

“You Call This Torture?” and “Cruz Control”

Some people have been wondering about the timing of Sen. Dianne Feinstein’s release of her committee’s report condemning the CIA’s interrogation of Islamic terrorists. After all, the practice of waterboarding had ceased several years ago, so why bring it out when one knew it would lead to the U.N. condemning the practice and insisting that those who took part be indicted and tried by the World Court? They also had to know that it would endanger the lives of our spies around the world.

There is nothing odd about the timing. One, the Democrats had to release it before the end of the year when the GOP would take control of the Senate, and relegate the report along with Mrs. Feinstein to the nearest dustbin. But, two, and even more essential to the Democrats, was that it be released on the very same day that Jonathan (“The American people are stupid and had to be conned into supporting ObamaCare”) Gruber would be testifying before a Republican-controlled House committee.

Anyone who believes that was just a coincidence must also believe that it was coincidental that Clinton ordered the bombing of a benign Sudanese pharmaceutical plant in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal. You can carve it in stone that there is no such thing as a coincidence in Washington.

As for the report itself, I would like to point out that our constitutional rights and protections do not apply to our enemies and even the Geneva Conventions don’t protect illegal combatants, aka terrorists. As for those who keep hollering about the Conventions, the fact is that they were first drawn up in order to guarantee for both sides that one’s captured soldiers would be treated humanely by their captors. However, in the case of Islamic terrorists, one, they are not

signatories to the Conventions; and, two, they not only don't have POW camps, but they torture and murder those, including civilians, who suffer the misfortune of falling into their hands.

In short, the Conventions were never intended to be a suicide pact.

Furthermore, while I don't happen to believe that most Americans are blood-thirsty, even if our legitimate motive hadn't been to extract information from those villains who were waterboarded or deprived of sleep, I doubt if many of us would have minded their being gnawed on by rats. That would especially have been the case with the memory of 9/11 and of innocent people leaping from the roofs of the Twin Towers to escape the flames fresh in our minds.

I know it's not entirely fair to just pick on Feinstein and her liberal cohorts. After all, John McCain has long been a loud critic of enhanced interrogation techniques, and because he was a POW during the Vietnam War, he is believed to hold the high moral ground on this issue. Unfortunately, Sen. McCain has never seemed capable of differentiating between the Vietcong torturing Americans for the hell of it and the CIA torturing jihadists in order to extract information that could prevent a repeat of 9/11 or lead to the extermination of Osama bin Laden.

I realize that Fox pundit George Will happens to agree with Sen. McCain, but that's because he believes that whereas others merely rent the moral high ground, he holds the actual deed.

When it comes to Sen. Feinstein, whom I have heard even some conservatives describe as a non-partisan grown-up in the Senate, I have to question the integrity and even the patriotism of someone who thinks it's essential to rehash events from long ago that serve no other purpose than to give

America a black eye and endanger those currently trying to protect the homeland.

On top of that, the self-righteous senator has managed to ignore every scandal connected to Obama, ranging from Operation Fast & Furious, through the Benghazi massacre, the IRS targeting of conservatives, the Affordable Care Act, Obama's bias against Israel and his promoting the alleged rights of illegal aliens while ignoring those of American taxpayers.

At the very least, you would think that a U.S. senator would object to a president who, for all his denials of having the power and authority of an emperor, has chosen to ignore the separation of powers enumerated in the Constitution that both he and Mrs. Feinstein have sworn to defend. In addition, he has made it a practice to lie to the American people and has turned Robert Gibbs, Jay Carney and now Josh Earnest into real life Pinocchios to fabricate on his behalf whenever he had a round of golf to play, a fund-raiser to attend or simply wasn't in the mood to face the press and do his own lying.

In other news, I wasn't even slightly surprised that Harvard, Columbia and Georgetown, law schools have all agreed to allow students who claim to have been traumatized by the grand jury decisions in Ferguson and Staten Island to postpone taking their exams, knowing that college administrators have the spines of jellyfish.

Still, can you imagine how these self-indulgent young milksops will react when a few years down the road a judge or jury rules against them? Will they burst into tears, faint dead away, take to their beds with a case of the vapors or merely insist on a re-trial?

Finally, the way Bowe Bergdahl has disappeared from the radar, in spite of his news-worthy exchange for five high-ranking jihadists, you might think he had been aboard Malaysian

Airline flight 370.

Is it any wonder that Obama has come to believe he can get away with absolutely anything when even the newshawks at Fox never ask about the Army's alleged investigation of Bergdahl's desertion?

In my opinion, it isn't only members of the military who should stand trial for dereliction of duty.

Cruz Control

I know that for a lot of my readers what I'm about to say is sheer blasphemy, but I wish that Ted Cruz would stop seeking the spotlight. More and more he reminds me of a creature from a sci-fi movie, but instead of turning into a giant fly, Cruz morphs into a giant moth. The only difference is that in his case, it's a TV camera not a flame that serves as the object of his obsession.

I realize that for a great many conservatives, Cruz represents their ideal, but that's because they place a premium on symbolic gestures, no matter how futile they happen to be. In fact, they celebrate that very futility because they believe it confirms the senator's purity of purpose. I, on the other hand, who am every bit as conservative as Cruz, believe that politics should be rooted in reality and that before setting out on a crusade, one should not only have a specific and achievable goal in mind, but should be aware that failure often comes at a very steep price.

In Sen. Cruz, I see a man possessed of such naked ambition that his primary goal is self-promotion. I don't happen to care for showboats in any field. I never liked football players who pranced around after sacking the quarterback or

spiked the ball after scoring a touchdown. I never liked Barry Bonds or any other baseball player who stood in the batter's box watching in awe as his home run cleared the wall. In short, I admire professionals who get the job done with a minimum of fuss and self-aggrandizement.

Cruz, on the other hand, seems interested in maximizing the fuss even if it accomplishes nothing more than garnering him TV exposure. In 2013, his prominent role in closing down the government achieved nothing except that it helped the Democrat, Terry McAuliffe, win the gubernatorial election in Virginia.

This year, Cruz was at it again. This time, his pigheadedness allowed Harry Reid to get liberal zealots Sarah Saldana appointed to head up Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Tony Blinken to be the new deputy secretary of state. In addition, Cruz provided Reid with the opportunity to appoint a number of left-wing judges to the federal bench and saddled us with a surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, an anti-gun zealot who believes that the Second Amendment is the single greatest threat to the health of Americans.

Ted Cruz is an egotist who subscribes to the loony notion that whatever furthers his personal agenda is what's best for the nation. It's a psychosis he happens to share with Barack Obama.

I understand that some of my readers regard it as traitorous when I attack Republican politicians, whether it's a conservative like Ted Cruz or an idiot like John McCain. I happen to believe that if you can't write honestly about those in your own party, nobody should trust you when you write about your political opponents. On the other hand, I happen to sympathize with all of them, Republicans and Democrats alike. I mean, imagine if your employment depended entirely on really dumb people deciding every two, four or six years, if you get to keep your job. It's no wonder that most of them wind up as

crazy as poodles.

Recently, I was reading about painters and it got me thinking about the astronomical prices that some paintings fetch. It doesn't bother me that some people can afford to pay \$75 million for a single work of art any more than it bothers me that some people own their own jet planes or own mansions on three or four different continents. I readily admit that there are some very wealthy people I despise – people such as George Soros, Ted Turner, Tom Steyer and Warren Buffet – but it's not their bank balance I resent, but the issues and individuals they choose to promote with their money.

I understand that the cost of most things is determined by the price people are willing to pay for them. It's just that while I understand why mansions and jet planes cost a fortune, I'm at a loss when it comes to paintings.

After all, the paint, frame, canvas and varnish, are not very expensive, so that doesn't explain it. And unlike sculpting, which requires intensive labor, painting is so easy, it can easily be done while sitting in a chair.

One painting can't cost more than another because of its rarity because even an amateur's work is unique. Also, most paintings aren't even what you would call aesthetically beautiful. And what's more, even the greatest forgery, no matter how faithfully rendered, is essentially worthless once it's found out. In a way, that's something of a shame. After all, whereas the original painter merely used the materials at hand, the forger is required to duplicate it centuries later, while disguising the fact that his own work only dates back to last Thursday.

So what is it that makes some paintings – paintings such as Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," Van Gogh's "Sunflowers," Gainsborough's "The Blue Boy" or Edvard Munch's "The Scream" – worth tens of millions?

All I can come up with is that they're famous. In a sense, they're the equivalent of our own celebrities, people like Paris Hilton, Justin Bieber and people named Kardashian, who are famous for no other or better reason than that they're famous.

In a logical world, or so it seems to me, a painting of a bowl of fruit would be worth far less than an actual bowl of fruit because you can't eat a painted banana.

**Burt's Webcast is every Wednesday at Noon Pacific Time.
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