

Canada should investigate Dick Cheney for war crimes. When he comes to Toronto will we give him safe harbour?

As vice president, Dick Cheney was a key architect of U.S. policy that bordered on war crimes.

By [Global Research News](#)

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Former U.S. president George W. Bush and former vice president Dick Cheney presided over policies that some say constituted war crimes.

By: Matt Eisenbrandt and Katherine Gallagher

On Halloween this year, Toronto will host the man who operated from the “dark side” of U.S. policy. As vice-president of the United States, Dick Cheney was a key architect of a post-9/11 response that featured waterboarding and other acts of torture, a global secret detention program where people were held for years without charge, and “extraordinary rendition,” by which innocent men such as Maher Arar were sent to countries like Syria to be tortured. His legacy of “endless war” continues today.

Canada has previously played high-paying host to Dick Cheney, as well as his former boss, George W. Bush. Even though they’ve left office, both men not only know they are safe from prosecution in the United States – where President Obama early on set out his preference for looking “forward” not back – but in Canada as well.

Dick Cheney’s [\\$500-a-person book tour appearance in Vancouver](#) in September 2011 resulted in protests, with demonstrators calling for Cheney to be banned or prosecuted as a war criminal. Instead of returning to Canada last year, [Cheney cancelled a trip to Toronto](#), deeming Canada too dangerous because of the likely demonstrators that would greet him. It’s unclear why Cheney now feels safe enough to venture north to Toronto – for Halloween.

Bush was also met by hundreds of [protestors seeking his arrest](#) when he spoke at a business forum in Surrey, British Columbia in October 2011. In addition, with the support of the Canadian Centre for International Justice (CCIJ) and the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), four men who were tortured at Guantánamo initiated a [private prosecution for torture against Bush](#).

The four men – Hassan bin Attash, Sami el-Hajj, Muhammed Khan Tumani and Murat Kurnaz – charged Bush with overseeing a torture program in locations including Afghanistan, Iraq,

Guantánamo and numerous prisons and CIA “black sites” around the world. As part of this program, the men were beaten, hung from walls or ceilings, deprived of sleep, food and water and subjected to extreme temperatures, among other acts of abuse they endured while in U.S. custody.

Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Torture. Under the Torture Convention, Canada is obligated to investigate and prosecute known torturers present in its territory (or, when possible, extradite them elsewhere for prosecution). Canada has incorporated this obligation into its domestic criminal code. The 64-page indictment and thousands of pages of supporting material submitted by the four tortured men clearly demonstrated that an investigation – and prosecution – of Bush for torture was warranted.

Instead of prosecuting Bush, Canada [rolled out the RCMP](#) to facilitate his visit – and more disturbingly, watched the Attorney General for British Columbia immediately [shut down the prosecution against him](#).

Canada should have investigated these crimes.

[Canada’s violation of its Torture Convention obligations](#) became an issue in 2012 when it appeared before the United Nations Committee Against Torture, which [admonished Canada](#) to “take all necessary measures with a view to ensuring the exercise of the universal jurisdiction over persons responsible for acts of torture, including foreign perpetrators who are temporarily present in Canada.”

The following November, the four men [filed a complaint](#) with the committee against Canada for its failure to investigate and prosecute Bush. After getting an extension, Canada finally submitted [its response](#) on October 29. Canada did not argue that Bush enjoyed any immunity under law as a former head of state or that the allegations of torture against him were frivolous or politically motivated. Canada’s defence was that practically, it could not pursue an investigation or prosecution because the authorities wouldn’t get the necessary assistance from their close partner, the United States. Canada argued that any evidence “of torture by the U.S. government resides, for the most part, within the very centre of the U.S. administration and with present and former U.S. officials residing in the United States.” That Bush enjoys safe harbour in the U.S. under the Obama administration cannot be sufficient reason for Canada to abdicate its own responsibility under the convention to prevent impunity.

In the weeks leading up to Cheney’s visit, human rights groups have been calling on Canada to uphold its international obligations and investigate Cheney for torture and war crimes. The thousands of people around the globe who have suffered under the Bush administration’s torture and detention policies deserve no less.

With Dick Cheney’s Halloween visit, Canada has another opportunity to show torture survivors, and the world, that it will not serve as a safe haven for torturers.

Matt Eisenbrandt is legal coordinator for the Canadian Centre for International Justice and

Katherine Gallagher is senior staff attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights.

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