

# Former head CIA lawyer defends torture in *Der Spiegel* interview

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In an August 20 interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, former acting CIA General Counsel John Rizzo defends his role as the legal architect of the US government's international campaign of detention and torture.

In the interview, Rizzo, who worked at the CIA from 1976 to 2009, declares that although the torture programs he approved "seemed harsh, even brutal," he does not regret his support for their implementation.

"I was certainly an architect of the interrogation program, even if I didn't originally come up with it," he says, adding, "I was the legal architect of the proposed list of techniques and played the lead role in obtaining legal approval for their use."

He goes on to tell *Der Spiegel*, "I can't honestly sit here and say I would have made any different decisions than the ones I made back in early 2002," even as he asserts, "I am confident that, If I had chosen to, I could have stopped [the torture programs] before they started."

At one point in the interview, Rizzo refers to an interrogation technique on the initial list provided by the Counter Terrorism Center that was "even more chilling than waterboarding." He claims it was never used.

Asked by the interviewer what the technique was, Rizzo replies: "I'm not allowed to specify it; it is still classified. I had no preparation when the counterterrorism people came to me, and so my first reaction was one of being rather stunned by what was being proposed."

Given the sadistic character of the so-called "enhanced interrogation" methods that have been acknowledged, one can only imagine the gruesome nature of the proposal that was supposedly rejected.

These statements make clear that Rizzo and his co-

conspirators, including the highest officials in the Bush administration, were absolutely clear about the savage and inhuman measures they were implementing. Other parts of the interview establish that they were also well aware of their illegality.

"I had been at the CIA long enough at that point to know when a proposed activity was bound to get the agency in trouble," Rizzo states, and then adds, "From the beginning, this proposal had deep trouble written all over it."

The interview sheds light on the role of the Obama administration in protecting the architects of the state torture programs. It begins with Rizzo noting his "surprise" upon hearing Obama proclaim earlier this month that "we tortured some folks."

What surprised Rizzo wasn't the flippancy with which the president discussed violations of the US Constitution and international law. "What did surprise me, in a good way," Rizzo says, "is that Obama went on to point out that the people who first conceived and carried out the program in the wake of 9/11 were under tremendous pressure to protect the country at a time of national crisis. He even called us patriots."

Rizzo notes the rapidity with which Obama accepted and expanded the Bush administration's police state "national security" programs. "With the exception of the interrogation program, he endorsed all operations and even intensified the general program," the former CIA lawyer states.

He continues: "When Obama came into the White House, he reviewed the operations, found them all to be effective and valuable. Every US president fairly quickly comes to really value having the CIA at his disposal. *The CIA reports directly to the president and responds to his wishes. It does what it does in secret, with no messy political debates.* In Obama's case, I

think he recognized it almost immediately.” [Emphasis added.]

Not only has Obama expanded the vast majority of the Bush-era programs, he has protected those responsible for torture. This goes beyond labeling the criminals as “patriots.”

John Brennan, who led the Counter Terrorism Center in 2004 and 2005, was appointed CIA director by Obama in 2013 and confirmed with the overwhelming support of Senate Democrats. Last May, Obama nominated David Barron, the author of the pseudo-legal memorandum authorizing drone assassinations of US citizens, for an open seat on the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. Barron easily won confirmation by the Senate.

More recently, the Obama administration has been delaying the release of a still-classified Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture that is widely expected to reveal state torture on an even broader scale than is currently known.

Obama allowed several of the architects of the state torture program to secretly view and redact the Senate report before its release. Rizzo himself was not amongst those given access to the document, a slight against which he indignantly protested.

Nevertheless, Rizzo is sufficiently confident that he faces no legal threat from the Obama administration, Congress or the courts, and can rely on the American media to cover up his crimes, that he boasts of his role in the torture program to a major international publication. The interview is, in fact, part of a publicity campaign to promote his new book about his years with the CIA.

That his confidence is well placed is demonstrated by the failure of any major US media outlet to report his interview with *Der Spiegel*.

The full complicity of Obama in the methods of torture and illegal detention pioneered by his predecessor is chillingly underscored by one exchange in the interview. *Der Spiegel* asks whether “the presidential directive you wrote with George Bush which allowed the targeted assassination of terror suspects” is still in effect. Rizzo replies: “It was signed just a few days after Sept. 11 and, as far as I know, it is still in effect today.”

Rizzo attempts to foist the blame for the torture and state assassination programs on the American people.

When asked about the White House’s post-September 11 decision to authorize the CIA to “do whatever is necessary” to halt the ostensible terrorist threat, Rizzo says “the phrase is a characterization of the atmosphere and the consensus in the country.”

This is a lie. All of these programs were instituted secretly, behind the backs of the American public, precisely because those implementing them knew they would be massively opposed.

Rizzo’s interview should be taken as a warning to the working class. It reveals the prevalence within the highest echelons of the American state of fascistic elements who would have had no problem serving as functionaries of Hitler’s Gestapo or SS.

The development of a mass movement of the working class in defense of democratic rights must assume as one of its major tasks the prosecution and conviction of political criminals such as John Rizzo, John Brennan, Dick Cheney, George Tenet, Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft and George W. Bush, and their continuators, beginning with Barack Obama.



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