

DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20511

APR 16 2009

Dear Colleagues:

Today is a difficult one for those of us who serve the country in its intelligence services. An article on the front page of *The New York Times* claims that the National Security Agency has been collecting information that violates the privacy and civil liberties of American citizens. The release of documents from the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) spells out in detail harsh interrogation techniques used by CIA officers on suspected al Qaida terrorists.

As the leader of the Intelligence Community, I am trying to put these issues into perspective. We cannot undo the events of the past; we must understand them and turn this understanding to advantage as we move into the future.

It is important to remember the context of these past events. All of us remember the horror of 9/11. For months afterwards we did not have a clear understanding of the enemy we were dealing with, and our every effort was focused on preventing further attacks that would kill more Americans. It was during these months that the CIA was struggling to obtain critical information from captured al Qa'ida leaders, and requested permission to use harsher interrogation methods. The OLC memos make clear that senior legal officials judged the harsher methods to be legal, and that senior policymakers authorized their use. High value information came from interrogations in which those methods were used and provided a deeper understanding of the al Qa'ida organization that was attacking this country. As the OLC memos demonstrate, from 2002 through 2006 when the use of these techniques ended, the leadership of the CIA repeatedly reported their activities both to Executive Branch policymakers and to members of Congress, and received permission to continue to use the techniques.

Those methods, read on a bright, sunny, safe day in April 2009, appear graphic and disturbing. As the President has made clear, and as both CIA Director Panetta and I have stated, we will not use those techniques in the future. I like to think I would not have approved those methods in the past, but I do not fault those who made the decisions at that time, and I will absolutely defend those who carried out the interrogations within the orders they were given.

Even in 2009 there are organizations plotting to kill Americans using terror tactics, and although the memories of 9/11 are becoming more distant, we in the intelligence services must stop them. One of our most effective tools in discovering groups planning to attack us are their communications, and it is the job of the NSA to intercept them. The NSA does this vital work under legislation that was passed by the Congress. The NSA actions are subject to oversight by my office and by the Justice Department under court-approved safeguards; when the intercepts are conducted against Americans, it is with individual court orders. Under these authorities the officers of the National Security Agency collect large amounts of international telecommunications, and under strict rules review and analyze some of them. These intercepts have played a vital role in many successes we have had in thwarting terrorist attacks since 9/11.

On occasion, NSA has made mistakes and intercepted the wrong communications. The numbers of these mistakes are very small in terms of our overall collection efforts, but each one is investigated, Congress and the courts are notified, corrective measures are taken, and improvements are put in place to prevent reoccurrences.

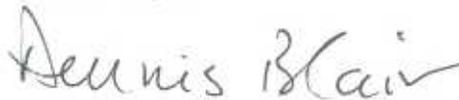
As a young Navy officer during the Vietnam years, I experienced public scorn for those of us who served in the Armed Forces during an unpopular war. Challenging and debating the wisdom and policies linked to wars and warfighting is important and legitimate; however, disrespect for those who serve honorably within legal guidelines is not. I remember well the pain of those of us who served our country even when the policies we were carrying out were unpopular or could be second-guessed.

We in the Intelligence Community should not be subjected to similar pain. Let the debate focus on the law and our national security. Let us be thankful that we have public servants who seek to do the difficult work of protecting our country under the explicit assurance that their actions are both necessary and legal.

There will almost certainly be more media articles about the actions of intelligence agencies in the past, and as we do our vital work of protecting the country we will make mistakes that will also be reported. What we must do is make it absolutely clear to the American people that our ethos is to act legally, in as transparent a manner as we can, and in a way that they would be proud of if we could tell them the full story.

It is my job, and the job of our national leaders, to ensure that the work done by the Intelligence Community is appreciated and supported. You can be assured the President knows this and is supporting us. It is your responsibility to continue the difficult, often dangerous and vital work you are doing every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Blair". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dennis C. Blair