

Investigate US torture and prosecute those responsible

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Considerable efforts are being made in various quarters to cover up the record of US torture and prevent the prosecution of military and Central Intelligence Agency torturers and those higher up who ordered them to carry out their crimes.

Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee are reportedly holding up approval of Barack Obama's nominee for attorney general, Eric Holder, until he promises not to prosecute any former Bush administration officials for their part in approving torture.

Not that the incoming Obama regime needs much encouragement along those lines. The new administration has made a series of cosmetic changes that will in no serious way alter the brutal course of US policy in regard to the "war on terror" and the treatment of detainees. The eventual closing down of the Guantánamo internment camp and illegal CIA prisons, as well as the official requirement that CIA and military personnel follow the Army Field Manual's prohibitions on torture, will resolve nothing.

The ideological and political framework—with its accompanying network of lies and justifications—for wars of aggression and attacks on democratic rights remains intact.

Obama's aim is to repair some of the damage done to America's standing as a result of the Bush administration's policy of abuse and torture carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo and a gulag of secret detention sites, without changing the essence of US foreign policy, the drive toward global hegemony, and the illegal and violent methods employed in the implementation of that policy.

The new president has made clear his administration has no plans to prosecute the perpetrators, whose transgressions, in any case, were carried out with the full knowledge and approval of leading Democrats in Congress. "I don't believe anybody is above the law,"

Obama told the media. "On the other hand, I also have a belief that we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards." This is, for all intents and purposes, a preemptive pardon for torturers.

It is critical, however, that just such an investigation into US torture and associated illegal practices be carried out, and the guilty parties, up to the highest levels of the Defense and State departments and the White House, be prosecuted.

To pretend, as supporters of Obama and the liberal media are now doing, that these criminal policies can be halted without an exhaustive examination of how they were ordered and carried out—and by whom—is a grotesque fraud.

This is a political and moral issue. The aim is not to exact revenge—although those responsible should pay a heavy legal price—but to expose and discredit the policies that have led to war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and threaten even greater crimes and disasters in the future. The American military-intelligence apparatus, the greatest instrument of terror and violence on earth, needs to be uprooted and dismantled. A first step is the careful recording and public exposure of its many crimes.

Bush officials remain confident that they will not be called to account for their actions. They can certainly hold over the heads of the Democrats their own complicity. The *Wall Street Journal* did just that January 6 in a commentary entitled "What Congress Knew About 'Torture.'"

The *Journal* comment points out that leading Democrats—including representatives Nancy Pelosi and Jane Harman and senators Jay Rockefeller and Bob Graham—were briefed more than 30 times, beginning in the spring of 2002, on the "CIA's covert antiterror interrogation programs" and its methods, "including waterboarding and other aggressive techniques."

The article continues: "After September 2006, when President Bush publicly acknowledged the program, the

interrogation briefings were opened to the full committees. If Congress wanted to kill this program, all it had to do was withhold funding. And if Democrats thought it was illegal or really found the CIA's activities so heinous, one of them could have made a whistle-blowing floor statement under the protection of the Constitution's speech and debate clause."

The complicity of the Democrats and the liberal media continues. True to form, *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen has written a piece justifying the cover-up of the Bush administration's illegal activities.

In keeping with the current motif of Americans' supposed collective guilt for the economic crisis and everything else done by the government and the ruling elite, Cohen sums up the theme of the piece in his headline, "Torture? Prosecute Us, Too." He argues that in "the very different country called Sept. 11, 2001" there was widespread support for brutal measures. George W. Bush enjoyed "an approval rating of 92 percent, which meant that almost no one thought he was on the wrong course."

As always, the assertion of "collective guilt" is used to shield those who are really guilty.

Asserting that "questions about the viability of torture were very much in the air," Cohen points to the support for torture among fellow liberals, including attorney Alan Dershowitz (who "was suggesting the creation of torture warrants—permission from a court to, in effect, break some bones") and *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter.

"The conventional wisdom," writes Cohen, "that torture never works—so counterintuitive as to be an absurdity—was not yet doctrine. Neither for that matter was the belief that the coming war in Iraq was a moral and practical absurdity. Congress overwhelmingly voted for war and the American people overwhelmingly supported it."

This, of course, is a further libel. In the first place, Bush was installed in 2000 by the US Supreme Court, not elected, after failing to win the popular vote. Moreover, a massive number of Americans opposed the looming Iraq invasion and protested in the hundreds of thousands in mid-February 2003. Millions of others were highly skeptical about the government's claims. Under the mistaken impression that the Democratic Party would do something to stop the war, the American people elected a majority of Democrats to Congress in 2006 and voted for Barack Obama in 2008.

Even if one were to accept the premise that most of the population backed the initial attack on Iraq, that would amount, above all, to an indictment of the American

media, including Cohen, who supported the drive to war and uncritically transmitted the lies of the White House and Pentagon. Famously, Cohen swallowed whole the falsifications passed off at the United Nations by Secretary of State Colin Powell on February 5, 2003 about alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, declaring the presentation to be "bone-chilling in its detail."

Having played his own filthy role in making all the subsequent tragedy possible, Cohen now holds the American people responsible for everything he condoned and legitimized.

"We tortured. So says the incoming attorney general, Eric Holder. We tortured. So says the person in charge of deciding such matters at Guantanamo."

No, "we" didn't. On orders from the White House, the US military and CIA tortured, with the approval of Cohen and the political-media establishment.

"What are we going to do about it?," asks the *Post* journalist. After first asserting the need to find out how the government came to torture and abuse, otherwise "we will not know how to ensure that the future doesn't wind up looking much like the past," the columnist proceeds to endorse the rationale that led to the criminal practices.

"At the same time, we have to be respectful of those who were in that Sept. 11 frame of mind ... and who, in any case, were doing what the nation and its leaders wanted. It is imperative that our intelligence agents not have to fear that a sincere effort will result in their being hauled before some congressional committee or a grand jury."

Precisely the argument of the *Wall Street Journal* and the ultra-right.

David Walsh

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