

[The Huffington Post](#)

October 16, 2008

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



[Aziz Huq](#) | [BIO](#) | [I'M A FAN OF THIS BLOGGER](#)

Hurry Up and Wait: The Torture Legislation and the November '06 Elections

Posted October 5, 2006 | 02:24 PM (EST)

Read More: [Bob Woodward](#), [Tom DeLay](#), [White House](#), [George W. Bush](#), [George Tenet](#), [Cofer Black](#), [Breaking Politics News](#)



Two weeks ago, the White House led a chorus baying for the blood of anyone who stood in the way of the President's Military Commission Act stood in the way of defending America. After five years' inaction on detainees and interrogation issues, the White House discovered a need for speedy action. But a week after the House and Senate voted on the bill, the enrolled bill is still sitting on President Bush's desk... No law has changed--yet. As thousands hit the streets to protest Congress's endorsement of cruel and inhumane interrogation techniques, and detention without end, it's worth asking: Why the delay? What does it tell us about the legislation, or the upcoming election campaign?

First and foremost, the delay illustrates a simple fact: There was no pressing need to act. The only pressing need driving enactment of the Military Commissions Act--with its frontal assault on rules against torture, indefinite detention, and fair trials--was the prospect of November elections.

The Administration pointed to two pressing needs in its campaign for the legislation: First, it wanted President Bush's "program" of coercive interrogations in secret CIA prisons around the world to go forward. Second, it wanted trials by new military commissions for those held at the Guantánamo Bay to begin again.

But were either of these needs in fact pressing? The Administration's own behavior suggests not.

A senior intelligence official [quoted in the *Washington Post*](#) explained that "there is no one in CIA custody today" who could be subject to the coercive techniques allowed by the Act. Setting aside the question whether torture works as a means of securing accurate intelligence--it doesn't--it thus appears that the CIA is not now holding anyone who might have information to prevent an incipient attack. Like many previous announcements about incipient terrorist threats, the timing of the White House's warnings had more to do with politics than threat predication.

The idea that there's a pressing need to begin military commissions is even more transparently false. According to Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman, no trials are imminent. It will take at least until next year to rewrite rules, assign judges, [and make the necessary arrangements for trials](#).

This legislation, in other words, had nothing to do with an immediate need. Instead, we now have repeated confirmation that the Administration, when confronted by real evidence of threats to American civilians, has simply failed to act. From the aching minutes that President Bush first took to register and respond to the news of the 9/11 attacks to the painful and disastrously inadequate response to Katrina, this Administration's record speaks for itself.

Recent revelations confirm this. Bob Woodward's new book *State of Denial* thus exposed the fact that CIA chief George Tenet and Cofer Black (who faced off against bin Laden in Sudan) warned Condoleezza Rice in the starkest terms of the looming assault--in a meeting the Secretary of State [cannot even recall](#). Woodward's revelation echoes Ron Suskind's account in *The One-Percent Solution* of the CIA's desperate effort to warn President Bush in August 2001 of the impending crisis--only to be completely blown off by the vacationing Chief Executive.

Repeatedly, we learn that our leaders failed to respond to the threats. Repeatedly, these same leaders are all too ready to conjure those same threats for narrow, partisan purposes untethered from the true security needs of the nation.

This year's election season will bring a slew of claims and counter-claims about who is "toughest" on national security. But there's little point in hanging tough if you are facing the wrong way. The Military Commissions Act that sits on President Bush's desk is the worst sort of political showmanship: For reasons I have [explained earlier](#), it will do little to keep us safer in the face of any imminent threat. It is rather a naked attempt to distract us from the gamut of real problems that today go unaddressed by haphazard, heavy-handed, and ineffectual executive branch approaches to national security.

Comments for this post are now closed

[More in Politics...](#)

- [Final Debate: McCain's Deer In The Headlights...](#)
- ['Angry McCain' At Final Debate Already Famous...](#)
- [Gergen: McCain's Performance "An Exercise In Anger..."](#)
- [Obama Ad Goes After McCain's Inner Bush,...](#)

Comments for this entry are currently under maintenance but will be restored soon.

- [Archive](#) |
- [User Agreement](#) |
- [Privacy](#) |
- [Comment Policy](#) |
- [About Us](#) |
- [Powered by Movable Type](#)

