

CIA documents point to massive and ongoing government criminality

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28 June 2007

The CIA's release Wednesday of a nearly 700-page, previously classified set of documents known within the agency as the "family jewels" has served to spotlight rampant state criminality in Washington that continues to this day.

The documents were compiled in the midst of the 1973-74 Watergate scandal, sparked by the bungled burglary of Democratic Party offices in Washington, in which two of the perpetrators were long-time CIA operatives. The CIA assembled the documents as part of an attempt to shield itself from the ensuing crisis of the Nixon administration.

The documents provide a written record of crimes ranging from the CIA's collaboration with the Mafia in the attempted assassination of Cuban President Fidel Castro to an assassination plot against Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, spying on journalists, antiwar and civil rights activists and other opponents of US government policy, and infiltration of covert agents into left-wing organizations.

In a statement to CIA staff members on the release of the documents, the agency's current director, Michael Hayden, described the declassification as an effort to close the door on an unpleasant but long ago concluded chapter in the CIA's history.

The documents, he said, represented "reminders of some things the CIA should not have done." They provide, he claimed, "a glimpse of a very different era and a very different agency." Post-Watergate reforms, he contended, had given the CIA "a far stronger place in our democratic system."

Yet a succession of recent revelations concerning CIA kidnappings and torture as well as wholesale illegal domestic spying refute Hayden's attempt to portray the criminal activities of an agency once known as Murder Inc. as ancient history. Reading these documents in the context of present political developments calls to mind William Faulkner's observation: "The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past."

While little in the declassified documents represents information that was not already in the public domain as a result of investigative reporting and congressional probes carried out more than three decades ago, the files have nonetheless aroused substantial public interest, including among the majority of the US population which was not yet born at the time of the original revelations.

This popular resonance stems from the stark similarities between the illegal activities carried out by the CIA in the 1960s and 1970s and the current crimes of the Bush administration.

On Wednesday, just a day after the release of the "family jewels," a Senate committee issued subpoenas to the White House, Vice President Dick Cheney's office, the National Security Council and the Justice Department for documents related to a massive domestic spying operation mounted by the National Security Agency (NSA) on the orders of Bush administration by means of warrantless wiretaps and the collection of millions of call records. The White House response indicated that it will continue to stonewall congressional investigators.

Hayden himself presided over these domestic spying programs as director of the NSA from 1999 to 2005.

Last week, John Rizzo, the man nominated by the Bush administration to serve as the CIA's general counsel, indicated in congressional hearings his agreement with the administration's ruling defining torture so narrowly—causing pain associated with organ failure or death—as to allow water-boarding and other forms of torture by CIA interrogators, who have trained military personnel in the same methods.

Rizzo, a career CIA attorney, refused to answer whether the CIA had used its kidnappings and "extraordinary rendition" flights to transfer prisoners to third countries in order that they be tortured in secret prisons. While the CIA lawyer claimed that it was impossible to discuss this issue in a public session, numerous international investigations and testimony by those who have been abducted have already exposed the CIA's current practice of "disappearing," torturing and, in some cases, murdering alleged terror suspects.

The juxtaposition of the CIA documents that were compiled more than three decades ago with the exposure of the current illegal practices of the agency and other branches of the US national security establishment raises a number of profoundly disturbing political questions.

While the revelations of CIA plots and conspiracies in the 1970s triggered public outrage, extensive media investigations and aggressive congressional probes, the Bush administration has thus far proven able—thanks in large part to the complicity of congressional Democrats—to suppress similar challenges to operations that in many ways are even more criminal than those carried out three decades ago.

The treatment of the type of actions that caused an immense national scandal nearly 35 years ago as standard operating procedure in the ongoing "global war on terror" is a measure of the deep-going criminalization of America's political

establishment and the financial oligarchy it represents.

One thing that the documents released Wednesday establish is that the US government, while claiming to be waging a worldwide war on terrorism, historically and today represents the principal force for terror on the planet.

Among the more revealing documents contained in the “family jewels” is a memo drafted by James Jesus Angleton, the agency’s longstanding chief of counterintelligence, who directed such programs as CHAOS, involving domestic surveillance and infiltration of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the US. (Aside from the brazen violation of the Bill of Rights involved in such activities, the CIA was barred by its charter from engaging in any form of domestic, as opposed to foreign, spying).

The subject line of the memo is “Joint CIA/USAID Terrorist (Technical Investigations Course).”

Described as a “training course for foreign police/security personnel” run jointly by the CIA and the Agency for International Development, it included training in interrogation and surveillance as well as discussions with the “students” on “terrorist and other hostile activities currently existing in their countries.”

This was followed by training in the use of explosives designed to “develop basic familiarity and use proficiently through handling, preparing and applying various explosive charges, incendiary agents, terrorist devices and sabotage techniques.”

Such schools were used to train terrorists, secret police operatives and death squads that were unleashed against the working class movement throughout Latin America and elsewhere, inflicting death, terror and torture on hundreds of thousands of people and destroying the democratic rights of millions.

One student at an earlier version of such schools was long-time CIA operative Luis Posada Carriles, who is currently being harbored by the Bush administration, which refuses to extradite him to Venezuela to face charges in connection with the 1976 terrorist bombing of a Cuban civilian airliner in which 73 people lost their lives.

The documents contained in the “family jewels” only hint at such crimes. There is no mention of the CIA-organized coups in Iran, Guatemala, Chile or Indonesia, nor any material on the organization of the death squads in Central America or the bloody clandestine and illegal wars the agency organized in Southeast Asia, Angola, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and elsewhere, which together claimed millions of lives.

Even what is presented is heavily censored, with dozens of pages—at least 10 percent of the entire document—whited-out. The National Security Archive, an independent non-governmental research institute and library located at George Washington University, pointed to one document that had previously been released in 1977. The document concerned the CIA’s role in providing the Secret Service with a safe house and surveillance equipment to spy on protesters coming to the 1972 Democratic and Republican national conventions in Miami.

The archive posted both the 1977 version and the newly released one side by side, showing that more than half of the information released 30 years ago had been excised.

So much for CIA Director Hayden’s claim that the release of the “family jewels” showed that the agency is being “as open as

possible” with the American public.

Indeed, in the opening section of the “family jewels,” which summarizes the CIA’s illegal activities in eight points, the very first point is blanked out. This comes before the agency’s conspiracy to organize an operation with the Mafia to kill Castro. Presumably, whatever crime is still being concealed was even more heinous.

There is ample reason for taking such extreme care with the material in these documents, and it has nothing to do with the usual pretext of protecting intelligence “sources and methods.”

In its coverage of the release of the “family jewels,” the *New York Times* published a graphic chronology of their history, including photographs of leading participants in the creation and handling of the documents. Featured prominently in these photos are none other than Vice President Cheney and former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, both of whom were intimately involved in what Rumsfeld, White House chief of staff in 1975, referred to as a “damage-limiting operation.”

Also pictured are George H.W. Bush, the former president and father of the current occupant of the White House, who took over as director of the CIA during the same period, and former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, who remains a prominent advisor to the present administration.

It also should be recalled that some of the worst crimes catalogued in the “family jewels”—assassination plots against foreign leaders and spying on civil rights and antiwar activists, as well as on journalists—were organized either at the direct behest or with the approval of the Democratic administrations of presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Undoubtedly, the release of documents requested more than 15 years ago under the Freedom of Information Act was intended as a public relations exercise to distract public opinion from the current crimes of the CIA and portray the agency as a more democratic and open institution.

Its effect, however, is just the opposite, underscoring the culpability of not just the CIA, but also both major political parties and key figures who remain at the pinnacle of state power, in historic and continuing crimes against working people all over the globe.



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