

Senate panel votes to declassify part of report on CIA torture

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The Senate Intelligence Committee voted Thursday to declassify the 480-page executive summary of its massive three-volume, 6,300-page report on the torture of prisoners held in secret CIA prisons between 2002 and 2006. The vote at a closed-door meeting was by a margin of 11-3, with one senator absent.

According to media reports, the full report includes previously undisclosed information about brutal and illegal methods employed by the CIA, as well as systematic cover-up and lying by the spy agency.

Passage of the resolution to declassify the summary was ensured when the two senators from Maine who are members of the committee—Republican Susan Collins and independent Angus King, who caucuses with the Democrats—issued a joint statement saying they would vote to declassify.

Collins and King were joined by all seven committee Democrats, and by two Republicans, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, the senior Republican on the committee, and Richard Burr of North Carolina. Chambliss and Burr are opposed to the report's findings but voted to declassify so that the minority rebuttal and a CIA critique of the report would be declassified as well.

The Republican minority on the committee refused from the beginning to participate in the investigation that produced the report, claiming it was an effort to target the previous administration of President George W. Bush.

Committee chairman Dianne Feinstein of California, in a statement issued the day of the vote, said, "The purpose of this review was to uncover the facts behind this secret program, and the results were shocking." She added, "The report exposes brutality that stands in stark contrast to our values as a nation. It chronicles a stain on our history that must never again be allowed to happen... This is not what Americans do."

Contrary to this sanctimonious sentiment, the activities detailed in the Senate report are central to the functioning of American imperialism, both in relation to its opponents overseas, and increasingly at home as well. The US government became deeply committed to torture, as a core component of the Bush administration's "war on terror," and there is no doubt that similar brutality continues at Guantanamo Bay and at other locations around the world, even if it is conducted more discreetly under Obama.

The furious opposition to the torture report on the part of Senate Republicans and the CIA itself—now led by Director John Brennan, a former aide in the Obama White House, where he headed the drone-missile assassination program—testifies to the continuing importance of these criminal methods in the eyes of the American capitalist state. The CIA and its defenders are not just justifying the crimes of 2002-2006, but covering up for ongoing crimes and those who are perpetrating them.

As part of this opposition, the CIA, according to Feinstein, illegally and unconstitutionally spied on Senate staffers preparing the report—an operation that the Obama administration sanctioned.

Feinstein's own opposition to the torture program is highly qualified. She has not supported releasing the bulk of the Intelligence Committee report, which will remain classified. Even the executive summary, which is being sent to the White House, will be heavily redacted by the CIA before publication.

The California Democrat said she hoped the report would be released in redacted form within 30 days, but unnamed US officials told the press it could be many months before the summary is ready for publication. White House press secretary Jay Carney said there was no deadline for publication.

A coalition of civil liberties and human rights groups sent a letter to Obama last week urging that the White House rather than the CIA oversee the declassification, “given the CIA’s inherent conflict of interest concerning the report.”

The senior legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, Christopher Anders, elaborated on this appeal after the Senate committee vote, declaring, “The key challenge for President Obama now is whether he will finally stand up to the CIA. The president should assert his authority to have the White House itself, and not the CIA, decide what gets declassified and what gets redacted. The CIA should not be handed a black-out pen to hide its use of torture or the lies it told to keep the torture program going.”

This statement expresses the most grotesque illusions in Obama, who has had the closest connections to the intelligence apparatus, going back to the very beginning of his career as an analyst for Business International, a company which served as cover for CIA agents operating overseas. While the ACLU urges Obama to “stand up to the CIA,” there is no reason to believe that there is the slightest difference of opinion between the two. Only last year Obama placed his own chief organizer of assassinations, Brennan, at the head of the spy agency.

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