

# The New York Times

## Military officers to Trump: No return to torture

By Nicholas Fandos, Charlie Savage, and Jennifer Steinhauer  
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In a large show of military opposition to reinstating torture, 176 retired officers — including 33 four-star generals and admirals — have sent a joint letter to Mr. Trump urging him not to follow through on his campaign vows to bring back waterboarding “and a hell of a lot worse.”

[The letter](#), obtained by The New York Times, was dated Jan. 6 and signed by some of the most prominent military figures of the recent era. They included two former Afghanistan war commanders, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal and Gen. John R. Allen, and the Special Operations commander who oversaw the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, Adm. William H. McRaven.

Citing their “six thousand years of combined experience” in commanding troops, the retired officers expressed concern “about statements made during the campaign about the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of detainees in U.S. custody,” and they noted that waterboarding and other “enhanced interrogation techniques” are illegal under domestic and international law.

The officers also called torture both “unnecessary” and “counterproductive,” adding that it “violates our core values as a nation.”

“Our greatest strength is our commitment to the rule of law and to the principles embedded in our Constitution,” the letter continued. “Our servicemen and women need to know that our leaders do not condone torture or detainee abuse of any kind.”

During the presidential campaign, Mr. Trump said he would bring back waterboarding and more for the interrogation of terrorism suspects — contending that “torture works,” and even “if it doesn’t work, they deserve it anyway.”

The letter makes clear that Mr. Trump’s pick for defense secretary, Gen. James N. Mattis, is not alone in recoiling against torture. Those signing also included a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Hugh H. Shelton; a former commander of the Central Command, Gen. Joseph Hoar; and four former commanders of the Southern Command: Gen. Douglas Fraser, Gen. James T. Hill, Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey and Adm. James G. Stavridis, who also went on to be the NATO supreme allied commander.

The list also included two former directors of the National Security Agency, Gen. Keith Alexander and Adm. Bobby Ray Inman; a commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Charles C. Krulak; and chiefs of staff of the Army and the Air Force, Gen. Dennis J. Reimer and Gen. Merrill A. McPeak.