CIA scandal: Leaks reveal brutal torture methods and government lies

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A still-classified Senate Intelligence Committee report contains damning information on both the extent of US torture methods and the lies of top CIA officials about these programs, according to information in a *Washington Post* article on Monday.

The government torture methods revealed by the *Post*, based on information from anonymous US officials, include sadistic forms of inflicting pain that are associated with the most brutal police state and fascistic regimes.

According to the *Post*, the Senate report "concludes that the CIA misled the government and the public about aspects of its brutal interrogation program for years—concealing details about the severity of its methods, overstating the significance of plots and prisoners, and taking credit for critical pieces of intelligence that detainees had in fact surrendered before they were subjected to harsh techniques."

The terms utilized by the *Washington Post* in its article—"brutal" torture methods, "excruciating" pain, "sprawling" black sites—gives an indication of the chilling and deeply criminal character of a torture operation directed by the highest levels of the CIA as a matter of official state policy. The original crimes and their subsequent coverup, by both the Bush and Obama administrations, are all impeachable and prosecutable offenses.

The report details how one prisoner, Ammar al-Baluchi, was taken from Pakistan in 2003 to a CIA black site called "Salt Pit" near Kabul, where he "endured a regime that included being dunked in a tub filled with ice water. CIA interrogators forcibly kept his head under the water while he struggled to breathe and beat him repeatedly, hitting him with a truncheon-like object and smashing his head against a wall, officials said."

After he endured torture at "Salt Pit," Baluchi was transferred to a CIA torture chamber in Romania where he was held until 2006. He was then taken to Guantanamo Bay, where he remains today. Military prosecutors have opposed a Senate Intelligence Committee request for Baluchi's medical records.

Anonymous US officials also pointed to the similar case of Hassan Ghul, an alleged al-Qaeda operative who was captured in Iraq, tortured at the black site in Romania, turned over to Pakistani authorities and eventually released, before being killed by a CIA drone strike in 2012.

Other prisoners had buckets of ice water poured into their noses and mouths and over their bodies until they felt they were suffocating, and until they were close to dying of hypothermia.

CIA-employed "doctors" would monitor vital signs so as to ensure that prisoners did not die and thereby prevent further interrogation.

So heinous were some torture methods that in at least one case lower-level CIA officials walked off the job when forced by their superiors to inflict pain in a manner that even they saw as unconscionable. According to the *Post*, "The report also cites cases in which officials at CIA headquarters demanded the continued use of harsh interrogation techniques even after analysts were convinced that prisoners had no more information to give."

The material leaked to the *Post* also makes clear that the inhumane treatment of prisoners did not lead to a significant increase in the amount of "intelligence information" gathered by the CIA. Such a revelation contradicts the chorus of lies used by the Bush administrations to justify the programs, and by the Obama administration to cover up for their blatant unconstitutionality.

Current CIA Director John Brennan (then in the private sector after a stint in the Bush administration) told CBS News in 2007, "There have been a lot of information [sic] that has come out from these interrogation procedures that

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the [Central Intelligence] Agency has in fact used against the real hard-core terrorists who have been responsible for 9/11, who have shown no remorse at all for the deaths of 3,000 innocents."

The *Post* cites one US official who said, "The CIA described [its program] repeatedly both to the Department of Justice and eventually to Congress as getting unique, otherwise unobtainable intelligence that helped disrupt terrorist plots and save thousands of lives. Was that actually true? The answer is no." Criticism of the efficacy of torture has been raised by sections of the political establishment, as well as officials in the FBI.

The report details how the CIA lied about statements made by a suspected al-Qaeda operative named Abu Zubaydah, who was waterboarded 183 times by the CIA after his capture in 2002. Videotapes of these and other torture interrogations were later destroyed by the agency. Though the CIA has claimed that Zubaydah gave-up valuable information upon being waterboarded, the Senate report contains evidence that "almost all of the critical threat-related information from Abu Zubaida was obtained during the period when he was questioned... at a hospital in Pakistan, well before he was interrogated by the CIA."

On top of this, the CIA inflated the importance of many prisoners in order to justify their torture. The Senate report reveals that several "masterminds" and "senior al-Qaeda operatives" were only recruiters or foot soldiers.

The appearance of the *Post* article and the possibility that some or part of the Senate report will be declassified, or leaked by whistleblowers, sharpens the crisis that has emerged within the state over the program itself and the unconstitutional efforts of the CIA and the Obama administration to spy on Senate investigators, to suppress the report and to intimidate Congress and Congressional staff into halting their investigation.

The dispute began three weeks ago, when Senator Dianne Feinstein delivered a speech in which she charged the CIA with violating the separation of powers doctrine in the Constitution and of breaking laws by spying on Senate staff carrying out an investigation of the CIA torture program.

A week later, Senator Harry Reid issued a letter to CIA Director Brennan, informing Brennan that he had instructed the Senate Sergeant at Arms to perform a "forensic examination" of the computer network used by Senate staff for their investigations.

The CIA and the Obama administration have ignored Senate requests for an assurance that such illegal surveillance and intimidation will not occur again. The Obama administration has given its full support to the CIA, with White House Press Secretary Jay Carney explaining that President Obama has "great confidence in John Brennan and confidence in our intelligence community and in our professionals at the CIA."

The administration has itself withheld over 9,000 top-secret documents from the Senate investigators.

Whatever may come of the developing crisis within the state apparatus, no genuine support for the democratic rights of the population will come from the likes of Feinstein and Reid, whose proclivities for state surveillance are made clear by their avid support for the spying programs of the National Security Agency. In line with this approach, the Senate has kept the chilling content of the report secret and has proceeded with closed-door appeals to the CIA, made entirely behind the backs of the American public.

Moreover, according to the *Post*, "U.S. officials said the committee refrained from assigning motives to CIA officials whose actions or statements were scrutinized. The report also does not recommend new administrative punishment or further criminal inquiry into a program that the Justice Department has investigated repeatedly." The recent Senate report even keeps secret the locations of hitherto unknown black sites and the names of those guilty of committing torture.

The Senate Intelligence Committee is due to vote on Thursday to send the Obama administration an executive summary of the report. If it is declassified at all, that process will take many months and will be subjected to redaction and censorship.

But the recent revelations raise another question: If torture does not lead to intelligence gathering, as the CIA previously claimed, then what purpose does the program serve and why did it continue? The reality that is beginning to emerge is that the barbaric torture regime initiated and legitimized by the state under the auspices of the events of September 11 is aimed not simply or even primarily at perceived challenges from "terrorists" abroad, but at developing methods of fear and state oppression that will be directed at all opposition to the policies of the ruling class, abroad and at home.

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