

Excerpt from White House Press Conference, 11/8/2005

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051108.html>

Q I'd like you to clear up, once and for all, the ambiguity about torture. Can we get a straight answer? The President says we don't do torture, but Cheney --

MR. McCLELLAN: That's about as straight as it can be.

Q Yes, but Cheney has gone to the Senate and asked for an exemption on --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, he has not. Are you claiming he's asked for an exemption on torture? No, that's --

Q He did not ask for that?

MR. McCLELLAN: -- that is inaccurate.

Q Are you denying everything that came from the Hill, in terms of torture?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, you're mischaracterizing things. And I'm not going to get into discussions we have --

Q Can you give me a straight answer for once?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me give it to you, just like the President has. We do not torture. He does not condone torture and he would never --

Q I'm asking about exemptions.

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me respond. And he would never authorize the use of torture. We have an obligation to do all that we can to protect the American people. We are engaged --

Q That's not the answer I'm asking for --

MR. McCLELLAN: It is an answer -- because the American people want to know that we are doing all within our power to prevent terrorist attacks from happening. There are people in this world who want to spread a hateful ideology that is based on killing innocent men, women and children. We saw what they can do on September 11th --

Q He didn't ask for an exemption --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- and we are going to --

Q -- answer that one question. I'm asking, is the administration asking for an exemption?

MR. McCLELLAN: I am answering your question. The President has made it very clear that we are going to do --

Q You're not answering -- yes or no?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, you don't want the American people to hear what the facts are, Helen, and I'm going to tell them the facts.

Q -- the American people every day. I'm asking you, yes or no, did we ask for an exemption?

MR. McCLELLAN: And let me respond. You've had your opportunity to ask the question. Now I'm going to respond to it.

Q If you could answer in a straight way.

MR. McCLELLAN: And I'm going to answer it, just like the President -- I just did, and the President has answered it numerous times.

Q -- yes or no --

MR. McCLELLAN: Our most important responsibility is to protect the American people. We are engaged in a global war against Islamic radicals who are intent on spreading a hateful ideology, and intent on killing innocent men, women and children.

Q Did we ask for an exemption?

MR. McCLELLAN: We are going to do what is necessary to protect the American people.

Q Is that the answer?

MR. McCLELLAN: We are also going to do so in a way that adheres to our laws and to our values. We have made that very clear. The President directed everybody within this government that we do not engage in torture. We will not torture. He made that very clear.

Q Are you denying we asked for an exemption?

MR. McCLELLAN: Helen, we will continue to work with the Congress on the issue that you brought up. The way you characterize it, that we're asking for exemption from torture, is just flat-out false, because there are laws that are on the books that prohibit the use of torture. And we adhere to those laws.

Q We did ask for an exemption; is that right? I mean, be simple -- this is a very simple question.

MR. McCLELLAN: I just answered your question. The President answered it last week.

Q What are we asking for?

Q Would you characterize what we're asking for?

MR. McCLELLAN: We're asking to do what is necessary to protect the American people in a way that is consistent with our laws and our treaty obligations. And that's what we --

Q Why does the CIA need an exemption from the military?

MR. McCLELLAN: David, let's talk about people that you're talking about who have been brought to justice and captured. You're talking about people like Khalid Shaykh Muhammad; people like Abu Zubaydah.

Q I'm asking you --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, this is facts about what you're talking about.

Q Why does the CIA need an exemption from rules that would govern the conduct of our military in interrogation practices?

MR. McCLELLAN: There are already laws and rules that are on the books, and we follow those laws and rules. What we need to make sure is that we are able to carry out the war on terrorism as effectively as possible, not only --

Q What does that mean --

MR. McCLELLAN: What I'm telling you right now -- not only to protect Americans from an attack, but to prevent an attack from happening in the first place. And, you bet, when we capture terrorist leaders, we are going to seek to find out information that will protect -- that prevent attacks from happening in the first place. But we have an

obligation to do so. Our military knows this; all people within the United States government know this. We have an obligation to do so in a way that is consistent with our laws and values.

Now, the people that you are bringing up -- you're talking about in the context, and I think it's important for the American people to know, are people like Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Abu Zubaydah, Ramzi Binalshibh -- these are -- these are dangerous killers.

Q So they're all killers --

Q Did you ask for an exemption on torture? That's a simple question, yes or no.

MR. McCLELLAN: No. And we have not. That's what I told you at the beginning.

Q You want to reserve the ability to use tougher tactics with those individuals who you mentioned.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, obviously, you have a different view from the American people. I think the American people understand the importance of doing everything within our power and within our laws to protect the American people.

Q Scott, are you saying that Cheney did not ask --

Q What is it that you want the -- what is it that you want the CIA to be able to do that the U.S. Armed Forces are not allowed to do?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not going to get into talking about national security matters, Bill. I don't do that, because this involves --

Q This would be the exemption, in other words.

MR. McCLELLAN: This involves information that relates to doing all we can to protect the American people. And if you have a different view -- obviously, some of you on this room -- in this room have a different view, some of you on the front row have a different view.

Q We simply are asking a question.

Q What is the Vice President -- what is the Vice President asking for?

MR. McCLELLAN: It's spelled out in our statement of administration policy in terms of what our views are. That's very public information. In terms of our discussions with members of Congress --

Q -- no, it's not --

MR. McCLELLAN: In terms of our members -- like I said, there are already laws on the books that we have to adhere to and abide by, and we do. And we believe that those laws and those obligations address these issues.

Q So then why is the Vice President continuing to lobby on this issue? If you're very happy with the laws on the books, what needs change?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, you asked me -- you want to ask questions of the Vice President's office, feel free to do that. We've made our position very clear, and it's spelled out on our website for everybody to see.

Q We don't need a website, we need you from the podium.

MR. McCLELLAN: And what I just told you is what our view is.

Q But Scott, do you see the contradiction --

MR. McCLELLAN: Jessica, go ahead.