

**Statement by the Director of National Intelligence
Dennis C. Blair**

April 16, 2009

The Department of Justice released today four previous Office of Legal Counsel opinions which concluded certain harsh interrogation techniques used by CIA officers on suspected al Qaeda terrorists were legal. The opinions spell out in graphic detail techniques used in questioning high value detainees suspected of involvement in, and plans for, terrorist activity against the United States and its allies.

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 use this understanding 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 Qaeda 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.

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. But we will absolutely defend those who relied on these memos and those guidelines.

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 public attention about the actions of intelligence agencies in the past. 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.