CIA employed “medieval” torture that brought prisoners “to the point of death”

Thomas Gaist
9 September 2014

The CIA engaged in brutal torture that brought prisoners to the brink of death, according to a report published over the weekend in the British newspaper, the *Telegraph*. The methods used far exceed what has been previously acknowledged by the CIA and the Bush and Obama administrations.

“They weren’t just pouring water over their heads or over a cloth,” said an unnamed source who had “first-hand knowledge of the period,” according to the *Telegraph*. “They were holding them under water until the point of death, with a doctor present to make sure they did not go too far. This was real torture.”

“They got medieval on his ass, and far more so than people realize,” he added, referring to one of the individuals tortured.

In 2008, the Bush administration publicly acknowledged the use of “waterboarding” several years earlier against alleged terrorists, including Abu Zubaydah, who was subjected to the torture 83 times, and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was tortured 183 times.

A 2004 CIA internal document, released in 2009, described what the Bush administration euphemistically referred to as “enhanced interrogation techniques.” Waterboarding was described as a method in which water is sprayed on detainees’ faces for “no more than 20 seconds” to “simulate drowning.” As revealed by the *Telegraph* ’s source, however, Mohammed and Zubaydah were subject to much harsher methods.

The interrogation sessions referred to by the *Telegraph* source were videotaped, but some 90 tapes containing the torture footage were destroyed in 2005 by US intelligence personnel under the supervision of the then-head of the CIA’s National Clandestine Service, Jose Rodriguez. In 2010, the Obama administration announced that it would not file criminal charges relating to the destruction of the tapes.

The *Telegraph* article makes clear that the tapes destroyed in 2005 showed that “enhanced interrogation” was being supplemented by unambiguous acts of torture, implicating CIA agents and Bush administration officials in clear and direct crimes under both international and domestic law.

The revelations come as the US Senate Intelligence Committee is preparing to release a more than 3,000-page report on CIA torture. A summary of the report is set to be published in the coming weeks after being thoroughly vetted and redacted by intelligence officials.

In March, Senator Dianne Feinstein revealed that CIA agents had spied on the computers of Senate staff who were involved in compiling the report, a violation of US law and the Constitutional separation of powers. This was part of a broader effort by the CIA to cover up its illegal actions, a cover-up that has been aided and abetted by the White House.

The Obama administration responded by seeking to defend the CIA, operating as a direct agency of the intelligence bureaucracy. The White House itself was implicated in efforts to withhold key documents from the Senate.

After expressing transparently contrived regrets that “we tortured some folks” during a press conference last month, Obama immediately proceeded to signal the solidarity of his administration with the countless high-ranking US government personnel involved with the CIA’s secret international network of torture centers. Obama declared his “full confidence” in CIA Director Brennan, who was a central player in the crimes documented by the Senate report while serving as a top counterterrorism official under the Bush administration.

In doing so, Obama was only reaffirming the position

© World Socialist Web Site

that it will hold no one accountable for the massive crimes, including torture.

The Obama administration has also explicitly defended the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), James Clapper, who is overseeing the CIA's redaction of the Senate report. Clapper committed perjury when he issued blanket denials of unconstitutional domestic spying by the National Security Agency (NSA), which he also oversees, during Congressional hearings. These lies were exposed in subsequent revelations from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

In an official statement totaling three sentences, Clapper rebuked Feinstein's mild objections to the CIA redactions, writing, "More than 85 percent of the Committee Report has been declassified. The redactions were the result of an extensive and unprecedented interagency process, headed up by my office, to protect sensitive classified information."

Clapper himself personifies the decomposition of American democracy: after lying to the US Senate directly and having his lying clearly exposed, he remains in charge of declassifying what is one of the most significant reports on criminal activity to be released by the US government in the country's entire history.

For her part, Feinstein, who initially denounced the CIA spying, quickly reeled in her rhetoric. By midsummer Feinstein announced her support for the decision of the Justice Department not to launch an investigation, while praising CIA Director John Brennan for taking steps in the right direction.

What the *Telegraph* article and the political crisis over the Senate report reveal is a government and state apparatus that is steeped in criminality. The intelligence agencies operate as a law unto themselves, rejecting any oversight or accountability.

No one can be held accountable because the entire government, including high-ranking officials in the intelligence agencies and the military, along with the top officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations and leading Congressional figures in both political parties, are implicated.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site