

Obama Opposes Releasing Photos of U.S. Detainee Abuse

President Obama has decided not to release photos which the Pentagon had planned to released by May 28 in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union.

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President Obama has decided not to release hundreds of photos potentially showing U.S. military personnel abusing prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon.

A senior administration official told FOX News that Obama met with his legal team last week and told them that he did not feel comfortable with the release of the photos because he believes they would endanger U.S. troops, and that the national security implications of such a release have not been fully presented in federal court.

At the end of that meeting, the president directed his counsel to object to the immediate release of the photos on those grounds, the official said.

The Pentagon had planned to release the photos by May 28 in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union. That decision was made after the Justice Department lost its latest round in federal court and concluded that any further appeal probably would be fruitless.

But on Tuesday, the president raised the issue of these photos with Gen. Ray Odierno, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, during a White House meeting and told him of his decision to argue against this release, the official said.

"Through his actions from the first days of his administration, the president has made it clear that the United States will hold itself and all the men and women who serve our country to the highest standards of conduct," the official said in a statement.

"Obama would be the last to excuse the actions depicted in these photos," the official continued. "That is why the Department of Defense investigated these cases, and why individuals have been punished through prison sentences, discharges, and a range of other punitive measures.

"But the president strongly believes that the release of these photos, particularly at this time, would only serve the purpose of inflaming the theaters of war, jeopardizing US forces, and making our job more difficult in places like Iraq and Afghanistan."

Photos That Could Cost Lives

There is nothing to be learned from more images of detainee abuse.

By [DAVID K. REHBEIN](#)

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but is it worth the death of a single American soldier? Is any photograph worth the life of your Marine Corps daughter? Or your neighbor's deployed husband?

I would like to concede that these are tough questions, but they are really quite simple. The answer is a resounding "No." Releasing photographs of alleged or actual detainee abuse in the War on Terrorism is not worth the life of a single American. Of course, as some have noted, the incidents at Abu Ghraib have already endangered our troops. So did any orders and policies that may have led to those incidents. But what is to be accomplished by continuing to provide ammunition and provocation to the enemy?

At issue is the Pentagon's decision -- in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) -- to release a "substantial number" of images depicting the treatment of detainees by May 28 after being ordered by a judge on the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York to do so. But given the riots that occurred after the release of the first round of Abu Ghraib photos and the enemy's penchant for using such images for propaganda and recruiting purposes, the Defense Department owes it to the soldiers to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in order to block the release of these photos.

Gen. Richard B. Myers, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, voiced his concern about the dangers of releasing photos in 2005. "It is probable that al Qaeda and other groups will seize upon these images and videos as grist for their propaganda mill, which will result in, besides violent attacks, increased terrorist recruitment, continued financial support and exacerbation of tensions between Iraqi and Afghani populaces and U.S. and coalition forces," he said in a statement in support of the Pentagon's efforts to oppose the ACLU's request. He added, "riots, violence and attacks by insurgents will result."

I was deeply disturbed by the images of Abu Ghraib. The military, however, has investigated the abuses and punished those involved. Moreover, the photographs that are now about to be released are already being used for investigative purposes. Other than self-flagellation by certain Americans, riots and future terrorist acts, what else do people expect will come from the release of these photographs?

Sen. Kit Bond (R., Mo.) warned of serious repercussions recently on "Fox News Sunday." "I don't think there's any question it will endanger all of us, because I think it will enhance recruitment for all kinds of terrorists willing to come after us," he said.

Whether or not the photographs contribute to another attack on American soil remains to be seen. We do know, however, that it will be our troops who will most likely pay the price. We hope that others in Congress heed Mr. Bond's concerns and not politicize a dangerous issue.

This is not so much a matter of "the people's right to know" as it is a matter of needlessly endangering the lives of our brave troops -- 99% of whom have had no role in any interrogations or allegations of detainee abuse.

As commander of the nation's largest veterans service organization, I have had the honor to present Blue Star Banners to military families, with the Blue Star signifying the deployment of a service member. It is always a moving experience. But it is the Gold Star Banner, the star that signifies the death of a service member in war, that I never hope to present. I fear that there will be many Gold Stars as a result of this misbegotten policy.

Mr. Rehbein is national commander of the American Legion.