

The lies of the CIA and Nancy Pelosi

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Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi charges the CIA with lying to her about torture in a 2002 briefing, a charge denied by the agency. What is certain is that she and the Democrats have lied systematically to the American people to obscure their complicity in the crimes of the Bush administration.

On Thursday, Pelosi called a Capitol Hill press conference in an attempt to clear the air about what she was told by the Central Intelligence Agency and what she knew about torture.

A CIA report released last week claimed that in a September 2002 briefing, the agency had described torture methods, including waterboarding, and informed Pelosi and her Republican counterpart, Congressman Porter Goss, that they were being employed against Abu Zubaydah, who by that time had been waterboarded at least 83 times.

While Pelosi had given the impression that she knew nothing about this torture because the CIA failed to inform her in the 2002 briefing, it then emerged that she had been told about the active use of waterboarding in February 2003—just five months later—by her senior aide based on a subsequent briefing.

In her press conference, the House speaker claimed that at the 2002 briefing, the CIA reported that the Justice Department had issued memos arguing that waterboarding and other “enhanced interrogation techniques” were legal, but were “not being employed.”

Pelosi went on to acknowledge that after she was informed that the CIA was torturing suspects in February 2003, she did nothing, leaving it to her successor as the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee, Congresswoman Jane Harman, to write a letter to the agency “raising concerns.”

Her entire story strains credulity. Even if what she says is true and the CIA did not inform her in 2002 that it was torturing Zubaydah, did she really believe that the agency’s briefers were describing methods of

torture and Justice Department memos justifying them because the Bush administration did not intend to use them?

Pelosi advanced another alibi. “Like all members of Congress who are briefed on classified information,” she said. “I have signed oaths pledging not to disclose any of that information. This is an oath I have taken very seriously, and I’ve always abided by it.”

Like all members of Congress, she also took an oath of office “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States,” but clearly that pledge took a back seat to defending the secrets of an agency known throughout the world as Murder Inc. Her oath would not have stopped her from denouncing torture in 2003, if she had really opposed it.

It should be recalled that in 1971 Alaska Democratic Senator Mike Gravel, an opponent of the Vietnam War, took to the floor of the US Senate to read into the record the so-called Pentagon Papers, a collection of secret documents on the war, after the Justice Department had obtained injunctions against their publication by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Gravel relied on a clause in the US Constitution that protects members of Congress from arrest for anything said from the floor of the House or Senate.

It would not occur to Pelosi to invoke this constitutional privilege because she did not oppose torture. It was not her oath of secrecy that kept her quiet but her class position. Like the rest of the well-heeled and thoroughly vetted members of the House and Senate intelligence panels, she defends the CIA because the agency’s assassinations, torture, kidnappings and other crimes are carried out in defense of the interests of America’s ruling financial oligarchy.

This is what makes all the more significant her statement at the press conference that the CIA had lied to her and that “they mislead us all the time.” It is an indication of the extent to which the attempt by the Obama administration to make a partial disclosure of

the Bush administration's record on torture and then "move forward" has thrown the Democrats into crisis and opened up a bitter internecine struggle within the state apparatus itself.

Pelosi's statement provoked a terse memo from Leon Panetta, Obama's appointee as CIA director.

"The political debates about interrogation reached a new decibel level yesterday when the CIA was accused of misleading Congress," he said. "CIA officers briefed truthfully on the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah. It is not our policy or practice to mislead Congress. That is against our laws and our values."

In other words, the Democratic head of the CIA is defending the practices carried out under the Bush administration and calling the Democratic leader of the House of Representatives a liar. Nothing could expose more clearly the role of the CIA and the national security establishment as a virtual state-within-a-state, answerable to no one.

Its power has been strengthened by the two wars of aggression launched under Bush and continued under Obama as well as the array of repressive legislation from the Patriot Act to the legalization of domestic wiretapping, illegal detentions and kangaroo military commissions, all passed with Democratic support.

It is this record that has emboldened the Republican right, which has seized on Pelosi's contortions on torture to make the case that nobody in Washington has clean hands and any real investigation of torture and the other crimes of the Bush administration would drag in the Democrats as well.

The point is valid, but it only underscores the fact that these crimes were the product not merely of the rabid politics of the Republican right, but of the deep decay of American democracy under the pressure of capitalism's crisis and the unprecedented growth of social inequality. This is why they were supported by both major parties, the media and the entire political establishment.

Clearly, the Democratic Party and the Obama administration are thoroughly compromised and cannot be entrusted with any investigation of the crimes in which they were complicit. Any congressional hearings, blue ribbon panel or "truth commission" as proposed by Pelosi would be a whitewash.

This cannot be accepted. The investigation and prosecution of all those responsible for torture, wars of

aggression and the other crimes carried out over the last eight years is vital for the defense of democratic rights and the moral health of society. If they are not investigated and prosecuted, these crimes will continue and be turned increasingly against the struggles of working people in the US itself.

The fight to hold accountable those who ordered, participated and covered up for these crimes can only be seriously undertaken by working people themselves as part of the struggle to build their own mass political movement fighting for socialism.

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