

CIA probe shields architects of US torture regime

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27 August 2009

The Obama administration's release of a 2004 internal CIA report on torture and the announcement by the Justice Department of an extremely limited investigation into actions by individual interrogators is part of an elaborate attempt to cover up the scale of the crimes carried out under the Bush administration, while shielding its top figures from prosecution.

While compelled by court order to release the CIA inspector general's report in a case brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Obama administration substantially censored the document, blacking out 36 pages entirely and heavily redacting another 30 pages on the grounds of "national security."

According to "a former senior intelligence official" cited by ABC News Wednesday, a substantial amount of the material concealed from public view deals with the deaths of three detainees and the disappearance of several others.

Two of the deaths occurred in Iraq and a third in Afghanistan. They appear to be similar in nature to a fourth death, details of which were left in the released document. That was the case of Manadel al-Jamadi, which became famous by images of grinning American military guards crouching over his corpse at the Abu Ghraib prison.

In that case, the detainee died after suffering a severe beating and being subjected to a stress position that CIA interrogators referred to as the "Palestinian hanging," in which the subject is suspended by his hands which are manacled behind his back. In a 2005 article by the *New Yorker's* Jane Mayer, al-Jamadi's CIA interrogator was identified as Mark Swanner. While army investigators classified the death as a homicide, to date no charges have been brought against Swanner. Only a handful of junior enlisted reservists photographed with the corpse—who had nothing to do with the murder—were prosecuted.

The censoring of information on similar torture deaths means that the Obama administration is acting to ensure that those who planned, ordered and executed the torture program under Bush are literally allowed to get away with murder.

Nor is this a matter restricted to the three deaths concealed in the report released Monday. Human rights groups have unearthed information on at least 100 detainee deaths during interrogations, and, given the cover-ups carried out by the military and the CIA, there is ample reason to believe that there are many more.

An indication of the widespread character of such fatal abuse was given by retired US Army General Barry Richard McCaffrey

during an interview on MSNBC television news last April, following President Obama's speech to CIA employees at the agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

"We should never, as a policy, maltreat people under our control, detainees," said McCaffrey, who made repeated inspection tours of US-occupied Iraq on behalf of the military's Central Command. "We tortured people unmercifully," he added. "We probably murdered dozens of them during the course of that, both the armed forces and the CIA."

It is not as if the crimes detailed in the un-redacted sections of the CIA report are not heinous enough. CIA interrogators, according to the report, carried out mock executions, placed guns to detainees' heads and threatened to kill them, menaced them with power drills and threatened to rape their wives and kill their children.

Physical abuse included: subjecting detainees to induced drowning or waterboarding, soaking them with water and placing them in cold rooms to induce hypothermia (the cause of at least one documented death), beating them with rifle butts, banging their heads against the wall and hanging them in so-called "stress positions" that tore shoulders from sockets and—in the case of al-Jamadi—apparently resulted in death by asphyxiation.

In Abu Ghraib, Bagram in Afghanistan and at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, those subjected to these barbaric methods were never convicted of any crime and, in the great majority of cases, there was no substantive evidence linking them to any act of terror.

All of this amounts to criminal and systemic torture, carried out under the orders and close supervision of the highest levels of the US government. Whether some of the detainee deaths resulted from interrogations that went beyond the methods spelled out in the "torture memos" issued by the Bush administration Justice Department, clearly many others resulted from interrogators following the CIA's standard operating procedures.

The sharply circumscribed investigation announced by Attorney General Eric Holder Monday is designed to assure that none of those responsible for these killings is ever prosecuted.

In announcing the appointment of federal prosecutor John Durham to investigate the CIA interrogations, Holder said he would be conducting only a "preliminary review" to determine whether the torture sessions violated US laws.

Holder offered assurances that no CIA interrogator who carried out torture according to the guidelines laid down by the Justice

Department memos would face any penalty.

Durham has not been named as an independent prosecutor, which would have given him broad powers to pursue an investigation, but rather is being kept under a tight leash by Holder. The attorney general, while claiming to be following the mandate of the law, is in fact tailoring the probe to the oft-stated determination of the Obama White House to “look forward and not backward” and avoid holding any senior officials responsible for the crimes carried out under the Bush administration.

At most, the investigation initiated by Holder is aimed at uncovering a few “bad apples” among the CIA interrogators, thereby repeating the scenario that played out following the exposure of the horrors at Abu Ghraib, with the prosecution of a handful of low-ranking enlisted personnel.

As in that case the effect would be the scapegoating of a few CIA interrogators—who no doubt did carry out torture and even murder—for the far more serious crimes committed by Bush, Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, George Tenet and others in adopting torture as a state policy and directing it from the White House.

In any case, most legal experts have expressed extreme skepticism in the Justice Department’s ability to mount a criminal prosecution against individual interrogators.

Several human rights groups have responded to Holder’s announcement by condemning the deliberately narrow focus of the investigation.

The American Civil Liberties Union, whose Freedom of Information Act suit forced the release of the CIA IG report, demanded a “full investigation into torture of prisoners and those who authorized it.”

In an opinion piece published in *USA Today*, ACLU executive director Anthony Romero said that there is ample evidence that “the Bush administration’s torture program was widespread, systemic and authorized at the highest levels of government.”

“Given all the evidence,” Romero continued, “it is troubling that the attorney general is still clinging to a ‘bad apples’ approach and resisting a thorough criminal investigation of not only those who committed torture, but also those who authorized and legally condoned it.”

“Any investigation that focused only on so-called ‘rogue’ interrogators who acted outside of official authorization, but no senior officials with overall responsibility for the CIA program, would lack credibility,” Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

And the Center for Constitutional Rights condemned any probe that would be limited to a “few low-level operatives.” It insisted, “Some agents in the field may have gone further than the limits so ghoulishly laid out by the lawyers who twisted the law to create legal cover for the program, but it is the lawyers and the officials who ... must be investigated.”

Meanwhile, both Obama’s own appointee as CIA director and the Republican right have voiced strong opposition to even a limited investigation.

In a memo to CIA personnel written Monday, the agency’s director Leon Panetta called the continuing revelations on torture “an old story” and vowed he would “stand up for those officers who did what their country asked and who followed the legal

guidance they were given.”

The Republicans, meanwhile, warned that any investigation into CIA torture would result in another 9/11.

The announcement of the probe constituted “a reminder, if any were needed, of why so many Americans have doubts about this administration’s ability to be responsible for our nation’s security,” declared former Vice President Cheney, a vocal proponent of waterboarding.

And in a letter to Holder, six Republican senators, including Jon Kyl, the Senate minority whip, and Kit Bond, the ranking Republican on the Senate intelligence committee, warned, “We fear that the true cost of this endeavor will ultimately be borne by the American people, who rely on the intelligence community, operating without distraction, to protect them from the many threats, known and unknown, that our country faces in this post-9/11 world.”

This pressure from the right and from within the military and intelligence apparatus, which acts as a virtual state within a state in Washington, will ensure that Obama and Holder maintain tight control over the announced probe.

The Democratic administration itself has no interest in a genuine investigation into the crimes of the Bush administration because it is continuing many of these same practices—from rendition, to the imprisonment of detainees without charges, to domestic spying, not to mention the two wars of aggression launched under the previous administration.

Under conditions of the worldwide crisis of capitalism and unprecedented levels of social misery and inequality within the US, there is a real threat that these same methods of state terror will be brought “home” and used to suppress opposition by the American working class to the policies of the ruling financial elite.

Holding accountable the real architects of the policies of torture, assassination and aggressive war is essential for the defense of basic democratic rights and for the clearing of the political, and indeed moral, atmosphere in the United States. This vital task can be realized only as part of the independent political mobilization of working people against the profit system and the state that defends it.



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