Bush Lied - To Himself

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BY PAT ARCHBOLD Monday, November 08, 2010 11:59 PM Comments [(202)](http://www.ncregister.com/blog/bush-lied-to-himself/#blogComments)

I just watched Matt Lauer interview George W. Bush on NBC promoting his new book on his Presidency.

By way of a minor preamble, let me state that the interview did little to change my overall impression of the man, but it did change it some.  I have for a time believed that he is generally a good man who cares deeply about his country.  He did what he thought was best but he made some bad decisions.  But I have always thought that even his bad decisions were made for, what he thought, were good reasons.

His decisions on war and peace, spending, and bailouts are all legitimate matters for disagreement.  I agreed with some and disagreed with others but I have always thought he came by his decisions, even the bad ones, honestly.

With all that said, I was struck by what I can only classify as a moment of dishonesty.  I don’t think that President Bush lied to Matt Lauer or the American people, I think he lied to himself.

The topic, it should come as no surprise, is the water-boarding of three suspected terrorists at Gitmo.  I do not intend to debate the morality of water-boarding here, my point lies elsewhere.

When asked whether water-boarding was torture President Bush answered “My lawyers said no.  The lawyers said it was legal.”

The lawyers?  It was legal?

I believe that George W. Bush wanted nothing more than to protect this country, but I believe he lied to himself to do it.  President Bush knows full well that there are plenty of things that are legal in this country that are intrinsically immoral.  Abortion comes to mind.

President Bush knows full well that the legality of such an act is not the right question when trying to determine the “right thing” to do.  President Bush denied that he pressured the lawyers to get the answer he wanted and I think I believe him.  But it doesn’t matter.  He pressured himself to accept an answer which he probably knew was wrong.

Why do I say he probably knew it was wrong, because in the next sentence he made a point that they only water-boarded three people.  You don’t say that unless you know its wrong.  If you think a legal opinion gives you moral carte blanche, then why not water-board them all?

I think that George W. Bush so much wanted to “protect” this country from another attack that he lied to do it.  But he didn’t lie to us, he lied to himself.

Comments

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Posted by Arnobius of Sicca on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 1:19 AM (EST):

I too was disappointed with the revelation that the President made the call to go ahead with this in the face of the moral questions about it.  Still, you raise a good point here, and I wonder how many leaders who do make a bad decision begin by lying to themselves.

Posted by Bender on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 1:51 AM (EST):

So, if someone, after giving the matter serious consideration, including researching the relevant legal authorities and moral arguments, were to sincerely disagree with you regarding the moral (and legal) status of waterboarding, then they are ipso facto dishonest?  Anyone who disagrees with you is automatically a liar?

Talk about being disingenuous and intellectually dishonest, not to mention being intellectually lazy, in so casually smearing those you oppose.

I suppose I could go into an in-depth explanation of exactly why waterboarding, as practiced in these cases, was not “torture,” but that would be a rather pointless exercise since I would be instantly branded a liar.

Posted by Matthew A. Siekierski on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 2:45 AM (EST):

Bender, did you miss the part Bush made a point of stating that they only waterboarded three people?  It implies that he knows it’s (at best) a morally questionable act.  Hence the legal answer as opposed to a moral answer.  
Is it moral to do an evil thing so that good may come of it? Of course not…the ends don’t justify the means.  
And please note: I’m not making a moral judgement on waterboarding.  Thank God, I don’t have to make that determination. The closest I get to a judgement is that it’s likely to be immoral, and therefore should not be used.

Posted by MMOCONNOR on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 3:43 AM (EST):

“Why do I say he probably knew it was wrong, because in the next sentence he made a point that they only water-boarded three people.  You don’t say that unless you know its wrong.”

I do not agree with your reasoning here at all.  Any parent who has ever punished a child can tell you that doing the right thing can be very difficult and very upsetting.

He made a tough decision and he took responsibility for it.  The fact that he agonized over the decision and that it still causes him pain indicates that he is a deeply moral man.

This is the kind of man I want as a leader: the kind of man who can make difficult decisions without trying to justify them by pretending they are easy or obvious.

Posted by Sawyer on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 3:52 AM (EST):

Emphasizing that only three people were waterboarded does not at all imply nor reveal that Bush believed it is a morally questionable or immoral act.

The statement was made to communicate that the tactic of waterboarding as an interrogation method was seldom needed. in many cases, detainees volunteered information after going through less harsh interrogation techniques. With three high-level detainees, however, lesser methods were not sufficient to win their cooperation.

Read “Courting Disaster” by Marc Thiessen. He details how the Bush Administration and Justice Department reached their conclusions, and he demolishes the misinformation and lies about the interrogation techniques used. The psychology of Arab Muslim detainees was that they were required by honor and by religion to resist interrogation techniques until they personally felt satisfied with their effort. After giving sufficient resistance, the detainees were “freed” by honor and faith to spill the beans. The interrogation techniques were not at all about beating or torturing information out of the detainees; they were about psychologically manipulating them into a state where they believed they had given the resistance that their culture and Allah expected of them. At no time were any detainees subjected to immoral, harmful, violent methods.

Waterboarding is not torture. American soldiers are regularly subjected to waterboarding as part of their SERE (Survive, Evade, Resist, Escape) training. If waterboarding were really torture, we would not subject our own soldiers to the practice.

The claim that waterboarding is torture is a canard of the left and a phony badge that some feeble minded Catholic conservatives pin on their lapel in an attempt to show that they aren’t subservient to “neocon ideology”.

Posted by Abiodun Ademoye on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 4:49 AM (EST):

Quite a number of you are missing the point here and you are beginning to attack the author of the article; this is not right. Could you please read Mmoconnor’s comment again, there lies the issue. It is about the moral certitude of Bush and not water boarding. Let us stop attacking people instead of their thoughts. Peace.

Posted by Kinana on Tuesday, Nov 9, 2010 6:19 AM (EST):

When asked whether water-boarding was torture President Bush answered “My lawyers said no.  The lawyers said it was legal.”  
On the face of it, this seems like an evasion of the question.  It sounds like he was saying: ‘In this one instance I did not want to go there and instead decided to hand over my own sense of right and wrong to my lawyers and followed their lead.’    
Or was he saying: ‘Look here, even my lawyers said that it was not torture and not only that, that it was legal, so of course I do not think it is torture.’  
The author believes that President Bush lied to himself by basically choosing the first option knowing full well in his heart that water-boarding is torture based on the follow up comment re water-boarding ‘only’ three people.    
If you take the meaning of the first instance the interpretation of the follow-up comment is saying ‘I am glad it was only three people because my conscience could not have handled any more.’  Therefore the author is correct in that President Bush lied to himself.  
However, if we follow on from the second instance/interpretation he is saying: ‘I was glad only three people were subjected to this technique because the political fallout would have been too much.  But the moral principle was and remains sound.’

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