

George Little  
CIA Office of Public Affairs  
703-482-7778

### **Message from the Director: Release of Department of Justice Opinions**

This afternoon, the Department of Justice is releasing a series of opinions that its Office of Legal Counsel provided CIA between 2002 and 2005. They guided CIA's detention and interrogation program, which ended this past January. Over the life of that initiative, CIA repeatedly sought and repeatedly received written assurances from the Department of Justice that its practices were fully consistent with the laws and legal obligations of the United States. Those operations were also approved by the President and the National Security Council principals, and were briefed to the Congressional leadership.

As this information is revealed, it is important to understand the context in which these operations occurred. In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the President turned to CIA—as Presidents have done so often in our history—and entrusted our officers with the most critical of tasks: to disrupt the terrorist network that struck our country and prevent further attacks. CIA responded, as duty requires.

Although this Administration has now put into place new policies that CIA is implementing, the fact remains that CIA's detention and interrogation effort was authorized and approved by our government. For that reason, as I have continued to make clear, I will strongly oppose any effort to investigate or punish those who followed the guidance of the Department of Justice.

The President and the Attorney General have also made clear that there will be no investigation or prosecution of CIA personnel who operated within the legal system. In addition, the Department will provide legal representation to CIA personnel subject to investigations relating to these operations.

This is not the end of the road on these issues. More requests will come—from the public, from Congress, and the Courts—and more information is sure to be released. We cannot control the debate about the past. But we can and must remain focused on our mission today and in the future. The President and the rest of our citizens are counting on all of us to help disrupt, destroy, and dismantle al Qaeda—and to learn the plans of our other adversaries. We have an obligation to this nation and to each other to do all we can to protect America.

This is an exceptional organization of talented men and women, dedicated to our national security. It is an extraordinarily capable organization that quietly defends our country while following its laws and upholding its values. For that reason, I am proud to stand beside you as your Director. And for that reason, this President—and future Presidents—will continue to ask us to undertake the hard missions that only we can. This is an

opportunity for CIA to begin a new and great chapter in our history of service to the nation.

You need to be fully confident that as you defend the nation, I will defend you.

Leon E. Panetta

*The President has sent a letter to the officers of CIA, which I share with you now:*

April 16, 2009

To the Men and Women of CIA:

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the work you are doing for the country. Your work has informed every President dating back to President Truman and it protects our people. I have come to rely on your service and I believe strongly that it is vital to the security of our country. Given the threats, challenges, and opportunities facing America, the CIA remains as critical today as it has ever been to our Nation's security. While necessity requires that the country may not know all of your names or the work that you do, all of us enjoy the freedom that you have helped secure.

I also wanted to share with you a decision that I made last night. Later today, the Department of Justice will release certain memos issued by the Office of Legal Counsel between 2002 and 2005. I did not make this decision lightly. As you may know, the release is part of an ongoing court case. I have fought for the principle that the United States must carry out covert activities and hold information that is classified for the purposes of national security and will do so again in the future. But the release of these memos is required by our commitment to the rule of law.

Much of the information contained in the memos has been in the public domain, and the previous Administration has acknowledged portions of the program – and some of the practices – associated with them. My judgment on this is a matter of record. I have prohibited the use of these interrogation techniques, and I reject the false choice between our security and our ideals.

In releasing these memos, the men and women of the CIA have assurances from both myself, and from Attorney General Holder, that we will protect all who acted reasonably and relied upon legal advice from the Department of Justice that their actions were lawful. The Attorney General has assured me that these individuals will not be prosecuted and that the Government will stand by them.

The men and women of our intelligence community serve courageously on the front lines of a dangerous world. Their accomplishments are unsung and their names unknown, but because of their sacrifices, every single American is safer. They need to be fully

confident that as they defend the Nation, I will defend them. We will protect their identities as vigilantly as they protect our security.

This is a time for reflection, not retribution. We have been through a dark and painful chapter in our history. But at a time of great challenges and disturbing disunity, nothing will be gained by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past. The national greatness that you so courageously and capably uphold is embedded in America's ability to right its course in concert with our core values, and to move forward with confidence.

It is a core American value that we are a Nation of laws, and the CIA protects and upholds that principle under extraordinarily difficult circumstances every day. My Administration will always act in accordance with the law, and with an unshakeable commitment to our ideals. That is why we have released these memos, and that is why we have taken steps to ensure that the actions described within them never take place again.

Thank you for your service, and God bless the work that you do.

Sincerely,  
Barack Obama