

State Department acknowledges widespread torture in leaked memo

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In an internal State Department memo inadvertently leaked to the press, the United States government acknowledges that it orchestrated an international program of torture, the limits of which extend far beyond what is already known to the public.

Referring to a 6,300-page Senate report that is still classified, the State Department “talking points” state that “the report leaves no doubt that the methods used to extract information from some terrorist subjects caused profound pain, suffering and humiliation. It also leaves no doubt that the harm caused by the use of these techniques outweighed any potential benefit.”

The leak of the State Department memo came only a few hours before the Central Intelligence Agency’s Office of the Inspector General announcement that the agency spied on Senate staffers involved in investigations as part of preparing the report. (See: “A law unto themselves: the CIA and the torture cover-up”)

Both the State Department talking points and the CIA OIG announcement are part of an effort at damage control. Each was prepared in anticipation of the forthcoming publication of a declassified version of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s 600-page executive summary of its investigation into Bush-era CIA torture. They come only two weeks after the Obama administration announced that it would not pursue charges against the CIA for spying on the Senate.

The State Department memo begins with a series of “talking points” that the State Department hopes will help officials respond to media questions with the appropriate lies and obfuscations. In this section, the memo states: “[t]his report tells a story of which no American is proud. But it is also part of another story of which we can be proud. America’s democratic system worked just as it was designed to work in bringing an end to actions inconsistent with our democratic values.”

The memo also asserts, “Our Congress issued this

report, and the Obama administration supported its declassification, in that spirit.”

In reality, the crisis developing as a result of the torture programs and the Obama administration’s response are proof of the breakdown of “America’s democratic system”—not of its health. What is involved is blatant illegality on a world stage and the systematic attempt to cover up for those who ordered these criminal actions.

Despite the telling obfuscations that make up the first section, the memo’s second part is even more revealing. It is comprised of a list of possible questions that the State Department suggests officials should be prepared to answer from journalists and the public.

The content of the questions selected makes two things clear. First, the administration is aware that it has been caught covering up for widespread unconstitutional activity. Second, the administration is very nervous about widespread public indignation following the publication of the Senate report.

“Isn’t it clear that the CIA engaged in torture as defined in the Torture Convention?” the memo asks. “Now that the report is released is the White House prepared to concede that people were tortured—or will this be like the non-coup in Egypt where you won’t admit the obvious?”

Further: “What are you still trying to hide?”

Only a historically bankrupt regime with nothing to offer the population of the world would be capable of asking itself such questions. What’s more, the responses that will pour out of the mouths of the likes of State Department spokespersons Marie Harf and Jen Psaki will only serve as further evidence of the bankruptcy of the entire political establishment.

The State Department memo expresses a further concern that the publication of the crimes committed by the CIA will make it more difficult for American imperialism to carve up the world and subject the population of seven continents to the diktats of finance

capital.

Under a header titled “implications of release of the report for [U.S. Government] stance/credibility on human rights,” the memo poses a series of hypothetical questions that the State Department says officials should be prepared to answer.

* “Is the administration further undermining our moral authority?”

* “In light of the findings in the report, has the United States complied with its obligations under international law regarding issues such as culpability, accountability, redress, and remedy?”

* “What standing does the U.S. have to criticize or judge other countries’ human rights practices when it itself sanctions torture and other violations of basic human rights in the name of national security?”

If they were to speak truthfully, the short answers to these questions would be: The US has no moral authority, it is violating and will continue to violate international law, and it has absolutely no credibility in its proclaimed concern for “human rights.”

This last question is particularly problematic for the Obama administration, which is preparing to launch new imperialist wars on the basis of so-called “humanitarian” crises.

While avoiding use of the word “torture,” the State Department memo explains that there is “no doubt” that the government engaged in what amounts to criminal activity. This statement vindicates everything that has been revealed by whistle-blowers Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, yet all three have been prosecuted or driven into exile.

Assange remains holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London on trumped-up allegations of rape. Snowden was forced to leave his family and friends to find safe haven in Russia. Meanwhile, July 30 marked one year since Manning was convicted on charges for which he is now serving a 35-year sentence.



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