

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

A Nation that Lacks Any Moral Standing.

Letter to the Editor
Financial Times
December 10, 2005

Sir, I hardly find it comforting when Condoleezza Rice states that US personnel are prohibited from torturing terror suspects outside of the US.

First, we are all aware that the Bush administration's definition of what actually constitutes torture is extremely narrow. Cruel and inhuman interrogation techniques have been openly used.

Perhaps this is acceptable when dealing with terrorists. However, US intelligence agencies continue to make mistakes, and end up "interrogating" innocent victims.

Moreover, the terror suspects held captive at Guantanamo Bay and other locations have been afforded little opportunity to defend themselves from the government's accusations.

At least some of these suspects will prove to be innocent. Most others are low-level operatives with virtually nothing to add to the intelligence community's understanding of al-Qaeda.

Considering the paucity of information gleaned from these suspects, one wonders if the effort is really worth the cost to America's reputation and the moral authority that it has squandered post-9/11.

The most troubling aspect of Ms Rice's statements, however, is the subtext. At no point has the secretary of state, or any other US official to my knowledge, asserted that non-US personnel can torture terrorist suspects in American custody.

Presumably, to simply observe these actions would - at least by the tortured logic of the Bush administration - not constitute a breach of international humanitarian law.

If Ms Rice is being honest, and US personnel truly are in fact prohibited from torturing detainees no matter where they are held, then this serves as a compelling reason for the US to withhold the names and locations of terrorist suspects located outside the US.

Given the Bush administration's record would anyone really be surprised?

That we can seriously entertain the notion of a US government "rendering" detainees to be worked over by foreign intelligence services only speaks to the absolute lack of moral standing this country has in the world today.

Owen Phillips,

Fairfax, VA 22033, US