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The urge to save humanity is almost always only a false-face for the urge to rule it.

– H. L. Mencken

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March 3, 2006

I Do Not Wish to Be Associated With Torture

by Ray McGovern

Note: Ray McGovern and 15 others took action Thursday in the halls of Congress. The 16 donned orange jumpsuits similar to those worn by detainees at Guantánamo Bay. They wore gags over their mouths decorated with one word – torture. Not another word needed to be said as they walked the halls of Congress. McGovern, a 27-year veteran of the CIA, also returned his Intelligence Commendation Award medallion, which was given to him for "especially commendable service." He delivered the medal to Congressman Pete Hoekstra along with the letter below.

Hon. Pete Hoekstra, Chair

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
Washington, D.C.

Dear Congressman Hoekstra:

As a matter of conscience, I am returning the Intelligence Commendation Award medallion given me for "especially commendable service" during my 27-year career in CIA. The issue is torture, which inhabits the same category as rape and slavery – intrinsically evil. I do not wish to be associated, however remotely, with an agency engaged in torture.

Reports in recent years that CIA personnel were torturing detainees were highly disturbing. Confirmation of a sort came last fall, when CIA Director Porter Goss and Dick Cheney – dubbed by the *Washington Post* "Vice President for Torture" – descended on Sen. John McCain to demand that the CIA be exempted from his amendment's ban on torture. Subsequent reports implicated agency personnel in several cases of prisoner abuse in Iraq, including a few in which detainees died during

interrogation.

The obeisance of CIA directors George Tenet and Porter Goss in heeding illegal White House directives has done irreparable harm to the CIA and the country – not to mention those tortured and killed. That you, as Chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, show more deference to the White House than dedication to your oversight responsibilities under the Constitution is another profound disappointment. How can you and your counterpart, Sen. Pat Roberts, turn a blind eye to torture – letting some people get away, literally, with murder – and square that with your conscience?

If German officials who were ordered to do such things in the 1930s had spoken out early and loudly enough, the German people might have been alerted to the atrocities being perpetrated in their name and tried harder to stop them. When my grandchildren ask, "What did you do, Grandpa, to stop the torture," I want to be able to tell them that I tried to honor my oath, taken both as an Army officer and an intelligence officer, to defend the Constitution of the United States – and that I not only spoke out strongly against the torture, but also sought a symbolic way to dissociate myself from it.

We Americans have become accustomed to letting our institutions do our sinning for us. I abhor the corruption of the CIA in the past several years, believe it to be beyond repair, and do not want my name on any medallion associated with it. Please destroy this one.

Yours truly,
Ray McGovern

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Ray McGovern was a CIA analyst for 27 years – from the John F. Kennedy administration to that of George H. W. Bush.