

Congress should hold the CIA accountable

by *The Detroit News*

The U.S. House should probe the destroyed CIA videotapes to uncover the full story and to keep the record straight: Congress oversees the CIA, not the other way around.

Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-Mich., is helping lead the charge on the tapes, which showed al-Qaida suspects questioned and subjected to the practice of waterboarding. Hoekstra took on the Justice Department's attempt to stall a probe by the House Intelligence Committee.

Hoekstra, the ranking GOP member of the committee, is in no mood to let spies off the hook.

"You've got a community that's incompetent. They're arrogant. And they are political," he says. "And I think we're going to hold (CIA Director) Mike Hayden accountable."

The issue is not interrogation technique per se, but accountability to Congress.

Did the CIA keep congressional oversight committees fully informed about the tapes and the decision to destroy them? The CIA believes it met its obligations, even if the agency fell short of full disclosure.

But as Hoekstra points out, lawmakers determine what counts as a satisfactory report to Congress, not the spy agency.

Some senators call for a special prosecutor in the case. None is needed. Congress and the Justice Department are capable of getting to the bottom of the matter.

CIA operatives taped interrogations to create a record to see if they missed anything the first time around. But then the CIA destroyed the tapes for fear they would leak.

If they leaked, the interrogators might be in danger of retaliation from al-Qaida operatives, the agency said.

Fearing a leak doesn't say much for the competence of the country's premiere spy shop.

For decades, CIA and Congress have jostled over accountability. Spies like secrets. Congress takes its oversight role seriously. Over the years, the CIA has thumbed its nose at oversight and even operated outside the law, according to a best-selling history of the agency, "Legacy of Ashes," by Tim Weiner.

And that goes to Hoekstra's point. The agency must be held accountable for its actions.

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