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Losing The Moral High Ground

Juan Cole: Skepticism Now Meets U.S. When It Comes To The Subject Of Treating Prisoners Humanely



(AP)

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The US military has, understandably and correctly, condemned the [coerced video](#) of a US soldier taken

hostage by Taliban in Afghanistan. But I fear that the argument that the public humiliation of prisoners is against international law won't take the US very far after 8 years of Bush-Cheney.

After the evidence surfaced that the US military took all those humiliating pictures of prisoners at Abu Ghraib to blackmail them by threatening to make them public, the US assertion of support for this principle of the Geneva Conventions will be met with, well, let us say substantial skepticism.

In fact, as I was reminded by a former ambassador, the Bush-Cheney-Yoo-Addison gutting of US conformance with the Geneva Conventions really makes it difficult for Washington credibly to complain about the treatment of any of our captured soldiers. The Taliban could hold the soldier hostage forever if they follow the principle put forward by Sen. Lindsey Graham. They could (God forbid) put him in stress positions naked and threaten to release the pictures to his family, and they would have done nothing that Rumsfeld's Pentagon had not done routinely and on a vast scale.

The US refusal to so much as investigate American officials implicated in torture and breaking international law also does not help us gain credibility on seeing to it that those who mistreat our

troops are tried on those charges. We even have Dick Cheney defending waterboarding, for which Japanese generals were tried and executed after WW II. It is disgusting.

And huffing and puffing that the Taliban are not a government won't get us very far either. They control 10 percent of the country.

You obey the Geneva Conventions and the rest of international law on the treatment of captives because it gives you the moral high ground with regard to the treatment of our troops. Not doing so endangers every single one of our men and women in uniform. The chickenhawks who called such international agreements 'quaint' and outmoded should be drafted and sent to the front.

What is really scary is that the shadowy set of secret military and intelligence teams charged by Cheney to break international law [continuing to do so](#) despite President Obama's orders to cease torture. Obama had better get a handle on this issue, because it could well blow up in his face, in fact, Cheney may intend it to do so. I think there are still people in the US government who take their cues from the latter rather than the former.

Juan Cole:

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