

## OPINION

# Paving the way for torture of Americans

*By David Steiner*

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Former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney has defended America's now-banned program that tortured al-Qaeda suspects, praising the CIA operatives who ran it as heroes. (AFP/Getty Images) (AFP | JIM WATSON)

In 2001, a great many people thought we should do everything we could to get information from suspected terrorists. The end, we thought, justified the means. We lost 3,000 people and in the ensuing 13 years, 6,802 Americans died in Iraq and Afghanistan in wars that searched for weapons of mass destruction and Osama bin Laden.

There were no WMDs and bin Laden went to Pakistan. Later figures aren't available. The value of what was obtained is questionable.

We captured suspected terrorists and used enhanced interrogation techniques, a euphemism for torture, and not just simulated drowning, but many other techniques equally inhumane. Torture is a cowardly admission that a combatant isn't able to get information by any other means. The recent report of the CIA's methods comes as a shock to many but there are also many who continue to believe that torture works even though more than 100 prisoners died in our custody by 2005. More recent figures aren't available.

Every branch of American military service tries to prepare troops for the possibility that they may be lost at sea or captured. Our survival schools train troops to escape and

evade and survive in many places and climes. In 1972, I went through the Air Force's basic survival training at Spokane, Wash. The training included escape and evasion techniques, solitary confinement and confinement in a box so small that movement was impossible.

We also learned about interrogation techniques currently in use based on prior wars. I then went through sea survival training in Florida and jungle survival training in the Philippines. All of my training was based on recent past wars. Waterboard training probably is currently in the curriculum. It would be foolish not to include it simply because our enemies know that we used it.

It's now part of what any prisoner can expect and will surely be used against us at the earliest opportunity.

I spent a year in Southeast Asia flying unarmed 1930s-designed aircraft at 10,000 feet over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The squadron lost some aircraft and there were no survivors. Other mission survivors were tortured and some died, but the North Vietnamese knew their prisoners were too valuable to kill outright. It was in their interests to keep the men alive. They could bargain using live prisoners. They were right.

How did this happen? Why did we ignore the lessons of the past and in the process pave the way for torture of Americans in future wars? We sent 2.6 million troops to these two wars. As of the end of last year, more than 900,000 service men and women had been treated at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics since returning Iraq and Afghanistan.

Going to war is as easy as saying that a government we don't like has weapons of mass destruction. This from a government with more WMDs than any other. It's as easy as invading a country for 13 years based on looking for one man who wasn't there. He escaped to Pakistan, living next to the Pakistan Military Academy. He's dead and our troops still face the possibility of capture or death in the war zones.

Edwin Starr's song "War" (What is it good for? Absolutely nothin') became popular as the Vietnam War was being exposed as unwinnable in 1970. But the song is wrong. War makes many people rich. Profits go to a broad spectrum of Americans: politicians, weapons-makers, oil companies, any company involved in the support of war. The end of these wars is one of the reasons gasoline costs us less at the pump today. It's expected to low for awhile, unless we get into another war.

We hear "This isn't what we are," but to the rest of the world, this is exactly what we are: the most powerful and arrogant country on the planet. We can blame lots of people in Washington, the CIA, the NSA and Congress, but all of us are responsible.

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