

In New Hampshire debate: Republican frontrunner backs torture

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During a debate Saturday night in New Hampshire, the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, billionaire Donald Trump, backed the use of waterboarding and even more severe methods of torture as part of the US government's "War on Terror."

Trump leads the Republican field in polling nationally and is favored in New Hampshire's primary Tuesday, although he finished second to Texas Senator Ted Cruz in the first Republican contest, the Iowa caucuses held February 1.

Neither his Republican opponents nor the moderators from ABC News sought to follow up on Trump's pledge to do "a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding" to prisoners captured by the US military or intelligence agencies.

Post-debate coverage gave little notice to Trump's comments, focusing mainly on the exchanges between Florida Senator Marco Rubio and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie or a clash between Trump and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Trump was even adjudged a "winner" of the debate in online summaries by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and in an online poll sponsored by *Time* magazine.

ABC News anchorman David Muir raised the subject of torture, or "enhanced interrogation techniques" in the euphemism of the Bush administration, in a question to Senator Cruz about halfway through the debate. He asked Cruz whether he considered waterboarding to be torture. Cruz replied that it was not, claiming "it is vigorous interrogation, but it does not meet the generally recognized definition of torture."

This is a repetition of the baseless claims by the Bush administration, spearheaded by Vice President Dick Cheney and a cadre of legal apologists in the Justice Department, in complete defiance of international law.

The Geneva Conventions specifically bar such methods of interrogation and the US Army Field Manual has defined waterboarding as torture for many decades.

While claiming to have supported legislation prohibiting waterboarding by military interrogators, Cruz said that "the commander in chief has inherent constitutional authority to keep this country safe," meaning the president could authorize such methods regardless of any Congressional prohibition.

Trump then went Cruz one better, declaring, "In the Middle East, we have people chopping the heads off Christians, we have people chopping the heads off many other people... I would bring back waterboarding and I'd bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding." His Republican audience then erupted in applause.

Former Governor Bush took up the issue next without making any reference to Trump's comments, merely noting that he would not seek Congressional action to legalize waterboarding. He then went on to declare his support for more intensive CIA spying and the maintenance of Guantanamo Bay as an interrogation center.

Senator Rubio was asked the same question, and again made no reference to Trump's remarks, declaring that it was wrong to treat the interrogation of terrorists as "some sort of law enforcement function." In context, he was arguing that the restraints of the legal system should not apply to such interrogations, making anything permissible, although he suggested that it was wrong to discuss specific techniques "because that allows terrorists to know to practice how to evade us." He echoed Bush in denouncing efforts to close the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay.

New Jersey Governor Christie, Ohio Governor John Kasich and Dr. Ben Carson, the other three Republican

candidates on the stage, did not take up the issue then or in any subsequent remarks.

Trump reiterated his statements about waterboarding and “worse than waterboarding” during several appearances on Sunday morning television talk shows. Again, neither the media pundits who interviewed him nor Republican rivals who appeared on the same programs made any serious objection to these comments.

Equally revealing was the silence of the two remaining candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders, who appeared on the same programs as Trump on Sunday morning and commented freely on other aspects of the Republican debate. Neither said anything about Trump’s call for torture.

In addition to his call for unbridled savagery in pursuit of the overseas interests of American imperialism, Trump backed brutality and violence at home against workers and youth. In another portion of the debate, Trump rejected suggestions that there was a problem with police brutality and killings of unarmed people.

“The police are absolutely mistreated and misunderstood,” he declared. “The police in this country have done an unbelievable job of keeping law and order, and they’re afraid for their jobs, they’re afraid of the mistreatment they get... They can’t act. They can’t act. They’re afraid for losing their pension, their job. They don’t know what to do. And I deal with them all the time. We have to give great respect, far greater than we are right now, to our really fantastic police.”

Once again, the Republican audience interrupted him with applause.



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