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What the President's Attack on the CIA Really Means

By [Herbert E. Meyer](#)

There is now just one group of people exempt from President Obama's worldwide ban on torture: the men and women of the CIA.

By authorizing Attorney General Eric Holder to appoint a special prosecutor to determine whether a full criminal investigation of CIA employees and contractors is warranted for the manner in which they interrogated captured terrorists, the President has thrown his power and support behind those far-left ideologues -- in Congress and elsewhere -- who believe that the CIA is a bigger threat to our country than al Qaeda.

I know the men and women of the CIA -- I had the honor of working with them during the Reagan Administration -- and they would rather have their fingernails pulled out with pliers or have holes drilled into their knees (neither of which they did to captured terrorists, as the Justice Department's hot-shot investigators will learn) than be thought of as anything other than honorable patriots doing their best, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, to protect our country from its enemies. It will be excruciating for them to face their colleagues each morning under the strain of looming criminal prosecutions that will destroy their careers and deplete their meager savings accounts -- and, even worse, to come home to their families each evening with the stench of President Obama's contempt for their honor in the air.

A Bone to his Base

By launching this latest attack on the CIA, the President has done more than merely throw a bone to his base. He has removed all remaining doubt about how the US now plans to confront the global threat of radical Islam. Simply put, we have reached one of those hinges of history whose swings alter the course of world events. The best way to understand what President Obama has done is to put aside this week's headlines and, for just a moment, press the rewind button:

In the 1930s, the world was becoming unglued and unstable. Fascism was on the march and, as usual, we Americans wished only to stay out of the world's problems and to focus instead on our own domestic issues. Then came the attack on Pearl Harbor, and we had no choice but to respond. Within a month we were at war not only with Japan, but also with Italy and Germany. In effect, President Roosevelt threw the switch from defense to offense. We went after not only those who had attacked us, but *all* of those who subscribed to the Fascist ideology. And, in time, we won.

Now let's fast-forward to the 1990s. Once again, the world was becoming unglued and unstable. This time it was radical Islam on the march and launching its attacks across the globe -- including a few on us such as the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the bombings of our embassies in Africa, and the attack on the USS Cole. And once again we Americans wished only to stay out of the world's problems and to focus instead on our own domestic issues. Then came 9-11, and we had no choice but to respond.

President Bush made the same *kind* of decision that FDR had made 60 years earlier. Rather than just go after those who had launched the attack on our homeland, he undertook a Global War on Terrorism to defeat *all* of those states and groups that subscribed to the radical Islam ideology. Just like FDR, President Bush threw the switch from defense to offense. Whether he played offense well or poorly during his years in office is something that historians will debate for the next thousand years. But there's no doubt that after 9-11 the US was playing offense.

That's now over. Look hard at everything President Obama has said and done -- this week's attack on the CIA, his banishment of the phrase "Global War on Terrorism" and its replacement with the milquetoast "overseas contingency operations," his apologetic Cairo speech, his seeming indifference to the recent bombings in Iraq, his unwillingness to seize the opportunity of the students' uprising in Iran to knock over that dangerous regime, his trashing of our special relationship with Israel, and all the rest including his longtime personal relationships with vicious America-haters like Bill Ayers and the Reverend Jeremiah Wright -- and the conclusion is inescapable: President Obama is throwing the switch from offense back to defense, and returning the US to its September 10 mindset.

The Two Futures We Face

One way or the other, the President's historic decision is going to settle the debate over the war that now divides us.

If President Obama and his supporters are right -- that what confronts us isn't a war but merely a complex international law-enforcement problem -- in the coming years not much will happen. We'll see the occasional bombing here or there, every so often an airliner will inexplicably fall out of the sky, and in a half-dozen or so countries most of us cannot even find on a map some previously unheard-of groups of thugs will seize power. But with the exception of those few of us unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, life will go on.

But if President Bush and those of us who supported him are right -- that we are in the midst of a global war on whose outcome rests the survival of Western civilization -- the future will unfold in a different and much less pleasant way. The forces of radical Islam will surge, our "allies" will cave in to pressure and cut deals with our mortal enemies, and at some point down the road -- seven years from now, three years from now, or perhaps next Tuesday -- something ghastly will happen.

Herbert E. Meyer served during the Reagan Administration as Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence and Vice Chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council. He holds the U.S. National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal, which is the Intelligence Community's highest honor. He is author of [The Cure for Poverty](#) and [How to Analyze Information](#).

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