Twitter Thread by Rebecca Ingber



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When we think about culpability for the events of Jan 6, who to blame, and how to move forward, there are parallels to be found in the torture era in the "war on terror." And there are so many mistakes from that era that we might usefully consider today.

Obviously there are significant differences in substance, and I am not seeking to draw some specific parallel between the actors themselves, only how we approach accountability at the top and at the bottom.

During the United States' torture era, for lack of a better phrase, we had, as here, elite and highly trained lawyers, public figures, and government officials condoning, legally justifying, and calling for--in that case ordering--certain actions.

The Office of Legal Counsel within the Justice Department issued memoranda, seeking to justify the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques," in an effort to legally sanction the mistreatment of detainees and provide legal cover for those carrying it out.
https://t.co/x2GFZpSqoy

The truth is that despite these elite lawyers' willingness to turn the law into a pretzel to justify this mistreatment, it was unlawful. It was torture. And it was a war crime.

Those actors on the front lines, government officials or soldiers in the CIA or military, who stayed within the lines of what OLC condoned were never held accountable for these war crimes. Nor were those elite lawyers who justified their actions.

Only a few of the soldiers who listened to the public figures' dehumanization of the other and carried it out to such an extreme level that even the OLC memos' justification of torture could not cover them were ever charged and held accountable.
https://t.co/lowMFa5dFz

And the torture debate itself became a partisan divide in this country. Calls for accountability met with calls to "turn the page." Bipartisan attempts at understanding what happened turned into nasty partisan fights.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence issued a report on the CIA's torture program and Republicans on the committee issued their own dissenting view.
https://t.co/kTPOFdNGVy

The elite lawyers in OLC and the public officials who justified and called for torture went back to their lives. They are judges, tenured professors, respected elder statesmen.

If we want to move on from this moment and say "never again, never again will we permit armed insurrection to threaten the very tenets of our democratic process," then what is the right way to do so?

Is it merely enough to hold accountable those who -- believing the lies their senators and congressmen and President told them, that the election had been stolen -- violently stormed the Capitol in response?

Or is there a deeper rot that we need to confront? Mustn't we not stop and say no, we will not let truth become a partisan issue? That we will not allow the peaceful transition of power to become a matter of political debate?

The only way to do this that I can see is to hold people accountable for the lies they have told to their own people. There is no closing our eyes and moving on -- as we did as a nation after the torture era.

The result of that era is that there is no common belief about what happened or about the acceptability of using torture as a tactic again. This alone is unacceptable.

And we cannot let it become a norm that one political party may simply refuse to accept the legitimate results of an election that it lost, or that some politicians will use lies about the results of an election to spin up support or violence against their political opponents.

To be clear, there is a bottom-up aspect to this whole event as well. The Trumps and Hawleys and Cruzs in power were not alone in seeking to capitalize on lies about the stolen election. So too were those extremists fomenting hate for years online from their basements.

These extremists seeking to foment violence by capitalizing on the normalization of lies by politicians and public figures have an analog to the torture era too -- the sadists who took advantage of the country's wars and prejudices to commit atrocities at home and abroad.