Your Home Teacher Tortures Inmates.](#)

By: Steve Evans - August 22, 2007

[This July Vanity Fair article](#) outlines the use of pseudo-psychiatric techniques and the reverse engineering of the military's [SERE](#) program to use as tools in taking apart the psyche of detainees and suspected terrorists. The currently used methods of waterboarding and other forms of duress were determined permissible on the basis of a memo written (at least in part) by [Jay Bybee](#), a mormon judge now sitting on the Ninth Circuit. The memo's introduction read (in part):

For purely mental pain or suffering to amount to torture under Section 2340 [that section of the U.S. Code implementing the UN Convention Against Torture]...physical pain amounting to torture must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death..it must result in significant psychological harm of significant duration, e.g., lasting for months or even years.

Unfortunately, not only did a mormon help provide the legal underpinnings of Abu Ghraib and CIA black site prisons, mormons also developed the very interrogation techniques used on those held in these locations.

The VF article describes the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah, an Al-Queda soldier, at a safe house in Thailand:

Two psychologists in particular played a central role: James Elmer Mitchell, who was attached to the C.I.A. team that eventually arrived in Thailand, and his colleague Bruce Jessen. Neither served on the task force or are A.P.A. [American Psychological Association] members...Mitchell and Jessen reverse-engineered the tactics inflicted on sere trainees for use on detainees in the global war on terror, according to psychologists and others with direct knowledge of their activities. The C.I.A. put them in charge of training interrogators in the brutal techniques, including "waterboarding," at its network of "black sites." In a statement, Mitchell and Jessen said, "We are proud of the work we have done for our country."

And the best part:

Mitchell and Jessen's methods were so controversial that, among colleagues, the reaction to their names alone became a litmus test of one's attitude toward coercion and human rights. Their critics called them the "Mormon mafia" (a reference to their shared religion) and the "poster boys" (referring to the F.B.I.'s "most wanted" posters, which are where some thought their activities would land them).

[Others have written](#) their feelings on this point. Some claim that the Bloggernacle represents, in some small measure, the face of Mormonism to the world, but far more people will know of Mitchell, Jessen and Bybee than will ever hear of BCC.

Another odd thing to consider: somewhere, these men are in a ward —maybe yours. From what I can gather, they either live on the East Coast or in the Spokane, WA area. Perhaps they teach in the Primary, or are on the High Council. We may break the Sacrament together some day. The juxtaposition of ruthless interrogators sitting in the pew next to me boggles my mind, and I don't quite know what to make of it all.

[180 Comments »](#)

1. Of course, humans of all tribes and religions are implicated in torture and sadism.

I do think, however, that Mormon culture predisposes us to oversee the evil implications of our actions much the same way Bolshevik ideology does. We are so convinced of our goodness that it becomes difficult to recognize the abusive implications of our behavior.

Karl Popper talks about similar dynamics in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.

Another cultural concept that is problematic in this context is the role of authority.

Comment by Hellmut —August 22, 2007 @ [12:08 pm](#)

2. You know, it really pisses me off that we have so rapidly ceded the high moral ground by engaging in these torture tactics. I think of the “greatest generation” and the relative humanity with which they treated prisoners.

And to have Mormons be the architects of this? That just makes me sad.

No wonder the rest of the world hates us.

Comment by Kevin Barney —August 22, 2007 @ [12:09 pm](#)

3. And let's not forget that Helmuth Huebener was a Mormon as well. It's probably not an accident though that his Mormon experience was in the diaspora.

Comment by Hellmut —August 22, 2007 @ [12:10 pm](#)

4. Hellmut, I'm not convinced as to your explanation in No. 1. I don't believe that mormons are able engage in evil acts because they're convinced of their own righteousness.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:14 pm](#)

5. I thought Mormon was a word that should be capitalized (I'm referring to the post).

I have mixed feelings about this topic, mainly because I've read that there are non-violent (but still highly manipulative) techniques that are more effective for getting information out of a prisoner.

Keep me awake long enough and I'd probably say anything you'd want me to, if only I thought you'd let me go to sleep afterwards. Same goes for near drowning or constant dunking in water - or any other conditions that would typically create desperation in a human being.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:18 pm](#)

6. I'm inclined to hang pictures of these guys on the Mormon wall of shame next to John D. Lee...

Comment by Jeremy —August 22, 2007 @ [12:18 pm](#)

7. I sit next to Republicans almost every Sunday. It's tough, but we must be open to all peoples, regardless of their position on waterboarding on the sabbath or any other day.

Comment by Dave —August 22, 2007 @ [12:19 pm](#)

8. Danithew, forcing someone to stand for hours and hours or waterboarding them (NOT dunking, which sounds like a carnival), or slapping them repeatedly are pretty violent. It's been established that these means are NOT necessarily more effective.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:22 pm](#)

9. Dave (not DMI, I presume), it's one thing to sit next to someone who agrees in the abstract that we should torture terrorists, vs. someone who actually tortures terrorists and teaches others how.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:25 pm](#)

10. Good point, Steve. I don't have any systematic data but participant observation leads me to conclude that we are not exactly world champions in respecting the rights of others. We do not share the exemplary record of the Quakers, for example.

Torture is only the tip of the iceberg. Do you need somebody to fudge the data about missile defense? A Mormon bishop will do it. Gotta fire federal attorneys for failing to prosecute imaginary voter fraud? A Mormon bishop will do it. Why is it that we are reliably involved in such events?

The next question is, how can it be that there is not a Helmuth Huebener Hall on any Mormon campus? Other religions would celebrate Huebener as a martyr and elevate him at every opportunity.

Why did some of our leaders malign the civil rights movement as a communist front? Why do our leaders punish scholars for their research?

It seems to me that there are institutionalized aspects of Mormonism that promote unethical behavior in the service of authority.

Comment by Hellmut —August 22, 2007 @ [12:29 pm](#)

11. Hellmut, you lost me at "institutionalized," which is where you veer off into old-fashioned antimormonism.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:31 pm](#)

12. Yeah, sometimes lawyers have to provide legal advice on fairly touchy issues for their clients. This is not a secret in the profession, Steve. I don't see how Bybee having provided legal analysis to his client is a basis for slurring him (whether you agree with his analysis or not, he was doing his job). If Bybee had invoked this brand of faux-piety to *avoid* giving his analysis of the law when his client needed it, then there'd be a character issue.

Comment by [Dave](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:32 pm](#)

13. Dave, how did I slur Bybee? I thought I was pretty careful about that...I'm aware of the nuances of the attorney/client relationship.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [12:35 pm](#)

14. I go to Church every sunday with a police officer. He has shot people, killed people, willingly slammed people in handcuffs into walls, over car hoods, etc. He kicks in doors on teenagers drinking underage and forces drug dealers to throw up little bags of crack they try to swallow. He is living an absolutely violent life. While I could never live like that, I am grateful for him and would pass him the sacrament any day of the week. I mainly do it on Sundays though, since that's the day we go to church.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [12:36 pm](#)

15. I don't agree with torturing anyone, ever, but I also won't criticize someone for providing legal advice about the meaning of a specific section of code - unless I read it myself and think that the advice is absolute crap. Even then, I will recognize that the advice might have been that person's best effort to make the best argument possible - which lawyers do all of the time. I agree with Dave; if Bybee had given a faulty or weak argument in order to manipulate a result that was not in the best interest of his client . . .

My attitude toward the role of Mitchell and Jessen, OTOH, is completely different. It is one thing to comment on the legality of an action, and it is quite another to help create that action and train others on how to employ it.

Hellmut, what Steve said. You lost me just a little earlier than you lost Steve, but you did lose me, also.

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [12:51 pm](#)

16. Isn't this old news?

I think we need more threads on homosexuals in the Church, how the Church has no good artists, and which hymns are the best.



Comment by D. Fletcher —August 22, 2007 @ [12:55 pm](#)

17. What is waterboarding?

When dealing with terrorists who lack basic civility, I suspect that methods which we would find repulsive would be necessary. I am certainly not going to complain about the methods we use to keep terrorists from destroying us.

Comment by Still Confused —August 22, 2007 @ [12:58 pm](#)

18. My own TR holding grandfather has killed dozens and dozens of people with a rifle and worse a few with a bayonet and a shovel.

Kevin he also witnessed with his own eyes the random shooting of multiple captured prisoners of war by fellow US troops. Lets not romanticize the greatest generation to much. They had some bad apples in the bunch. One guy is his platoon stole a German womans ID papers and forced her to have sex to get them back. Without ID papers she would have been forced into a displaced person camp. This guy went to prison for his criminal act. War is hell

I am not sure I am ready to throw a couple of LDS guys under the bus for their apparently lawful actions during a war. Esp not from a Vanity Fair article largely based on hearsay.

Comment by bbell —August 22, 2007 @ [1:02 pm](#)

19. Steve, you are right that the unlinked 'Dave' in comment #7 is not me, the linked 'Dave' in comment #12. I always link back to DMI. [Nothing against Dave #7, although it sounds like he'd have a hard time sitting next to Dave #12 on Sunday. I wish people would just check their politics at the door on Sunday.]

Comment by [Dave](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [1:05 pm](#)

20. I don't think that the 'greatest generation' were all that more humane to prisoners than the current crop of soldiers. Prisoners were killed, and people attempting to surrender were killed also. And, if there were real dirty work to be done, we could count on Ivan to take care of it.

And don't even start on the 'humanity' of the war waged on the Japanese. (It may be that their own methods of conducting warfare, especially in 1944-45 at Saipan and Iwo Jima and Okinawa, left the American soldier with few alternatives, but spraying burning jellied gasoline on another human being isn't exactly humane.)

Comment by Mark B. —August 22, 2007 @ [1:09 pm](#)

21. bbell, the LDS guys here weren't soldiers, they were consultants to the CIA.

StillConfused, the ends justify the means?

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [1:10 pm](#)

22. by the way, [here's](#) a description of waterboarding.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [1:15 pm](#)

23. bbell, that's why I used the word "relative." I'm well aware that we committed plenty of atrocities of

our own in WWII. I think for instance of the story Hugh Nibley tells of when he was over there and five GIs gang raped a French woman on her wedding day— *and we were on the same side!*

Still, the pictures that came out of Abu Ghraib did immeasurable damage to the perception of us around the world, and it ticks me off. I have a tough time imagining our grandfathers countenancing such a thing on such a wide and official scale.

Comment by Kevin Barney —August 22, 2007 @ [1:15 pm](#)

24. Kevin: ultimately, it seems that what our grandfathers didn't countenance was pictures coming out. In my grandfathers' old age, when I told him I was going on a mission to the philippines for the Mormon Church, his words of encouragement were 'If you see anyone over there who looks like me, it's not my fault.'

Oh, and our grandfathers dropped a nuclear bomb or two on Japan and fire bombed Dresden until it was worse than a Nuke. Our grandfathers incinerated men, women, and children from infants all the way to great great grandmas.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [1:26 pm](#)

25. Yuck.

Comment by [Norbert](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [1:45 pm](#)

26. Kevin,

It's pretty clear that we (the allies) shot German soldiers trying to surrender in WWII, sometimes as a matter of policy.

I don't know how to compare waterboarding in our era to the horrific actions of another time, but I'm pretty sure that I've sat in priesthood meetings with people who have done awful things.

I also think that our views on the magnitude of wrongdoing is tightly bound to our opinion of the legitimacy of the war on terror. It doesn't bother me so much that Lincoln suspended *habeus corpus* in the Civil war because I think that war was necessary. The Internal Revenue Service violates the civil liberties of hundreds of citizens every day (asset seizure, no jury trial), but we don't mind, because we understand that the government needs to collect money.

Comment by Mark IV —August 22, 2007 @ [1:46 pm](#)

27. We could always do what the other side does - make videos of their beheadings and post them online for their loved ones to see. Compared to that, what you call torture is a walk in the park. Thank heaven for people like Mitchell, Jessen and Bybee. And yes, the ends justify the means in cases such as this.

Comment by anonymous —August 22, 2007 @ [1:51 pm](#)

28. 23 —You're employing a standard that strikes me as remarkably weird. On the one hand, we can firebomb hundreds of thousands of people in Japan and Germany, and that's okay, but some pictures of guys with panties on their heads is just inconceivable. But I should clarify that I'm more familiar than I wish to be with the treatment of prisoners during WWII, particularly by the Japanese, and I just can't find my pulse raise by the idea of someone standing around for a few hours, or sleeping in a chilly room, or maybe having some water on his face so he feels like he's drowning. Particularly not when his compatriots are kidnapping civilians that they treat far worse before using them for PR value by making ludicrous demands and then beheading them when those stupid demands aren't met.

If you want to talk about real torture that happens in the real world, and the things these people would like to do to your family and mine, then we can do an apples comparison with what we're doing to them to try to avoid those things. But sitting on your moral high ground, viewing the actions of the past through rose-colored glasses, ignoring the actions of people who would like to see you dead and applying ridiculous standards to the people keeping them from doing that just doesn't impress me.

And keep in mind how much of the ugly things that were done in the past were simply better kept secret than the things of today.

As in the wars your grandparents were involved in, we don't know ahead of time how ugly we will need to be to survive this one. Are you sure you want to, from that position of ignorance, tie the hands of the people who are protecting you? I'm not.

War is Hell. Always. It is never run perfectly. It requires inhuman and ugly things, and failing to do so when required simply means those things will be done by the people you would have stopped to people closer to you. Wringing your hands about this won't change that.

I thought you knew better than believing in the Good Old Days.

Comment by Blain —August 22, 2007 @ [1:53 pm](#)

29. I am so sorry, I apparantly started a "throw pooh at Kevin" party. That was not my intent. Kevin, I think you are awesome.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [2:04 pm](#)

30. Steve, (responding to comment #12) - you're just repeating my point. But no worries.

And hey man - I still want to see the word Mormon capitalized (there are a number of places in your post where you write it as "mormon").

It's a proper noun. I wouldn't want to see "catholic" or "jew" or "muslim" or "rastafarian" either.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [2:05 pm](#)

31. I despise loaded threads like these because they remind me that I have to straddle two worlds on the bloggernacle. I am "liberal" only in regards to my LDS orthodoxy and agree with so much that is posted out here, but when it comes to issues like these...

You all talk about inhumane actions and the moral high ground, but always neglect to talk about why we would bother to waterboard these filthy jihadist dogs instead of just capping them.

Is it more humane to make the helpless islamist feel like they are going to drown, or to drive a vehicle loaded with explosives into a crowd of children in the hopes that you will kill one of the GIs giving them candy?

Is it more humane to slap a bound prisoner around or to use children in the back seat of a car as a way to gain access to a secured area with your car bomb, only to run from the car a let the children be obliterated with the explosion?

The moral high ground was ceded a LONG time ago, my friends, and by the jihadis. Wake up or this crap WILL spill into your backyard or onto your ferries (shout out to to my homies in the Pacific NW)!

If I knew one of these men was in my ward and somehow knew what they did for a living, I would pound them on the back and shake their hand and thank them for keeping my family safe! They are not hardly the villains you make them out to be, but rather are those with their fingers in the dikes.

\right-winger off

Comment by RoughRider1901 —August 22, 2007 @ [2:27 pm](#)

32. danithew, if you want a job done right, do it yourself. I can't be bothered by your punctuation hangups!

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [2:32 pm](#)

33. "filthy jihadist dogs"? RR, have you been frequenting Iran's anti-Sunni chat rooms?

What kinds of psychological gymnastics are necessary to waterboard someone while remaining full of charity towards all men?

If what is reported is true, I sure hope the brothers remembered to show afterwards an increase of love!

Comment by Greg B. —August 22, 2007 @ [2:42 pm](#)

34. #12 Dave:

I don't see how Bybee having provided legal analysis to his client is a basis for slurring him (whether you agree with his analysis or not, he was doing his job).

Actually Dave, an attorney has a duty or option (depending on which jurisdiction he's practicing in) to withdraw from representation if the client insists on a course of action that the attorney finds morally reprehensible. It's not enough for an attorney to say, "Hey, I was just doing my job."

If I was still active LDS, I'd sit in a sacrament meeting with these guys, but I'd certainly never allow them in my home as home teachers, or sustain them as my own local leadership. It's not just a matter of political preferences; it's a matter of basic morality. As for the old "anything goes in war" argument, try that at Nueremburg.

Comment by Nick Literski —August 22, 2007 @ [2:45 pm](#)

35. Roughrider1901:

Comparing our actions to those of our enemies does not establish what is moral. There is a difference between being righteous and being less-wicked than the wicked.

Also, such comparisons fail to address the problem of efficacy of such sordid techniques —a test which one *might* argue from a Mormon scriptural standpoint.

Comment by Jeremy —August 22, 2007 @ [2:48 pm](#)

36. Steve, send me a login and password, and I'd be happy to fix your post. (grin)

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [2:48 pm](#)

37. Assuming the article is accurate (it seems pretty biased) I'm very disturbed by the fact that not only are Mormons to blame for our current torture program, but that there seems to be no evidence that it is effective. We appear to be torturing people simply to torture them. Look at what it did to Jose Padilla.

I'm actually surprised that they didn't just sit people down and use the commitment pattern on them. At least we know that works.

Comment by a random John —August 22, 2007 @ [2:56 pm](#)

38. I'm a graduate of the basic SERE school at Fairchild AFB; I've also had more advanced training in the subject. My take on the whole thing is:

1. The ones living around Spokane would be instructors at the Air Force Survival School. They aren't 'ruthless interrogators', they are American military men and women preparing other men and women to deal with harsh physical and psychological 'pressures' should they find themselves as prisoners of war or detained by a foreign power or terrorist organization. The work they do saves lives. I can't stress that enough—the work they do in preparing servicemen and women saves lives.

There is great concern for the mental health of both the students and the instructors; psychologists are present throughout training, and instructors have periodic psych evals. Sadists are quickly weeded out.

I for one would have no trouble sitting in church with those who subjected me to physical and psychological pressures. None whatsoever.

2. The reverse engineering of the SERE techniques for use in the war on terror leaves me baffled. One thing I learned is that physical pressure is much less effective at getting to the truth than psychological pressure, and the most successful psychological pressure very much resembles the building a relationship of trust pattern used by missionaries.

How psychologists who watched what happened at Fairchild and elsewhere came away with the idea that those techniques would be useful is beyond me.

3. There are a number of LDS cadre at survival school. An officer I greatly admire, who was my commander in addition to being the bishop of a neighboring ward, went on to be the ops officer at Fairchild. A finer man, and a greater example of a believing Saint can't be found.

Comment by Capt Jack —August 22, 2007 @ [3:01 pm](#)

39. I don't agree with using terms like "filthy jihadists dogs" either. And yes, reprehensible things happened at Abu Ghraib. But interrogation tactics were needed which were fast and effective and emotions were running high. How many people were killed on September 11th? If someone had kidnapped your 4 year old and wouldn't tell you where she was, where would you draw the line on torturing that person to get her back?

I am not saying it is ideal or right, I am saying, like the police man I mentioned above who lives a hard and challenging life, I understand why it is the way it is.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [3:03 pm](#)

40. The so-called Greatest Generation gave birth to the Baby Boomer generation, so maybe we should rescind the "greatest" moniker.

That said, I doubt they'd be my home teachers if they lived in my ward. I haven't had a HT visit in over 2 years (which is why I *heart* the 'nacle, man).

Comment by queuno —August 22, 2007 @ [3:06 pm](#)

41. Ideally we could be like the Anti-Nephi-Lehis and bury our weapons then bow ourselves down as we are slaughtered. I wonder how many of us would be killed before their hearts were softened and more are converted than the numbers of those they killed?

Comment by Timshel —August 22, 2007 @ [3:09 pm](#)

42. Capt. Jack, let me clarify a bit. I have no problem with SERE training or with SERE instructors; indeed, as you point out, I believe them to be in the service of their country in preparing people. Active servicemen and instructors such as those you mention are doing good work. I regret not making that more clear in my post.

It is your point no. 2 that baffles me as it baffles you as well.

Matt W., don't try to explain away Abu Ghraib. That just shows a poor understanding of the events and their background. And don't confuse the people in my post with policemen, who have strict guidelines to follow in enforcing the law. We are talking here about civilian contractors who sell interrogation techniques to the CIA for money.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:10 pm](#)

43. Matt W.,

I don't follow your line. The criminal tactics at Abu Graib were neither fast nor effective. And what is the connection between torture and September 11th?

If someone kidnapped my four year old, I would not be in the right frame of mind to decide how to question a suspect. I hope I would show good sense. In any case, lashing out in anger and fear is not the same thing as deciding to systematically abuse someone.

Comment by Greg B. —August 22, 2007 @ [3:19 pm](#)

44. Steve -

How would you feel about them in church?? Like any other person there! Duh! Try not judging the person! Let the Lord figure out how He wants to treat them. I like some of the issues brought out by the post, but to talk about the specific people in this way isn't right!

Normally I don't get on a moral pedestal, but somebody needs to here!

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [3:22 pm](#)

45. My understanding is that most special forces are waterboarded as a matter of course to understand it and to be prepared to resist it. I *personally* see a *huge* difference between waterboarding or keeping someone awake or even some slapping and what I normally think of as torture: severe beating; breaking out the odd medical tools and pliers; electrocution; etc.

Don't get me wrong, I don't want it done to me. But then there's lots of things I don't want done to me that we as a society do as a matter of course. I'd never want to be in a maximum security prison for instance. It sounds like an absolute hell.

As an interesting tangent, here's the infamous video where a [Fox News correspondent allows himself to be waterboarded on TV by special forces](#).

Anyway, I recognize some here see these actions as intrinsically immoral. While I think we can debate whether they are *wise* politically and *useful* in terms of acquiring information, I confess I'm surprised by those who see this as so immoral. I personally can think of many other things regularly done along the Wasatch front that are more questionable to me.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:22 pm](#)

46. My concern about our country is that in some quarters (prisons, war) we have somehow arrived at the conclusion that it's acceptable to torture people psychologically. Often, from what I've read, the damage is permanent. Sensory deprivation or total isolation for very extended periods of time - that strikes me as one of the worst things they are doing to people.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:22 pm](#)

47. *What kinds of psychological gymnastics are necessary to waterboard someone while remaining full of charity towards all men?*

What kind of psychological gymnastics are necessary to shoot someone as a sniper and remain full of charity towards them? Welcome to the world of warfare. I'm sure it *is* extremely difficult for many who are soldiers, police officers or prison guards. I'm sure some are very negatively affected by it.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:25 pm](#)

48. Good post, steve.

#6

| I'm inclined to hang pictures of these guys on the Mormon wall of shame next to John D. Lee...

Lee simply did his best to do his duty as he understood it. I suspect the Church (or is that church?) was thinking along similar lines when it reinstated his membership posthumously.

Comment by Peter LLC —August 22, 2007 @ [3:28 pm](#)

49. Jacob, you say "to talk about the specific people in this way isn't right!"

In which way, exactly?

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:32 pm](#)

- 50.
1. I try very hard, and often fail, at the instruction to "judge not lest ye be judged". I would try to give these fellow the benefit of the doubt.
 2. There is a difference between the emotion of the battleground, and a methodically thought-out and official policy. Again, I try not to judge, but the premeditated use of torture (waterboarding can not be described as anything less) and intentional humiliation of Abu Ghraib give me huge concerns about the moral stature of our country in the world today.
 3. Unfortunately, we as Mormons and disciples of Christ should know better. I read the MMM article in the new September Ensign last night, and was relieved that the official church publication did not try to gloss

over the facts of that particular crime. When the rest of the world dabbles in these moral gray zones, their religion, or lack of it, is rarely mentioned. However, when one of our own is involved, that becomes a topic for discussion in the media.

4. I'm extremely glad I have never had to be in the position of having to decide what to do in a situation like this. I like to think I could act in accordance with gospel principles at all times, but I've never been tested like this. It frightens me, because I know that when I sense that someone I love in my own family is being ridiculed or attacked verbally, I am most likely to lose my temper, and act in an un-Christ-like manner.

5. I also recognize the danger we face in the world today, but someone else's actions do not justify my own abandonment of my Christian heritage and principles. I just hope that I never am in a situation that tests me like this.

Sorry, the numbers are because I am a little angry.

Comment by kevinf—August 22, 2007 @ [3:38 pm](#)

51. The thought of the Marriotts sitting in the pew next to mine sends chills up my spine.

Oops, wrong thread, sorry. Carry on.

Comment by Rusty—August 22, 2007 @ [3:38 pm](#)

52. kevinf, you're supposed to count to *TEN*. You had five more points to go!

Comment by Steve Evans—August 22, 2007 @ [3:42 pm](#)

53. Clark:

Most special operations forces don't go through survival training and thus aren't exposed to those techniques. There has been a push in the last few years to get more of them trained, but there aren't enough trained instructors to get them all through.

The real problem with all the methods you outlined is that they are ineffective if you are looking for the truth.

They are effective if you just want someone to say something whether true or not. Remember, SERE techniques are based on methods developed in the Soviet Bloc, where the truth of a confession was less important than the confession itself.

Comment by Capt Jack—August 22, 2007 @ [3:44 pm](#)

54. RE My # 50.

My point # 3 is probably an emotional reaction. One has only to think of recent years and the Catholic Church, or Jim Bakker, or here in the NW, anyone with any religious persuasion that lands in the news, gets pasted as a hypocrite. I obviously notice the Mormon references more readily.

Comment by kevinf—August 22, 2007 @ [3:44 pm](#)

55. Having just watched *Saw II* (absolute rubbish) I can bear my testimony that manhandling the person who has kidnapped your son only leads to bad things, which in the case of New Kid Donnie meant being stabbed by a woman wearing a boar-mask and left to rot.

...

The Bybee torture memo only proves what I've come to realise: that most of the crap done in this world begins at the desks of otherwise good men.

Comment by Ronan—August 22, 2007 @ [3:44 pm](#)

56. And most crap-talking gets done on blogs. Also at the desks of otherwise good men.

Sorry, couldn't resist.

Comment by [Susan M](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:49 pm](#)

57. . . . *most of the crap done in this world begins at the desks of otherwise good men.*

And most of it seems to be done in the name of one deity or another.

Comment by [Nick Literski](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [3:49 pm](#)

58. Okay Steve, here you go:

6. I wouldn't want one of these men for a home teacher, so I didn't have to think about their actions directly each month. Besides that, my current home teacher brings me salmon from Alaska that he brutally murders with camouflaged hooks. I can deal with that.

7. I would sit next to them in the pew, because hopefully, the atonement can still work in their lives, as I hope it works in mine.

8. What were they thinking?

9. My father-in-law flew B-25 bombers in WWII, and it still gives him nightmares from time to time, and he is one of the kindest, gentlest men I have ever known.

10. I often think about the anti-Nephi-Lehi's these days.

Comment by [kevinf](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [4:05 pm](#)

59. *If someone kidnapped my four year old, I would not be in the right frame of mind to decide how to question a suspect. I hope I would show good sense. In any case, lashing out in anger and fear is not the same thing as deciding to systematically abuse someone.*

And that's why President Bartlett did what he did (although, she was older than four).

Comment by [queuno](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [4:06 pm](#)

60. re: 10

'Why is it we are reliably involved in such events?'

Probably because in recent decades, American LDS have become overwhelmingly associated with the Republican party (what is it bbell, 80%?). As this Republican administration has unfolded over the past 8 years, it's no surprise that Mormons are involved in various events along the way.

I don't think Mormons are any more likely to be torturers, anti-civil-libertarians, or anything else unsavory like that. On the contrary. American Mormons are, however, more likely to be Republicans. If the Republicans go off track, the LDS are going with them (until the Saints come to their political senses, that is!).

Comment by [MikeInWeHo](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [4:34 pm](#)

61. Steve -

'I'm inclined to hang pictures of these guys on the Mormon wall of shame next to John D. Lee' is the most prominent example. I'll let Nick's (34)pass since he's (self-proclaimed) not active and won't be sustaining people, anyway.

Comment by [Jacob](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [4:39 pm](#)

62. Don't you take the Lord Jesus Christ's mortal life as your guide? He said, 'Come, follow me.' As between the moral reprehensions outlined in the post and death, wouldn't the true disciple choose death, like the Savior did? Is He not powerful to save you and your brother? If society is inadequate to safeguard us, isn't the Lord able to deliver the righteous? Won't he?

Comment by [WE](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [4:41 pm](#)

63. I heard [an interview](#) on npr with a guy who wrote a book about George Washington. He talked about how Washington insisted that prisoners of war should be treated with dignity, in stark contrast to the British, who would kill and mutilate the corpses of those captured after battles. Because of Washington's treatment,

many of the German militia who were fighting for the British ended up staying in America and refused to continue fighting for the British. I wish we had leaders with that kind of moral character. I'm sure that in the revolutionary war atrocities were committed by colonists fighting against the British, but the fact that Washington espoused a more humane approach I'm sure made a difference in the behavior of the rank and file. The contrast with today, where our leadership looks for legal loopholes to avoid following the Geneva convention, is really sad. I wish we had a president with the integrity and character of at least one of our founding fathers. I wish our common faith bred a more consistent sense of integrity and compassion toward our fellow men.

Comment by [kristine N](#)—August 22, 2007 @ [4:44 pm](#)

64. I like your example, Kristine N.

Helmuth Huebener probably didn't know his actions—speaking out against the Nazi horrors—would lead to his beheading, but he and his helpers, taking the Lord as their guide, spoke out. They had the courage to do right in the face of harsh suffering or of even losing their lives. Of course it cost Huebener's life and, at first, his membership in the Church. But the Lord didn't desert him, did He? My challenge in sitting next to the guys mentioned would be to have the courage to challenge them as to their position.

Comment by WE—August 22, 2007 @ [4:59 pm](#)

65. Now that I have a couple more seconds, I have something more to add. If this post was about whether or not we should participate in torture based on moral viewpoints then I wouldn't have a problem with it. However, this post is saying, "Look at what these members are doing! How does that make you feel?" Whatever these brethren have done makes no difference to me, whether I condone the type of behavior they're said to do, or whether I condemn it. I'll let the Lord settle it with them in their hearts.

I do think that the debate about whether torture is morally right to do under certain circumstances is a good discussion, but that is not the discussion we are having here.

Comment by Jacob—August 22, 2007 @ [5:00 pm](#)

66. Jacob, I think you're incorrect to say that what they do has nothing to do with you. First, their acts reflect poorly on America, and second, their acts reflect poorly on mormons. I think you're correct that their acts might have little to do with the state of your eternal soul, but then, same with blogging.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#)—August 22, 2007 @ [5:06 pm](#)

67. Steve - the point I'm making is that we shouldn't be judging them. That's the Lord's job, not mine. And the fact that this post starts with the position that these men are guilty of something is what I'm objecting to. And yes, I know I'm guilty of prejudging, too, but I don't think that we're doing the debate on torture any service by this discussion.

Comment by Jacob—August 22, 2007 @ [5:18 pm](#)

68. Jacob, I think you're misapplying the concept of judgment here. I'm taking no position as to the salvation of these people, but the fact is that I believe their actions are wrong. There is nothing wrong in saying so. And this post actually has little to do with the "debate on torture."

Comment by [Steve Evans](#)—August 22, 2007 @ [5:20 pm](#)

69. Steve (42)

Um...I didn't try to explain away Abu Ghraib, but Abu Ghraib isn't waterboarding, nor is it sanctioned torture. Soldiers involved in Abu Ghraib are being punished according to the law. And don't confuse contractors in civil defense doing their jobs with terrorist mercenaries. Police men cross the line all the time, because they have to. Because the line is pretty thin and is surrounded by a lot of gray and when you just got punched in the face by some moron who just raped his wife, the only thing you can do is beat the crap out of him.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [5:24 pm](#)

70. Everyone who supports this type of “interrogation”, consider the following carefully:

1) I will not support anything that would raise cries of outrage from us if it was done to our own troops - no matter what worse things were also being done. Is there anyone reading this who can say with a straight face that we would not be screaming barbarism if Muslim Arabs were waterboarding Christian Americans before we started doing so?

2) I know war is Hell, but do we have to embrace that Hell and find new ways to prove it is Hell?

3) “Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

4) Can anyone here read the Gospels, read about His reaction to those who “grind the face of the poor”, read His parables, read the story of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, read about how he reacted to what was done to Him and argue that He would approve of waterboarding?

5) Can anyone read the last few chapters of Mormon and not see what happens when one side starts justifying how they treat prisoners of war by comparing it to how the other side treats theirs?

Finally,

6-10) Ditto to just about everything kevinf said - and to Kristine N’s comment.

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [5:26 pm](#)

71. Greg B. You are exactly right, lashing out in anger and fear is not the same as deciding to systematically abuse someone. I submit that the former is what happened here, not the latter.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [5:26 pm](#)

72. Matt W:

re your defense/nondefense of Abu Ghraib, you said, “And yes, reprehensible things happened at Abu Ghraib. But interrogation tactics were needed which were fast and effective and emotions were running high.” As for soldiers being punished for their involvement, perhaps you’ve noticed of late how many of those charges have been dropped and reduced on procedural grounds.

So far as the rest of your comment, I’m not sure you’re employing a train of thought that I can follow. You skip from contractors to police men “crossing the line” (what does that mean? Breaking the law?), to beating an aggressive rapist. I really don’t follow you there. What are you trying to say?

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:28 pm](#)

73. Steve do their acts only reflect poorly because they haven’t been effective at getting good results? That’s what is so stupid. It’s not that what we are doing is evil or mean, it’s that it’s not what is most effective.

I’m with Jacob. If we can’t forgive things like this, how can we ever aspire to be like Christ and forgive for the greater sins.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [5:30 pm](#)

74. Steve,

It may seem like a silly point - but I’m still curious about why you insist on lower-casing the word “Mormon” or “Mormons.”

When I read your post I noticed it because it happened multiple times. I thought I counted five occurrences but now I’m seeing only three. Maybe some editing is going on. Regardless, it couldn’t be missed. So I was wondering if it was deliberate.

But then in the same post you capitalized the word Mormonism ...so I wasn’t sure what to make of it.

This isn’t, as you refer to it in comment #32, a “punctuation hang-up.” It’s not a punctuation error. But it is an error - not the kind of error a Mormon blogger on a Mormon blog would be expected to make.

But maybe you have a specific reason for writing it that way? Just curious.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:32 pm](#)

75. danithew, you're right that it's a silly point. At first it was by accident, but now it's deliberate just to cheese you.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:34 pm](#)

76. Uppercase Mormons don't engage in torture.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:37 pm](#)

77. Matt W. (74) Steve's point is that what the brethren in the post are doing is wrong, no matter if it's effective or not.

My point is that asking the question about how to respond to these brethren in a church setting is also wrong, even if you have a valid reason for disagreeing with what they do.

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [5:41 pm](#)

78. Jacob, if that's your point I guess I think you are completely wrong.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:42 pm](#)

79. Uppercase Mormons also vote for Republicans. 😊
Sometimes Democrats, too!

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [5:45 pm](#)

80. Completely wrong how?

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [5:45 pm](#)

81. Wrong from A to Z, Jacob.

If you have someone in your community that engages in acts of torture and sells torture techniques to the CIA for money, that's reprehensible behavior. While I don't come between that person and God, as a member of the community I sure will look at them a little cockeyed.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:48 pm](#)

82. Matt W., John McCain speak of forgiveness for being abused as a prisoner; unless there is something in our background of which I am unaware, you and I cannot do so.

To make this discussion more personal, my foster son still struggles daily with the effects of abuse he suffered over 15 years ago. It has wrecked his life in countless ways. Wartime or not, no child of God should have to suffer anything similar to what he suffered - and no child of God should countenance anything similar to what was done to him.

In ‘Patriot Games’ (the book, not the screwed up movie), Ryan has an opportunity at the end to kill the terrorist who tried to kill him and his wife and daughter - knowing full well that he will not be punished for it. The central theme of the book is that someone who had every reason imaginable to abuse another man was able to control that natural urge, rise above his instincts and allow the law to take its course - to not become what he loathed.

I spent hour after hour after hour trying to teach that lesson to my foster son - to teach him to control his initial reaction, breathe deeply, think carefully before acting and then ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ no matter how you feel about what they did unto you.

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [5:48 pm](#)

83. Having home taught for many years a member of the national board of the John Birch Society and having had a boss at work who is on the national board of the ACLU, I can truthfully say that while I disagree strongly with the Bybee/Yoo torture memo (which, I understand, has been withdrawn or revised by the Administration) and the strategies devised by certain other Latter-day Saints, I would have no problem with any of them as my home teachers.

Politics and torture, however, would be off limits as discussion topics. Fortunately, even when Steve and Ronan do their ‘interpretation’ of the First Presidency message during their monthly (well, sort of monthly) home teaching cyber-visits, politics and torture are not the topics.

Comment by DavidH —August 22, 2007 @ [5:50 pm](#)

84. Geez Steve, if you don’t understand then I’m not going to explain it to you.

Seriously, I’m all drugged up on Cough medication (Why am I sick in August? That’s ridiculous)

So I’m going to abandon this argument.

Comment by Matt W. —August 22, 2007 @ [5:55 pm](#)

85. LOL Matt, it’s all good.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [5:58 pm](#)

86. Ray - Thank you for your words and example.

I will admit at this point that I used to not have a problem with the whole torture thing against terrorists who have no problem beheading us. My feelings have changed at this point. I wish it is something that never ‘has’ to happen. Maybe because I came from that point I don’t begrudge others who haven’t made the same change that I have. They have what they feel as moral reasons for doing what they’re doing. If you disagree with what they’re doing, I suggest that if you can’t say it to them personally, don’t say it. I am for speaking out politically about the subject matter, but not about a specific brother or sister.

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [6:02 pm](#)

87. #57 Nick, I know yours is a popular argument well publicized by the Hitchenses of the world, but I wonder if it is true. We can all cite a good deal of injustice and misery perpetrated by the atheistic and agnostic who don't bother to hide behind any God. Even when God is invoked, historians seem generally to blame power, greed, nationalism, etc. for man's misdeeds before citing a belief in God's blessing as a cause. Furthermore, absent some hard evidence, such a broad brushed and devastating criticism of religion ignores or devalues the good religions do for mankind.

Comment by [Molly Bennion](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [6:18 pm](#)

88. Steve, for what it's worth, I think this is a great post and I'm really getting a lot from the comments. I'm sorry for annoying you so much with my questions about grammatica or whatever you might want to call it.

I used to feel that the secret prisons, the renditions of captured prisoners to home countries that practiced torture, waterboarding, etc. were all justified in the aftermath of September 11.

But frankly, over time I've become very uneasy about this and I feel it's dangerous and wrong for many reasons. For one thing, it's just wrong to treat people this way. Also, it has a very strong potential of eroding our own rights inside our own country. I know how much we hate the talk of "slippery slopes" in the 'Nacle, but I really think this is one of them.

I'm not saying that prisoners who are Islamic militants should be handled with soft gloves all the time - but they shouldn't be tortured or packed off to regimes that would do it for us. I know there are non-violent yet effective ways to interrogate prisoners and extract information. I had a roommate once who was trained as an interrogator and he explained to me something about the psychological approaches that are used. He told me the first thing they did at interrogator school was prove to the trainees that the methods worked - by using their methods on the trainees themselves. If a team of people is trained and knows what they are doing - they can get information from someone without hurting them or threatening their families. A person may think he/she can just shut their mouth and not talk - but the human mind doesn't generally work that way and just about anyone is vulnerable if the right means are used to manipulate them. Again, this is possible without violence. This roommate assured me (telling me stories of his own experience, as he underwent the training) that these methods worked and they still followed the Geneva Conventions or whatever the widely-agreed international rules are for the treatment of war prisoners. Frankly, I believed him. It seemed obvious he knew very well what he was talking about.

I just watched the linked youtube video about the three stages of waterboarding that are being practiced and it's astonishing to see what a science has been made of this practice.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [6:26 pm](#)

89. We ARE the moral high ground here. Our troops would be lucky to be water-boarded rather than what they are subjected to. The problem is one of perspective, you're trying to compare war reality against Mainstreet America reality so of course the military comes off looking like they're the ones wearing black hats. But in truth we are far and away the good guys.

Look at it like this. If you compare the Anti-Nephi-Lehies against the Nephites in the time of Captain Moroni then the Nephites come off looking pretty bad. They killed their own rebelling citizens (rather than put them in prison) unless they committed to joining the fight for their nation, they refused to accept surrender from an enemy unless that enemy swore an oath not to return ever again, they performed assassinations against opposing military leaders, they purposely overworked their prisoners because that made them easier to guard, etc. Compare that to a people that were willing to die rather than shed the smallest drop of blood and of course the Nephites look like they have horns. Yet the Nephites at this time were a righteous people (well, up and down like always but the leaders calling the shots were good men), and ironically enough it was the Nephites willingness to do the dirty-work that allowed the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to survive in their peaceful existence.

That's the problem as I see it today. Too many of us have grown accustomed to living in a peaceful society and we've forgotten that God knows that this is a telestial world and that at times hard things have to be done in defense of a nation.

I fully support the Mormon brothers that have been spoken against here and would be proud to sit next to them at sacrament meeting.

And no I do not give a blank check regarding the actions that can morally be performed, but nothing that has been approved so far merits what I consider torture. You're watering down the definition and making the word meaningless.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [6:33 pm](#)

90. To put it another way, if you have a scale from one to ten describing the level of violence a nation performs in it's defense with one being the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and ten being the Lamanites and Nephites at the conclusion of the Book of Mormon then I don't know how you could justify considering modern day America further on the scale towards ten then the Nephites during Captain Moroni's day. Given that we are well within the scale of past divine approval plus the lack of prophetic condemnation (that is the point of having a modern day prophet after all, let us know if we go astray) I'm comfortable with our present course and hope that we will continue it.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [6:52 pm](#)

91. Aluwid - Steve has pointed out earlier that these men are not military. You make some good points about the Nephites, except that the Nephites weren't beating the Lamanites to get information out of them. And the Lord doesn't have to have the prophet condemn every wrong thing that happens in the world. The prophet doesn't need to tell us, for example, that what is happening to the poor people in Darfur is wrong, because it's obvious. Non condemnation doesn't mean approval (see John 8).

Comment by Jacob —August 22, 2007 @ [7:15 pm](#)

92. Re #89:
It was the Nephites AND the Anti-Nephi-Lehies OWN SONS that allowed them to keep their oath not to take up arms.

Comment by John —August 22, 2007 @ [7:19 pm](#)

93. Aluwid, no offense, but you are 100% wrong and you are wresting the scriptures to support evil. To make a comparison between the scriptural examples you cite and what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan or anywhere else we have sent our troops or spooks (and to justify the actions they have taken torturing or killing) you would first have to know something about those places and what is really going on in those societies. Clearly you do not. Of course, you are not alone in that. It seems the less people know, the more jacked up on ignorant fear they are, and the more willing they are to use the scriptures or the flag to blindly justify evil actions by "us" against "them" (while never even bothering to define who "they" even are except in the vaguest of terms).

Comment by Non-Arab Arab —August 22, 2007 @ [7:29 pm](#)

94. Capt. Jack (#53), that's why I said setting aside the question of utility. That, to me, is the biggest issue as well. It's just not at all clear these methods are effective. By focusing in on what to me is the non-issue of ethics rather than the fundamental problem of incompetence in the war on terror I think we let people off the hook too easily.

Regarding those who put these folks' picture up with John D. Lee, I sure hope you have Porter Rockwell's up there as well. I suspect good old Teacum would deserve it in your eyes as well.

Comment by Clark —August 22, 2007 @ [7:38 pm](#)

95. Jacob (#91) - I'd just note that the Book of Mormon is entirely silent on Nephite interrogation methods. Given that they were primitive people I suspect that they would have been much harsher than most here would appreciate.

Comment by Clark —August 22, 2007 @ [7:42 pm](#)

96. Clark, I suspect it involved writing on plates for hours on end. And lots of marching about.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [7:43 pm](#)

97. I can't help but notice that almost none of the discussion here or really ever on this topic amongst Americans ever considers what this looks like to your average person on the street in the Arab or Islamic worlds. While the history lesson that would be necessary to fully convey that is way too big to do here, let me cite one example.

Saudi writer Abdul-Rahman Munif was one of the modern Arab world's greatest authors (he died just a few years ago, many of his works have been translated into English including his 'Cities of Salt' trilogy about what the coming of oil did to Gulf societies). One of his early books (unfortunately not available in English to the best of my knowledge) was called 'Sharq al Mutawassit' - 'East of the Med' - and was one of the first to break the taboo about talking about the torture - physical and psychological - that is common in the prisons of the Arab regimes. The picture he paints in that book is horrific. Men are broken, destroyed, torn down piece by piece and stripped of their humanity and very identities. Their crimes are generally thought 'crimes' and political 'crimes' and Munif paints a dark vision of what it is like to go through the torture, step-by-step, from the point of view of the one being tortured for his thoughts.

When your average Arab reads a work like Munif's, and then looks at how the American government operates now in Iraq, Gitmo, Afghanistan, 'black sites', or out-sourced 'rendition' sites..the thing you as an American should realize and be ashamed of is not that what we are doing is somehow shocking and new..it's that they recognize it all too well. America in their eyes has become just another all-too-familiar dictatorship foisted upon them, torturing and killing for the crime of opposing the ruler.

Is America spreading freedom and liberty when we have become Munif's anonymous torturer? Is that what Captain Moroni was about?

Comment by Non-Arab Arab —August 22, 2007 @ [7:51 pm](#)

98. Jacob,

Why does it matter that these men are not military? The way we construct our arm forces is significantly different than how the Nephites did, I don't understand how that provides any difference in the overall moral question.

As Clark mentioned I don't believe there are examples of Nephite interrogation. Also the nature of war (one man with a bomb is a threat now whereas in the past it took large forces to be a threat) changed which significantly increased the value of interrogation versus other methods that the Nephites used (such as scouting).

Also, I'm not aware that beating is an approved interrogation method. That's not something that I've heard discussed. And no I don't consider waterboarding to be beating.

I understand what you are saying about non condemnation not equaling approval but I can only work with what I'm given. My point there is that any interpretation of the scriptures on my part is going to bow before a modern prophetic pronouncement, but there hasn't been one regarding this. So I work with what I have, primarily examples from Nephite civilization.

John,

Later yes, but there was a period of time where the youth had not grown up where they depended entirely on the Nephites for physical protection. Regardless in both instances the Nephites were dying and killing in place of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Non-Arab Arab,

It's nice to be told I'm misapplying the scriptures, it's even better to be told why. Other than the implication that if only I was more knowledgeable then I wouldn't have such backwards views I don't see any argument there.

Your later post dealt more with the effectiveness of the overall strategy, but I'm talking about the morality. I doubt the average Lamanite (even the non-combatants) had very positive views of Nephites and perhaps the Nephites could have chosen more effective ways to handle the situation but that doesn't mean that the Nephite actions were immoral.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [8:11 pm](#)

99. I won't beat a dead horse any longer, but can anyone answer "Yes" to my first questions in #70?

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [8:12 pm](#)

100. Nobody has pointed out how well the FBI conducted themselves this instance, and in other instances of this type of interrogation at GTMO. I guess all the mormons (lower case) in the Bureau are just more righteous!

Comment by adcama —August 22, 2007 @ [8:14 pm](#)

101. You know what President Putin says when we try to criticize him for torturing others these days? Do you know what the Iraqi on the street thinks American GIs are really doing to people when no one is watching?

The loss of our moral position of leadership in the world has done ten times the damage to our nation that 9-11.

Many here talk of committing evil to justify saving lives.

This position is pure cowardice. I'm really tired of sugar-coating this. You are more concerned with your own selfish hides than following God's true path. Unless this fearful, faithless, and blighted attitude in our nation can be halted, we truly will be in the gall of bitterness and ripe for destruction.

Our so-far, paranoid, jingoistic, and godless responses to terrorism will destroy this nation far more surely than anything else.

I've had enough of the justifications and equivocations in the name of emotionally raping our brothers and sisters.

Comment by [Seth R.](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [8:20 pm](#)

102. How did 100 comments manage to hit this post topic without Dan Dubei chiming in?

I thought he owned this issue.

Comment by [danithew](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [8:22 pm](#)

103. Ray,

1) Were an enemy army to waterboard our soldiers I would be upset. But we're wandering into Geneva Convention argument territory here. Were terrorists to start waterboarding our soldiers rather than torturing and beheading them, and otherwise keep them alive and healthy for the duration of the fight I think that would be an improvement on the current situation. I wouldn't like it though, but then again I wouldn't like them keeping our soldier imprisoned either. About the only thing that they could do to our soldiers that I would like is to surrender to them.

2) This is a "When did you stop beating your wife?" question. How can I answer this?

3) Same as above.

4) If assassinating military leaders in their sleep is acceptable then I don't see why not. In reality though, would you use "accept" to describe his consideration of any military action? Does he "accept" when soldiers kill other soldiers? What about friendly fire? Perhaps "tolerate" would be a better description?

5) The comparison only comes in if you are trying to compare who has the moral advantage. I agree that we don't want to push the limits just because the other side is so bad.

Comment by [Aluwid](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [8:39 pm](#)

104. Aluwid said: "It's nice to be told I'm misapplying the scriptures, it's even better to be told why. Other then the implication that if only I was more knowledgeable then I wouldn't have such backwards views I don't see any argument there."

Yes, in this case, ignorance basically is your error.

Aluwid said: "Your later post dealt more with the effectiveness of the overall strategy, but I'm talking about the morality."

Actually, I was talking about the morality too. Munif's book is a horrifying revelation of the evils of torture in the name of power and domination. That is what we are committing, and your average person in an Arab country sees that quite clearly and accurately. They are right, we are wrong. They see and experience what we actually do to them, we ignore it and instead engage in theoretical debates like these. I've sat with victims of torture and seen them writhe in pain years later. Nothing I said amounted to a hill of beans in the face of that.

Comment by [Non-Arab Arab](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [8:44 pm](#)

105. Seth,

Recent activity in Iraq is proving that the citizens are coming around to realizing who holds the moral highground between the US and Al-Qaeda despite enemy propaganda. I certainly hope this continues.

I skimmed some of the comments but it seems to me that those supporting these members are not stating that the actions are justified evil, they are stating that the actions are not evil in the first place.

Put it this way, if I kill my neighbor because I don't like how he cuts his lawn, it's evil. If I kill an enemy soldier in the line of battle, it's not. If I waterboard my neighbor's teenage son because I want to know where he hid my lawnmower it's evil. If I waterboard a captured terrorist as part of the interrogation process to track down others planning attacks on America, it's not.

That's the argument anyway, not that it's evil but it's ok because it's for a greater good, but that the same action can be good or evil based on the circumstances. And in these circumstances it isn't evil.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [8:52 pm](#)

106. | Yes, in this case, ignorance basically is your error.

But on the bright side, I get bliss right?

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [8:53 pm](#)

107. Aluwid,

I won't argue. It is obvious we view this issue very differently, since I don't even see your responses as on point or logical or moral. This is one time when it pains me greatly to say 'we'll have to agree to disagree' - but that's all that's left.

I just can't get past 'do unto others . . .' I know that the practical application of the standard changes in times of war, but I believe the standard remains the same - and I just can't believe that we wouldn't be screaming about how barbaric waterboarding is if 'they' were doing it to 'us' - that we wouldn't see it as just another example of how depraved they were. We would acknowledge that it is not as bad as beheading and rape and hanging from hooks and other kinds of torture, but we still would highlight it as being an example of the lengths evil will go to abuse their fellow human beings. If we would take that stance if it was done to us, then we are hypocrites if we do it to them.

That's my take, and I just don't see nuances that are worth discussing - that might change my mind in any way. Therefore, I'm done with this one.

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [9:02 pm](#)

108. re: 39

How many people died on September 11th from terrorist? About 14,000 less people than died in the same year from drunk drivers. I'm so sick of all the fear mongering.

Comment by Amanda —August 22, 2007 @ [9:12 pm](#)

109. Ray,

You are taking all the context out of the actions and acting as if the US Military is morally equivalent to terrorists and as such any action that is available to the military should be available to their enemies regardless of the very different underlying motives and goals.

Based on your logic criminals would be morally justified to shoot police officers since officers are permitted to shoot at them.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [9:32 pm](#)

110. OK, you got me to respond. That's crap. Now I'm done.

Comment by Ray —August 22, 2007 @ [9:34 pm](#)

111. I'm surprised there have been more than 100 messages with no mention of Mitt Romney, who doesn't seem to take the moral challenges of torture seriously at all. In fact, he seems to be rather proud of his position on Guantanamo and lack of judicial review for U.S. detainees.

Comment by Eric —August 22, 2007 @ [9:41 pm](#)

112. Aluwid,

It seems to me there are at least five questions:

1. Should there be any rules at all at war time with regard to treatment of prisoners?
2. If there should be rules in "conventional" war, should there be any rules at all if the captured prisoners are non-state "terrorists" (or, if the White House so rules, if the prisoners are part of an army (like Iran's) that itself may one day be declared by the President to be a terrorist organization)?
3. Should a prohibition of torture be among those rules in 1 or 2?
4. Should "inhumane treatment" be among those rules in 1 or 2?
5. Is waterboarding either torture or inhumane conduct?

I am curious, in particular, on #2, whether you feel there ought to be any rules at all on the way the US treats captured individuals we consider "terrorists." Or whether you believe that torture and/or inhumane treatment should be prohibited with respect to such individuals.

I read Ray to be saying that there ought to be rules that the US follows in treating captured individuals we consider terrorists and that a ban on torture and inhumane treatment should be among those rules. And I gather he is proposing a rule to determine whether waterboarding or other US treatment is torture or inhumane: how would we regard it if the other side did it to our captured troops?

Ray's sounds like a reasonable approach to me.

Comment by DavidH —August 22, 2007 @ [9:45 pm](#)

113. Eric,

Agreed. That is one of the reasons I do not support Romney (although, on this issue, I hope against hope that he is not speaking his heart, but merely "pandering" to the far right base in the GOP, and hope that is also all he is doing in his harsh anti-immigration rhetoric). If he gets the nomination, I would think he would moderate his language and positions, and if he were elected, I would pray he moderates them.

Comment by DavidH —August 22, 2007 @ [9:48 pm](#)

114. Seth, you know what Pres. Putin says when people complain about his censoring the press in Russia? They do it in America. Putin's so out of touch with reality and is so interesting in bringing back key components of the Soviet Empire that I honestly don't care what he thinks. It's ridiculous (IMO) to think that Gitmo has any practical effect on how Russia conducts itself in places like Chechnya.

David, for the record I don't consider waterboarding torture. It's something I wouldn't want to experience but I can assure you I'd rather experience that than getting shot in a Geneva Convention approved war injury in combat.

Should there be rules for an enemy who violates the Geneva conventions by not identifying themselves as soldiers? I think there should. I don't agree with the Geneva convention policy of shooting them as spies.

Comment by Clark —August 22, 2007 @ [10:08 pm](#)

115. DavidH,

1. Yes, treated as POW per Geneva Convention

2. Yes, but permissible to subject to more rigorous interrogation than true POWs
3. Yes prohibited for both
4. Yes again prohibited, but I'm guessing that my view on what constitutes inhumane treatment is different from yours. In this context I view this essentially the same as torture.
5. Not in my opinion

The argument here isn't whether or not torture should be allowed. It is what constitutes torture. When I think torture I'm thinking of cutting off fingers, hooking people up to batteries, sexual abuse, etc. The kind of things that people called torture before 9/11. Psychological stress and pressure is completely fair game in my opinion. Although I would expect us to treat true POWs differently than we treat terrorists.

My point is that in the current conflict there is no moral equivalency between the two sides. If we were facing another legitimate nation then I can understand that argument better, but we are not. So we have latitude in the actions that we can take, but the other side really has only one morally correct choice: surrender.

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [10:09 pm](#)

116. The argument that what we're up to in Iraq, or anywhere else is somehow justified because "at least we're better than those terrorists" is sheer bunk.

Sad when you have to rely on thieves and murderers for your moral compass.

Comment by [Seth R.](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [10:09 pm](#)

117. Aluwid: "Recent activity in Iraq is proving that the citizens are coming around to realizing who holds the moral highground between the US and Al-Qaeda despite enemy propaganda."

Oh, are you referring to the article linked to in the left-hand sidebar?

Comment by Steve Evans —August 22, 2007 @ [10:49 pm](#)

118. 70 —I think you're almost trying to respond to me, so I'll almost try to respond to you.

1. I don't know what my response would have been. I suspect it might have included something like "it's nicer than the systematic rape and beheading they've done before."

2. What you have to do in a war is what it takes to survive. You can't know ahead of time what that might take, anymore than Nephi knew he was going to have to behead Laban.

3. Doing something you don't like doesn't make it a wrong.

4. I'm not going to pretend to read his mind on the matter. Are you sure you want to?

5. The other side justifies the way they treat anybody who disagrees with them by claiming that the entire world is outside Islam, since there is no Caliphate, and, therefor, is a battleground, thus they can deny anybody they want to the basic rights and protections their religion demands. Not sure if you wanted to deal with that, but it's part of the deal. Also, the Book of Mormon shows that, more often than not (one counter-example), when you're attacked, you defend yourself. You try to maintain your faith, but it's a very difficult thing to do, and many can't. There are a lot of very complex issues here and you're attempting to wash them away with grand oversimplifications.

So, if you want to actually respond to my points and questions, feel free, whether here or in my earlier post.

112 —Another list of questions:

1. Yes, but they are almost always ignored by at least one side even when they exist.

2. When none of the enemy combatants is in uniform while on the battlefield, when the battlefield is anywhere you are, and when the enemy sees noncombatants as legitimate and preferred targets, you've got a highly complicated situation that makes overly simple rules potentially quite dangerous. So you do the best you can and accept that it probably won't be as good as you want it to be.

3. Yes, with a reasonable definition of "torture." And with the understanding that that means that there are consequences for breaking the rules, rather than that the rule will never be broken.

4. Same as 3.

5. No.

116 —It's justified because it's not wrong, not because it's less bad than what they're doing. It's not torture by any reasonable definition. If you want to know what real torture is, take a look at the treatment Japanese soldiers used on Chinese civilians and Allied prisoners of war during WWII. They make the Nazis look like Boy Scouts. That's real torture and inhumane treatment. Making someone stand up for a few hours is uncomfortable and not much fun, but it's not the same as force-feeding uncooked rice to someone who has been starving and dehydrated, then forcing them to drink fluids that expand the rice through their whole digestive/eliminary system, and then severely beating them with lots of kicks to the stomach.

Comment by Blain —August 22, 2007 @ [11:05 pm](#)

119. 117 —He might be referring to reports coming out through independent journalists who have been in Iraq recently —folks like Michael Yon and Michael J. Totten, for instance.

Comment by Blain —August 22, 2007 @ [11:06 pm](#)

120. Steve,

Interesting post. The Mormon (catch that danithew?) connection is, to say the least unfortunate, if not as you suggest, "mind boggling." I can think of no justification for the way our government has treated fellow human beings, in our name, in the name of democracy, freedom and basic human rights. It violates the most basic of [Christian injunctions](#).

Rusty's comment number 51 was tongue in cheek; but, I think it also contains sufficient irony given the feigned bloggernalce outrage over their choice of in room entertainment options. Where is that same condemnation and outrage of this incomprehensible war and the immoral techniques used to wage it? I think both the war and America's techniques are much more obscene and morally repugnant than some in room entertainment options.

Thanks for posting on this article and topic.

Comment by [Guy Murray](#) —August 22, 2007 @ [11:20 pm](#)

121. Steve,

I was referring to reports such as this:

<http://www.captainsjournal.com/2007/08/22/operation-alljah-and-the-marines-of-2nd-battalion-6th-regiment/>

And of course the prior report printed in the New York Times as well:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/30/opinion/30pollack.html?ex=1343448000&en=33f56c9c2e2a6389&ei=51>

Comment by Aluwid —August 22, 2007 @ [11:29 pm](#)

122. Guy,

I can show you statements from people I sustain as prophets who condemn pornography, and specifically the kind that is available in hotel rooms.

If you're looking for "condemnation and outrage of this incomprehensible war and the immoral techniques used to wage it" maybe you could show me some statements from those same prophets.

Oh, that's right, there aren't any.

Also, I take strong exception to your characterization of my concern about hotel room porn as "feigned". Please, Guy. At least give people the benefit of the doubt and assume their opinions are sincere. Nobody has said you're faking your outrage about Bybee, Mitchell, and Jensen.

| I think both the war and America's techniques are much more obscene and morally repugnant

| than some in room entertainment options.

Fair enough, Guy. I'll assume your opinion is sincere. Is it possible for you to even consider the possibility that better men than you and me hold a different opinion?

Comment by Mark IV —August 22, 2007 @ [11:54 pm](#)

123. This week on CNN, Christiane Amanpour is presenting a 3-part series called "God's Warriors." She's covering Jewish, Islamic, and Christian militancy in sequence. Sitting here in my living room watching Part 2 (Islam) while I read these 120 comments, I see a connection. If you can, check it out. Details here:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2007/gods.warriors/>

Comment by MikeInWeHo —August 22, 2007 @ [11:59 pm](#)

124. Nope, Blain. Wasn't responding to you at all. Steve made a humorous comment to kevinf about needing a list of 10 things (#50, #52 & #58), so I wrote five serious ones and added a cumulative one to meet Steve's requirement. Your comments never crossed my mind - any more than the others in the thread.

Having said that, thanks for your answers. I could respond point-by-point, but I'm tired enough that I would end up being anything but tactful. Suffice it to say that I don't agree with any of them (except for the first one that proved my point), and I don't think any of them really answered the questions I asked (except for maybe #4, in a way), but, again, I'm not going to argue with someone when neither of us has any chance of changing our mind.

I have faced death. I have seen what serious abuse and torturous actions do to a person. That colors my judgment in ways that cannot be altered - and gives me less patience than normal for the arguments of those who have not shared such experiences. I have breathed deeply as I wrote my comments, trying very hard to keep my emotions in check. I have said my piece; I am done now, because anything else I contribute is likely to cross a line I promised myself I would not cross in a forum like this.

I am very tired and heading to bed as soon as I submit this comment. I'm done commenting on this thread. Thanks, Steve, for posting it and giving me the chance to say what I have said. I'm glad, in a way, that many people don't understand why I feel as strongly as I do, but it saddens me, as well. I wouldn't want anyone to learn it by observing what I have observed, but I also wish they could get a glimpse somehow. I think it would change the basic tenor of the conversation a bit - but, then again, maybe it wouldn't. Good night.

Comment by Ray —August 23, 2007 @ [12:03 am](#)

125. Mark IV,

Relax man. I'm just expressing my opinion that what Steve has pointed out in this post is much more obscene than what has irked others in the bloggernacle. Clearly you don't think much of my opinion- and that's fine. I'll readily concede many many folks who are better people than I—including you—hold differing opinions.

I used the term "feigned" in an ironic sense that there was moral outrage (and I admit your opinion and those of others were and are sincere) about the topic of pornography—but there doesn't seem to be the same level of moral outrage about this war and the questionable tactics used to support it.

That's all.

Comment by [Guy Murray](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [12:13 am](#)

126. Thanks for explaining, Guy, I appreciate it.

Comment by Mark IV —August 23, 2007 @ [12:17 am](#)

127. I should clarify. My experiences were not in war. Good night.

Comment by Ray —August 23, 2007 @ [12:21 am](#)

128. Mark IV,

| I can show you statements from people I sustain as prophets who condemn pornography.

Don't you think you should just avoid porn because it is wrong? Did you really need someone to tell you porn was bad?

| If you're looking for "condemnation and outrage of this incomprehensible war and the immoral techniques used to wage it" maybe you could show me some statements from those same prophets.

Do you really need a statement from the brethren before you take a stand an issue? Is that usually how you debate someone—by demanding that they show you statements from the brethren?

| Is it possible for you to even consider the possibility that better men than you and me hold a different opinion?

First of all, how could you possibly know that any of the men you sustain as prophets are "better men" than your fellow blogger, Guy. You don't know that. You can't possibly know that. So why even write it?

Second, I think you are way over reaching when you purport to know what a particular person (the brethren) would do in a given hypothetical situation (being forced to either watch porn or to torture someone).

Personally, I would go with the porn. And for better or worse, I arrived at that conclusion all by myself.

Comment by Nate C —August 23, 2007 @ [3:01 am](#)

129. | 1) I will not support anything that would raise cries of outrage from us if it was done to our own troops - no matter what worse things were also being done. Is there anyone reading this who can say with a straight face that we would not be screaming barbarism if Muslim Arabs were waterboarding Christian Americans before we started doing so?

The problem here is I would raise a cry of outrage if they shot at us, pushed us, shoved us, hit us, kicked us, dropped bombs on us, killed us, etc. How do I stop them from doing those things without doing those things?

While I know that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Referring to the Anti-Nephi-Lehites, I frankly do not have enough faith to lay down and be slain. You see, my fear of what would happen to my wife and kids undermines my faith.

Now, regarding the intent of this post, and what i was trying to say yesterday, I still think I can love these men without condoning what they have done, or wanting to take part in it. I can understand why they did it, and I can understand the necessity of depreciating the value of human life on the part of people involved in civil defense. I tried to elaborate on this with the example of a police officer friend. He is a great man, but in the intensity of the moment, you don't think about whether the person you are shooting was somebody's baby. I think, from my limited understanding of the facts, that the torture methods were developed shortly after 9-11, when the US as a whole was in a state of elevated rage. I mean, we were practically desperate to blow afghanistan to smithereens, and when that didn't satiate our rage, we obliterated Iraq as well. We all used to talk about what we'd do if we caught Osama Bin Laden. How we'd love to torture and kill him for what he did. Was it Christlike? No, definitely not. But was it understandable? Yes. I can understand that need for action, and even that need for revenge.

Lastly, Ray, I was abused as a child myself, and I can understand the pain of your Foster Child. I am lucky in that my real parents were not the abusers, and were my refuge, whether they knew it or not (I never told them about the abuse out of shame and confusion). It took me from when I was 6 until when I was 21 to overcome all the pain of it. It also took understanding the Gospel and understanding the deterministic nature of the world in which we live. I feel for your Foster Son, and I hope the atonement can heal him, as it healed me.

Comment by Matt W. —August 23, 2007 @ [7:52 am](#)

130. My opinion is that quorum brotherhood should transcend such issues.

Comment by Jordan F. —August 23, 2007 @ [8:09 am](#)

131. In other words, if these men were called to be my home teachers by those in authority to do so, then I would accept them and welcome them into my home as such. When I sustain the Bishop as a judge in "Israel," to

me it means sustaining his judgment, or lack thereof, against my brethren, even if I personally find some of their actions reprehensible.

Comment by Jordan F. —August 23, 2007 @ [8:11 am](#)

132. Jordan's point is different than the other central argument with which I am done. 😊 I can agree wholeheartedly with it.

Comment by Ray —August 23, 2007 @ [8:21 am](#)

133. Nate C.:

It's very possible, likely even, that Guy Murray is a better person than I am. And without consulting Guy, I think he agrees with me that the men in the leading councils of the church are very likely to be better men than either of us. So that's not what I meant.

My point was that Bybee, Mitchell, and Jessen might be better people than many of us commenting here. They're public figures, so it is legitimate to discuss their public actions, but I just don't get the clenched teeth outrage and ostentatious display of moral superiority. The sanctimony is suffocating, and the moral pedestal mentioned up in comment # 44 is getting pretty crowded by now.

Comment by Mark IV —August 23, 2007 @ [8:32 am](#)

134. Thanks for the link to waterboarding. It was not at all what I expected.

As far as "do the ends justify the means", I think that my point is more that you need to address matters in a manner that is appropriate in light of the person with whom you are dealing. Intellectual arguments work better for intellectual types. You treat 2 year olds different from 25 year olds. I think that it is very important that we do not try to impose our views of how terrorists should be treated on our very limited understanding of humanity. We are a pretty clueless people when it comes to how other cultures act and react.

Comment by StillConfused —August 23, 2007 @ [8:36 am](#)

135. Jay Bybee and his family are friends of ours. We've known them for over 15 years, have stayed in their house on several occasions. Jay was our son's Aaron priesthood teacher in the early nineties; he taught those young men faith, but also critical thinking. He taught them compassion, hard work, and service and a way to look at the Gospel and the Church that enabled them to keep the faith inspite of the doubts many experienced. My son would say that Jay was the most exciting teacher he ever had growing up and I will say he was one of the top two or three GD teachers I've had in my lifetime. Jay provided the best legal advice he was required to give to the admiistration. About two years ago, I had a conversation with Jay regarding that situation. I came away feeling as I had before—that Jay Bybee in no way condones torture.

Comment by BR —August 23, 2007 @ [8:37 am](#)

136. BR, thanks very much for that comment—it is both heartening and enlightening.

Comment by Steve Evans —August 23, 2007 @ [8:41 am](#)

137. #87 Molly:

I should have made a more complete comment, rather than tossing off a one-liner. My post was actually not intended as a condemnation of religion, ala Hutchins. Rather, it was a condemnation of individuals who will engage in atrocities, all the while claiming that they are doing deity's work. They use religion as a cloak to hide their evil, rather than as an impetus to be better. At least in the United States, this seems to be a popular malady of the right wing. Anything that they claim is good for their country is automatically considered to have divine approval, no matter how heinous the action. Our not-so-esteemed commander in chief is famous for claiming that he is doing "God's work."

Comment by Nick Literski —August 23, 2007 @ [9:06 am](#)

138. #131 Jordan:

So, what happens when you have one of these men as your home teacher, and one of your children knows that he is involved in these atrocities? What example of “priesthood leadership” is thus given to them? What if the topic of his employment happens to come up during a visit—something not at all unusual? Do you let this horrible example infect your children?

I’m betting that most LDS would have an issue with a known adulterer coming to home teach them, despite him being assigned by church leaders. I can’t see how allowing a known promoter of torture come into your home as an example to your children is any better.

Comment by Nick Literski —August 23, 2007 @ [9:27 am](#)

139. Darn —late to the party.

1. Captain Moroni and the Lamanite War simply cannot be used to justify U.S. actions in Iraq. The Nephites were fighting to [repel an invading Lamanite army; they did not attack the Lamanites first in a preemptive strike](#), as the U.S. has done. The current U.S. administration has taken what should have been a police action and escalated it into full military engagement. There is simply no BofM correlation to what’s happening here.

2. I am sick of hearing people justify American actions because they are not as bad as what terrorists have done. If our enemies behead an innocent civilian, that does not justify waterboarding a suspected terrorist. The United States is supposed to stand for the rights of the accused, regardless of what crimes he has been accused of (which is a major issue within the Bill of Rights). We need to be not just a *little* better than our enemies, but *much* better if we are to claim any kind of moral authority.

3. I say “suspected”, above, because many people have been detained and tortured by U.S. forces who were, in fact, innocent. Dozens of people have been [released from Guantanamo who were not involved in terrorist acts](#) but were simply picked up in military sweeps or delivered by bounty hunters. Many have been [rendered to foreign countries to be tortured who had done nothing](#).

4. D&C 98 has a lot to say about how Mormons should respond when attacked, but many among us seem blissfully unaware of that particular section of our scriptures.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [9:37 am](#)

140. While to some extent I am troubled by the lack of statements by our current church leadership condemning this war, I also find little in the way of statements of support for the war either.

Yet our previous prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, spoke about these very issues poignantly in a first presidency message in 1976, called “The False Gods We Worship”. I’ve included the most pertinent parts here:

The Brethren constantly cry out against that which is intolerable in the sight of the Lord: against pollution of mind, body, and our surroundings; ...against murder and all that is like unto it; against all manner of desecration.

That such a cry should be necessary among a people so blessed is amazing to me. And that such things should be found even among the Saints to some degree is scarcely believable, for these are a people who are in possession of many gifts of the Spirit, who have knowledge that puts the eternities into perspective, who have been shown the way to eternal life...

Sadly, however, we find that to be shown the way is not necessarily to walk in it, and many have not been able to continue in faith. These have submitted themselves in one degree or another to the enticings of Satan and his servants and joined with those of “the world” in lives of ever-deepening idolatry.

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel —ships, planes, missiles, fortifications —and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching:

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45).

We forget that if we are righteous the Lord will either not suffer our enemies to come upon us —and this is the special promise to the inhabitants of the land of the Americas (see 2 Nephi 1:7) —or he will fight our battles for us (Exodus 14:14; D&C 98:37, to name only two references of many). This he is able to do, for as he said at the time of his betrayal, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”

I believe our prophets have spoken.

Comment by kevinf—August 23, 2007 @ [9:52 am](#)

141. In the case of Bybee, I don't think it's fair to construe a memo drafted at his employer's request regarding what constitutes torture as him condoning what the Administration decided to do with that legal opinion.

With regard to the two psychologists, I will admit that I have not put a lot of thought into whether waterboarding amounts to torture. I am uncomfortable with it. I am also uncomfortable with the subtext of distrust in the American judicial system which is used to justify keeping "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo. I am also uncomfortable with creating the new designation "enemy combatants" in order to create a different way of dealing with them. Essentially, they are murderous civilians, and should be dealt with as such. That we gathered them ourselves abroad rather than relying upon local law enforcement and extradition treaties seems beside the point. They are a public relations disaster for the United States.

I do find it curious that some feel justified in withholding their Christian embrace from men doing work for their government to keep them safe. Former enemies embrace each other in the gospel all over the world. It would be a shame to withhold that embrace from men who have been asked to work in the gray areas created by our current situation. Their salvation is between them, God, and their priesthood leaders.

Having said that, the Brethren have not left us uninstructed in how we should conduct ourselves. Below I have pasted text from President James E. Faust. This can be applied to any individual situation. If a member of the church has questions about his or her conduct, it should be discussed between that individual, the Lord, and that individual's priesthood leader. The broader moral and political implications of the policy are a welcome discussion. Mitt Romney's position is fair game as well, as he would like to be president. Further, I think it is healthy to ask whether it would be better to resign from a position than to engage in morally questionable behavior. Anyway, this post is much longer than I had planned.

Here is President Faust:

<http://lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-353-19,00.html>

[edited for length]

Comment by Chris Laurence—August 23, 2007 @ [10:04 am](#)

142. t/j re#139- Did anyone else notice how the preisthood manual edited SWK's talk referenced above by removing the paragraph about being a warlike people?

Comment by scott—August 23, 2007 @ [10:21 am](#)

143. Chris, some very good points, but I think you might be misconstruing my post (assuming you've derived your positions from my post, that is).

First, I didn't say that Bybee condoned what the Administration did; he did write the memo, at least in part, and so that's something to consider. Attorneys are not mere mercenaries, and they need not participate in behavior or advance legal positions they consider to be illegal or unethical. Bybee had a choice, in other words, however limited.

Second, you say that some feel justified "withholding their Christian embrace from men doing work for their government to keep them safe." This statement is an inaccurate description (of my position, in any event). To begin with, not every Joe with a government contract can be lumped in as if they were part of the government—you seem to place Jessen and Mitchell on par with servicemen, which I think is a serious error. Also, I have not suggested that anyone withhold their embrace, Christian or otherwise, from these people; I was merely expressing my personal difficulty reconciling mormonism and a sense of community with behavior that I consider morally reprehensible. I'm not suggesting shunning or stoning or anything of the kind, merely stating my honest opinion that their engaging in such behavior causes me to look at them a little cockeyed.

While I do not completely agree with Nick Literski, the sentiment in his #138 is telling: I would have trouble with having home teachers that are known adulterers or abusers, so why should a torturer getting money from the government be easier to take?

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [10:26 am](#)

144. Scott #142: When the instructor in my high priests group covered that SWK lesson last Sunday, I made sure to share the excised part of the quote. There was a very uncomfortable silence in the room afterward. No comments.

After class, another class member approached me and said, simply, "We have to defend our freedoms."

This is what I despise most about the state of current political discussion in this country: Many people have been reduced to mouthing slogans and accepting whatever the U.S. does as being right and just and necessary.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [10:31 am](#)

145. 143 —I think you need to get over this problem, and it is a problem. No matter what you do or where you go, you will find that Mormons are, without exception, human beings. This means that they engage in morally reprehensible behavior and sin, without exception. If you can't deal with that, and sit with them in a spirit of brotherhood, then you need to go to a church that doesn't have any human beings in it, because that's the only alternative.

I'd suggest you ask God to help you see them the way he sees them. Because he loves them, and that can help you get over this problem so that you can love them too.

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [10:36 am](#)

146. Blain, there's a big difference between "sitting with them in the spirit of brotherhood," vs. welcoming them into your home as a divinely-appointed teacher to your family. The former is your obligation, and hopefully, your desire. The latter is an utter abrogation of what Mormonism teaches is your highest, and most important, calling.

Comment by Nick Literski —August 23, 2007 @ [10:42 am](#)

147. Blain, I'm aware of the principles in your comment. I would suggest that it's one thing to sit next to someone who has a drinking problem, or someone who has trouble with the historicity of the book of mormon, versus someone who teaches torture. For us to say otherwise is disingenuous.

While your answer definitely tracks the scriptures and church manuals, it isn't helpful in the extreme scenarios. I doubt that you would feel happy and see your neighbor the way God sees him if you found yourself at church next to a pedophile. In other words, your comment is correct but still unhelpful.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [10:43 am](#)

148. Wow, Blain, that was pretty over the top. Almost makes me want to start hitting for the other team.

Personally, I'm glad the church doesn't allow child molesters to teach primary. They apparently just aren't "getting over it".

Comment by Matt W. —August 23, 2007 @ [10:43 am](#)

149. Mike, my point in bringing up the examples from the Book of Mormon was to highlight past levels of violence performed in warfare by a righteous people in comparison to our own. There is no one to one comparison because methods, cultures, and technologies change, but it's hard for me to consider waterboarding worse than killing.

If the Lamanites had been able to sneak in men deep into Nephite territory and cause mass casualties with a single explosion then I'm sure we'd have examples of the interrogation methods that Captain Moroni found acceptable, but as it is the type of war they had to be concerned with was fought mainly at the borders, and required large forces to be a threat. Today we don't have that luxury so our methods have to change.

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [10:43 am](#)

150. Steve,

Thanks for your response. I don't really have an argument with what you've said in response to my comment. I'll be interested to see what else is said on this matter, because I am interested in where that line is crossed from doing work for the common good, to being complicit in a crime, and whether this issue constitutes such a line crossing.

I don't equate contractors with servicemen, but I do think that the moral issues are similar. What is justified? What is the correct moral path? They are difficult questions. In the post-9/11 hysteria, I think our nation has veered off track. I am not confident enough in any of the presidential contenders that they have the right prescription to bring us back on track, however. This issue is significant (whichever way it is decided), because it will be a part of how the United States defines itself and is defined. It's probably a bigger issue than victory or defeat in Iraq.

Regarding hometeaching, it depends how morally repugnant you find their activity. I think you would be justified in asking for a different hometeacher. Explaining your reasoning, I would expect that a bishop could grant you that. How that would translate if one of these men were your bishop, stake president, or a General Authority, they would not be in your home monthly, but grappling with the moral issue would be more difficult.

Comment by Chris Laurence —August 23, 2007 @ [10:47 am](#)

151. When Bush chose to invade Iraq, I was serving as a stake executive secretary. The seventy to whom my stake president reported shared with our stake president some comments made by Gordon B. Hinckley during a recent meeting of general authorities. I really, really wish they had been published, as they were perhaps the most "prophetic" things the man ever said.

According to this seventy, Hinckley said that (a) this action *could* lead to opportunities to share the gospel in that part of the world, but that (b) the United States would "never again" be viewed as the moral leader of the world.

Comment by Nick Literski —August 23, 2007 @ [10:50 am](#)

152. Aluwid, RE # 149.

Don't you think it's significant that the Book of Mormon gives us both the example of Moroni and his defensive war, along with the parallel story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, showing us two different ways of responding to violence? While I know I would have difficulty not responding against direct threats of violence to my own family, both the Savior's teachings and the principle of forgiveness tell me my emotional response is wrong. Simple as that.

Comment by kevinf —August 23, 2007 @ [10:52 am](#)

153. 144 —I don't agree that everything the US does is right and just and necessary. It's a country made up of

human beings, just like the Church is, so that means it will do bad things.

My problem is when I hear 10 comments criticizing water-boarding and wearing panties on your head as horrendous torture and human rights violations for every comment that will even acknowledge beheading, hanging and burning bodies, rape and mutilation as happening. There is a laser focus on every alleged wrong done by any American, and a blind eye cast on every wrong done by the other side, and that bugs me.

Al Queda's behavior is bad enough that the Sunni sheiks in Iraq are turning their backs on them. They recently carried out the worst terrorist attack since 9/11 (by at least some estimates) by exploding fuel trucks full of explosives in camps populated by Yezidis (peaceful folks whose religion is derived from Zoroastrianism, living just outside Kurdish areas), killing around 500. This behavior seems more reprehensible to Sunni extremists than it does to Americans who dislike the war and the president. I don't think that's okay.

Plenty of folks on both sides of this question stop at mouthing slogans. That doesn't discredit their viewpoints, although it should discredit them. Were I one of them, I'd guess I'd have more folks responding to my points, because they'd be easier to address and more commonly heard.

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [10:53 am](#)

154. Kevin,

The problem is that we are in a secular society that is continually moving further and further away from God. I don't think we can expect him to fight our battles for us. Consider the example of Mormon and his son Moroni who chose to fight alongside their fellow Nephites even though they were aware that their nation did not deserve any divine assistance (and I don't believe they asked for it due to that fact).

Don't get me wrong, I believe that the US is a great force for good in the world (the greatest by far actually), but we are far from the Anti-Nephi-Lehis or even the Nephites (in their good times), and I don't see us getting better any time soon.

I'm curious, was this meant largely for the "Cold War"? The fact that the "warlike" paragraph was removed seems to suggest that today's church leaders think the current situation is different doesn't it?

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [10:58 am](#)

155. Kevin, (#152)

I think the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are a special case. They chose the pacifist path due to their past murders and other sins which they repented of. Keep in mind that they were willing to take up arms until Helaman convinced them that they shouldn't betray the oath that they had made. If they had repented without taking the oath of nonviolence then I assume they would have taken part in the war at that time instead of only sending their sons to do it.

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [11:03 am](#)

156. 147 —Nice try, but I have sat in church with a man who molested his daughters, although not while he was doing the molesting. I am aware of the shortcomings of the people I attend Church with, and some of them are pretty bad. I used to do domestic violence perpetrator treatment, and had several Mormons come through the program. Personally, I think it's worse to torture someone you've covenanted to love and protect than it is to torture a stranger. I understand that you're trying to create categories of sinners, with "torturers" at a higher level than the people you like, but that's not consistent with scripture. God can't look at any sin, be it pride or torture, with the least degree of allowance.

And you seem to think that loving someone means giving them a pass on their bad behavior. That's something to spend some time thinking on, because it doesn't make any sense. Loving your child doesn't mean you give them a pass on their bad behavior—you correct them, because that's your job. Failing to do so does them no favor, nor is it fair to the other people who their bad behavior will be subjected upon. Now, there's a difference in position between a badly behaving child and a badly behaving ward member, and that means that your failing to give someone a pass will be expressed in different ways, if at all. The brother in my ward who molested his daughters is not someone I ever left alone with my children, nor do I condone in any fashion what he's done. I've never confronted him to his face about it, because it wasn't my place to do so. But I did what I could to help his daughters heal, and I treated him with kindness as I could.

148 —I think you need to read what I said again, because I'm talking about Steve getting over his problem

in how he thinks he would handle fellowship with these people. Not playing with the “child molester” hypothetical (beyond my comments above about a real-world molester), as I think we’ve hit our hyperbole quota for the thread a few messages back. Thanks for playing.

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [11:06 am](#)

157. Following up on my number 154, I don’t want to give the impression that we should not be seeking divine assistance. But I’m in the camp that you should pray for help and then go out and do all in your power to make it happen.

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [11:12 am](#)

158. Blain, then I thank you for your participation on this thread, as your love and acceptance of others is truly Christ-like and a beacon to us all.

Btw, the concept of levels of sin is not inconsistent with scripture. See e.g. Alma 39.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [11:14 am](#)

159. Aluwid,

Last question first. Yes, that was during the cold war period, when the actual threat of violence to us was, I believe, much higher than today (nuclear war, shooting war in Europe with the Soviet Bloc, and fear of communist revolutions in Central America). However, the topic of Sunday’s PH/RS lesson was about idol worship, and seemed to focus more on material things and individual actions. Only brief excerpts from the talk were used in the manual.

As to the US being a force for moral goodness, we probably are still capable of that, but the recent actions of our country in Iraq, our reluctance to get involved in Darfur, and our seemingly contradictory policies on rendition and the “enemy combatants” in Guantanamo have pretty much reduced our status to the level of “at least we are no worse than the rest of you”.

A good example of how to handle these things are the Nuremburg war crimes trials after WW II. Everything was done in the open, in cooperation with the United Nations and other countries. Our current administration’s (and previous as well) disdain for the World Court and our current actions appear to have broadcast to the world that there is one standard for the United States, and another standard for everyone else. This is a key problem with the neo-con philosophy of how to use our status as the “sole superpower” in the world.

I view the current state of our nation as one that is morally ambiguous at best, and getting worse. I don’t expect the Lord to fight all our battles for us, but I expect him to fight for my family, and give me aid in that arena. The example of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is a message to me that personal action and responsibility is possible even in the worst of circumstances. You have to remember that Helaman would not allow the people of Ammon to take up weapons because it would have violated the covenant they had previously made with the Lord. I view that as a chastisement, because they allowed the expediency of the moment to make them consider breaking a sacred covenant. Helaman recognized that, and so they sent their sons, who had special protection because of the faithfulness of their parents.

Even though I live in a secular society, I choose to try to live the standard I believe the Lord wants me to live. That means I won’t participate in, condone, or pardon torture and humiliation of our enemies in the name of vengeance.

That’s also why I would sit next to these men at church, but would not likely want them to be my home teachers.

Comment by kevinf —August 23, 2007 @ [11:21 am](#)

160. Steve, I think the problem is that your personally defined levels of sin are at odds with how the church feels about it. If the church considers the man to be worthy to fill priesthood callings, hold a temple recommend, etc, then why do you feel differently?

Are we moving towards politically separate Wards? “He can’t be my home teacher, he’s a Republican and supports Bush and Cheney! I don’t want people like him teaching my children!”

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [11:24 am](#)

161. Blain #153:

My problem is when I hear 10 comments criticizing water-boarding and wearing panties on your head as horrendous torture and human rights violations for every comment that will even acknowledge beheading, hanging and burning bodies, rape and mutilation as happening. There is a laser focus on every alleged wrong done by any American, and a blind eye cast on every wrong done by the other side, and that bugs me.

Couple of thoughts here:

1. Abu Ghraib was [a lot more hideous](#) than “wearing panties on your head.” Please don’t try to downplay what happened there by using that pithy and inaccurate summary.
2. There *should* be “laser focus on every alleged wrong done by any American,” because *we’re* supposed to be “the good guys”, the ones who stand for justice, fair treatment of prisoners, and civil rights. When a member of al-Quaeda beheads a civilian, the reaction isn’t a strong because we *expect* that sort of behavior from them. When an American serviceman tortures a prisoner (or an American president condones it), our reaction is stronger because that sort of thing is anathema to Americans, and we are ashamed when it is done in our name.

Aluwid #154:

The problem is that we are in a secular society that is continually moving further and further away from God. I don’t think we can expect him to fight our battles for us.

So we Mormons should just join in the fun and support evil? Quite the contrary, we should stand for what is right, be voices urging peace and justice, and refuse to participate in inhumane acts.

Read some Nibley on separating ourselves from the world.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [11:26 am](#)

162. Aluwid, I guess the recommend interviews don’t pick up on every moral ill.

And yes, it’s true —I don’t want anyone who (still) supports Bush and Cheney to teach my children, but that’s a matter for a different post.

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [11:28 am](#)

163. Just out of curiosity. All those condemning torture *of any kind* (i.e. the claims that pouring water over someone’s face or making them dress as a woman) are so unChristlike. Are you total pacifists?

That is, if you appeal to the anti-Nephi-Lehis, would you act the same way? Would you have been pacifists during WWII for example?

The reason I ask this is because I *could* respect that. I might disagree. (I think the anti-Nephi-Lehis acted the way they did because of their past history and the worry about getting a blood lust that would lose them their salvation) But I could at least respect it.

What I have a harder time respecting are those who condemn waterboarding but don’t mind a sniper in say Afghanistan shooting a Taliban in the leg to draw out his comrades so as to shoot them. Or who doesn’t mind using the air force in a raid knowing that it will result in the injuries of many civilians in a manner far worse than anyone is accusing the US doing “as torture.” (i.e. burning bodies, etc.)

That is my fundamental problem with these debates, which seem rarely to focus on effectiveness, is that truly horrible things are allowed whereas relatively mild, all things considered, things are condemned. If one is appealing to religion to do this I just can’t see how this can be done with any consistency.

At least the pacifists, for all their faults, have a leg of consistency to stand on.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [11:29 am](#)

164. 158 —So you're not going to address my other points (other than the one I don't really have time to explore right now), and will give me a sarcastic pat on the head. How sweet.

You said that you started this thread to discuss how to deal with this hypothetical situation, not to get into a discussion of torture and the war in Iraq. I addressed this point directly, but you don't want to talk about it. You seem to think that "love one another" came with an exception that somehow wasn't included (maybe a plain and precious thing that was removed by evil transcribers), but it didn't. We're told to love our friends and our enemies, and to pray for them.

This doesn't mean that we have to open ourselves up to any evil thing they might want to do to us, but we are commanded to love them (not just a suggestion). I can't do this as much as I should, and I don't pretend to, but neither do I seek to excuse my fallibility by pretending that I am exempted from this commandment to love those who are hard to love.

You don't like "torturers." I wouldn't care much for a doctor who performed abortions. Someone else wouldn't like having an IRS agent in their ward. Or a gun dealer. Or a peace activist. Or a wife-beater. The list goes on and on. If you simply couldn't handle one of these folks as a HT, then you could tell your EQP and ask for a new assignment. I'd suggest you try the love thing, and see if, by talking to them and listening, you might learn something you could use. Perhaps, your heart might be softened, and you might change your mind. Stranger things have happened.

That's if the purpose of the thread is not to talk about "torture" and the war in Iraq.

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [11:30 am](#)

165. Re: Comment 143

First, I didn't say that Bybee condoned what the Administration did; he did write the memo, at least in part, and so that's something to consider. Attorneys are not mere mercenaries, and they need not participate in behavior or advance legal positions they consider to be illegal or unethical. Bybee had a choice, in other words, however limited.

I guess I did have a comment regarding Bybee. It's also true that an attorney can be unaware of what use his client intends to put his advice. I could see the issue being presented this way. "The Administration wants to know at what point we would be in violation of the UN Convention Against Torture, so that we can be sure to avoid it." So, the attorney spells it out, assuming the best about his client. Now, this is 2002. All of the word at the time was that our intelligence agencies had not infiltrated any terrorist networks. It was all a black box. We needed information. Americans, at the time, considered ourselves above any kind of torture. It is reasonable to assume that, in the attorneys' minds, the United States government would use their opinion was to determine the clear cut line that should never be crossed. It's also possible that the Administration came in and said, "Give us a definition that lets us fudge as much as possible." If that was the case, maybe Bybee has something to answer for, but not to me. I'm just glad I didn't get a job in this Administration. I certainly applied.

Comment by Chris Laurence —August 23, 2007 @ [11:37 am](#)

166. #164 —Blain, the fact is you're not advancing any points for discussion. You're setting yourself out as an example, and telling us the Christlike principles to follow. Once you've finished teaching us these things, what kinds of comments did you want?

Comment by [Steve Evans](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [11:40 am](#)

167. Kevin,

When it comes to warfare I find it hard to see that the US has gone backwards. We used to firebomb cities after all, now we place such an emphasis on avoiding civilian casualties that we are putting our own troops at extra risk. I suspect that you will see a similar improvement in prisoner treatment from the past until now.

Re - Humanitarian missions, Darfur etc. Many view Iraq as a present humanitarian mission (including me) and consider it our moral duty to remain until the country is at peace. But that's a different thread.

| That means I won't participate in, condone, or pardon torture and humiliation of our enemies in the name of vengeance.

I also disagree with using torture, or anything similar in the name of vengeance. But that's not what we're

talking about here.

| So we Mormons should just join in the fun and support evil?

Of course not. Go through my comments again, my point is that our current actions, regarding interrogation techniques, are not evil.

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [11:44 am](#)

168. Clark #163:

| *What I have a harder time respecting are those who condemn waterboarding but don't mind a sniper in say Afghanistan shooting a Taliban in the leg to draw out his comrades so as to shoot them.*

I see an *enormous* difference between the actions of a soldier, in combat, shooting at individuals who are shooting at him, and the actions of a soldier who is entrusted with the safekeeping and protection of a prisoner.

This isn't an issue of "all violence is bad"—it's an issue of not committing violence against unarmed prisoners.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [11:45 am](#)

169. re: 139

I agree that people do tend to ignore D&C 98. For instance, verse 5 says that the constitution belongs to all mankind. Based on what I've read here, I'd say that there is a fairly large percentage of saints that would disagree with what the Lord said in section 98. I'd say that Mitt Romney would also fall into that camp.

Will the Lord protect our land if we fail to live by His counsel? Are the actions of those who are claiming to protect us, actually going to lead to our downfall?

Comment by Amanda —August 23, 2007 @ [11:46 am](#)

170. Aluwid #167:

| *Go through my comments again, my point is that our current actions, regarding interrogation techniques, are not evil.*

Tell that to Khalid El-Masri, Mamdouh Habib, and Maher Arar.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [11:50 am](#)

171. But Mike, why is there a difference? Further, the people in question *aren't* soldiers under the Geneva conventions.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [11:58 am](#)

172. 159 —The Nuremberg trials weren't nearly that pristine in process. It was a very difficult thing to even convene them, and determining rules under which they could operate was even harder —remember that the USSR was a participant, and they had very different rules and expectations than the US, England or France.

I'm telling you, the "Good Old Days" thing is just a byproduct of ignorance about details of the past.

161 —I like the idea of a "no pithy and inaccurate statement" rule. Let's enforce it across this thread and see if there are any comments left to discuss. What do you say?

You realize the contempt you're showing for these folks is higher than mine. You expect them to be little more than animals, so, when they behave like animals, you're okay with that. I also think the standard you're trying to hold the "good guys" to, doubled though it is, isn't based on any apparent understanding of what these "good guys" are actually facing, but, rather, is based on the situation you'd like them to be facing.

In WWII, American policy favored day-time bombing of targets with military value, and an avoidance of targeting cities and population centers, which could be done at night time (cities are bigger than ball-bearing factories). Unfortunately, technology and weather conditions gave them very few opportunities to do the former kind of bombing, so, over time, they did the former when they could, and the latter when it was all that was available, which led, as time progressed, to the fire-bombing of cities like Dresden, Hamburg, Tokyo and quite a few others. It resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Hindsight has indicated that these bombings may have done nothing to accelerate the end of the war, but the people who had to make decisions of what to do didn't have the benefit of this hindsight. They faced enemies that had never tasted defeat, and who wanted to subject, enslave, and kill them, so they took what steps they could think of to stop those enemies and eliminate their ability to wage war. They were not proud of all of the choices they made, which can be seen in the way their stories have been told after the fact, minimizing, spinning and withholding information that makes them look bad. I don't look down my nose at them —I never want to have to make the decisions they had to make, and they didn't want to have to make them either.

Similarly, I don't look down my nose at those who have to make those decisions now. I don't know what they know (neither do you), and I don't know exactly what they do nor why (...). You can state that you think what they're doing is torture, and I can disagree about that, and we can agree that we don't like torture and don't want it done by our representatives. Their job is to protect us, so that we can have this conversation, and what it takes to do produce the result of safety that we want may not be possible if they only do the things we're comfortable having them do. I don't want to pretend moral superiority over them simply because I haven't had to make the choices they have. YMMV

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [11:58 am](#)

173. 166 —I brought up my position only after you conjectured about what you thought I might do in what you thought was a hypothetical. Sorry to burst your bubble on that point. The principles of the gospel I brought up would seem relevant —I guess I'd like to hear you discuss how you might incorporate those principles into your life to address the problem you raised.

If that's not what you had in mind, then what's the point of the conversation? You find things you don't like, but you don't want to find out how you can use the gospel to help you with that? Or was the point to engage in a discussion of how "torture" is wrong the way you said it wasn't?

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [12:02 pm](#)

174. Mike,

It's unfortunate when mistakes happen but lack of perfection does not make our interrogation techniques evil actions any more than friendly-fire deaths make killing an enemy in combat an evil action.

Comment by Aluwid —August 23, 2007 @ [12:05 pm](#)

175. 168 —Snipers don't (usually) shoot at people who are shooting at them. They don't usually shoot at people who are shooting at all. A former ward member of mine, last I knew (a decade ago) was going to sniper school for law enforcement.

I recognize that's not your point, but you weren't responding to the material you quoted in what you said.

Is it time to make a list of behaviors and see what the consensus is on what should and shouldn't go on in interrogations? Or would that be too specific and reduce the options for vague, inaccurate and pithy comments?

Comment by Blain —August 23, 2007 @ [12:07 pm](#)

176. Blain, that's a good point. Although the sniper always has to consider they may be shot at once they start shooting. But often snipers are used as support in regular combat. So I don't think we can separate it quite as much as you do.

But it is clear that the role of a sniper is often to draw the enemy out where other troops can then eliminate them.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [12:11 pm](#)

177. Re. Blain #172:

"The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."—George Orwell

I've said all I care to on this issue.

Comment by Mike Parker —August 23, 2007 @ [12:11 pm](#)

178. Mike, I agree with that quote. What isn't clear is what is or isn't an atrocity. The pacifist thinks *all war* is an atrocity. Some think almost nothing is. Surely the truth is somewhere in the middle. But few seem willing to point to where that is.

Comment by [Clark](#) —August 23, 2007 @ [12:15 pm](#)

179. We seem to be circling the original issue of the post, and coming back to it from time to time.

Regardless of my views on this war, it's prosecution by the current administration, and our past history of good and bad actions as a country, I am the sole judge, with my wife, of who comes into my home. I said before, that I can't judge a person, and we are all in need of the atonement.

I had a much longer comment here, but I deleted the balance. I have been much disturbed by recent behavior of good men and women in the church who have been caught up in unfortunate circumstances. This is the case here. It's sad.

I've pretty much exhausted myself on this topic. I'm done.

Comment by kevinf —August 23, 2007 @ [12:15 pm](#)

180. Watching Russian TV in the 90s, the newscaster commemorated the firebombing of Dresden, saying it was one of the worst wartime atrocities of all time. Justified or not, that's how it played in Russia. I do wonder what a Mormon president would do to Mormonism's image. Assuming Romney is not pandering, I do have some concern about how his position on Guantanamo Bay will play around the world. The 'left' critique of American power is the most generally accepted view outside the United States, whether we like it or not. This article ultimately reflects on the church whether we like or not, whether its critique and assessment are true or not. If Americans have to do it better and cleaner, that standard is even higher for Mormons. Again, like it or not.

Comment by Chris Laurence —August 23, 2007 @ [12:34 pm](#)

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