

Limbaugh and torture 'lite'

By Rory O'Connor

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Will someone please put a bag over Rush Limbaugh's head? Last week, as the world stared transfixed at images of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of American soldiers, and editorials in virtually every major American newspaper— across the ideological spectrum – denounced the practice as torture, Limbaugh leapt to its defense.

To the drug-addled radio host, it's morally acceptable to dehumanize people by sticking bags over their heads, stripping them, freezing them, hanging them by their wrists, attaching electrodes to their genitals but (here's where the "lite" part comes in) only pretending you'll turn on the juice – all because "we're at war with these people."

Limbaugh justified the guards' actions by stating they were just "having a good time," and that they needed an "emotional release," adding that it "sounds pretty effective to me if you look at it in the right context." Here are more horrifying remarks:

"We hear that the most humiliating thing you can do is make one Arab male disrobe in front of another. Sounds to me like it's pretty thoughtful. Sounds to me in the context of war this is pretty good intimidation – and especially if you put a woman in front of them and then spread those pictures around the Arab world. And we're sitting here, 'Oh my God, they're gonna hate us! Oh no! What are they gonna think of us?' I think maybe the other perspective needs to be at least considered. Maybe the people who ordered this are pretty smart. Maybe the people who executed this pulled off a brilliant maneuver."

To Limbaugh, the torture pictures were no different than a pop music concert or – get this – "standard good old American pornography:"

"Here we have these pictures of homoeroticism that look like Britney Spears or Madonna concerts or whatever, and yet the Libs upset about the mistreatment of these prisoners thought nothing of sitting back while mass graves were being filled with three to 500,000 Iraqis during the Saddam Hussein regime."

Incredibly, Limbaugh is not alone. Hannity and Colmes hosted a guest, former U.S. Army

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sergeant and interrogation instructor Tony Robinson, who stated, "Frat hazing is worse" than "what [was] happening in these pictures." And Jonathan Last of the Weekly Standard agreed, telling Dennis Miller on cable channel CNBC that he believed worse things happen in fraternity houses.

One has come to expect such moronic blather from not-so-compassionate conservatives like Limbaugh, Hannity and Last. But they are not the first to endorse "torture lite." In the run-up to the Battle of Iraq, Newsweek and MSNBC pundit Jonathan Alter was among those arguing in favor of similar practices. And author Mark Bowden of "Blackhawk Down" fame wrote a long and carefully reasoned cover story for the Atlantic in which he explored the issue – and in the end declared torture lite both necessary and acceptable.

Still, neither went as far as Limbaugh, who blamed the uproar on his belief that "a lot of the American culture is being feminized," concluding "the reaction to the stupid torture is an example of the feminization of this country."

Call me a woman -but call me an American too – and I say "No to torture. Not in my name, and not in the name of my country."

What do you say?

– Rory O'Connor writes a weekly column on the media for AM New York.