

# Brutal torture detailed in Senate report on CIA interrogation

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The unclassified executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s report on CIA interrogation, released yesterday, reveals a brutal program of torture and abuse, implicating the US government in crimes that are far more extensive than previously acknowledged.

The 500-page report of CIA torture under the Bush administration was released on Tuesday morning, accompanied by remarks on the Senate floor by committee chairman Dianne Feinstein. It is a summary of a larger, still classified, 6,700-page document compiled by Senate staff from 6 million pages of documents.

Though the Intelligence Committee report was completed in 2012, the CIA, with the collaboration of the Obama administration, has sought to obstruct its release.

The report paints a picture of an intelligence agency that operates outside of all legal restraint. In reading the report, one gets the impression of a grotesque experiment to test methods aimed at reducing prisoners to a state of absolute submission.

Beyond “waterboarding” (a euphemism for repeatedly submerging a prisoner in water to the point of death), the torture methods approved by the CIA include “rectal rehydration,” by which prisoners were fed rectally “without documented medical necessity.” This was done as part of efforts to exert “total control over the detainee,” according to the CIA’s chief of interrogations.

Prisoners were also regularly thrown against walls and subjected to “rough takedowns,” in which “approximately five CIA officers would scream at a detainee, drag him outside of his cell, cut his clothes off, and secure him with Mylar tape. The detainee would then be hooded and dragged up and down a long corridor while being slapped and punched.”

Other detainees were subjected to “mock burials,” and were kept in small boxes in which they were unable to move for hours at a time. One prisoner, Gul Rahman, was forced to take “ice water baths” and was then “held

partially nude and chained to a concrete floor” until he died of hypothermia. One of the officers responsible for Rahman’s death was then given a “cash award” of \$2,500 by the CIA for his “constantly superior work.”

According to the report summary, “CIA officers also threatened at least three detainees with harm to their families—to include threats to harm the children of a detainee, threats to sexually abuse the mother of a detainee, and a threat to ‘cut [a detainee’s] mother’s throat.’”

Further, “[o]ne interrogator told another detainee that he would never go to court, because ‘we can never let the world know what I have done to you,’” and another interrogator “engaged in ‘Russian Roulette’ with a detainee.”

A CIA employee noted that prisoners in the COBALT detention facility (described by the chief of interrogations as “the dungeon”) “literally looked like a dog that had been kenneled,” and that when the doors to their cells were opened, “they cowered.”

The torture tactics were such that many prisoners attempted suicide and self-mutilation. The report summary notes that “Majid Khan engaged in acts of self-harm that included attempting to cut his wrist on two occasions, an attempt to chew into his arm at the inner elbow, an attempt to cut a vein in the top of his foot, and an attempt to cut into his skin at the elbow joint using a filed toothbrush.”

The report summary details how the CIA hired two doctors, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen (identified in the report by the pseudonyms, Grayson Swigert and Hammond Dunbar), to develop a method of torture whereby prisoners could be reduced to a state of physical and mental devastation. The doctors based their recommendations on the theory of “‘learned helplessness,’ in which individuals might become passive and depressed in response to adverse or uncontrollable

events.”

According to the report summary, Mitchell and Jessen “received \$81 million” from the CIA for their services. Moreover, “in 2007, the CIA provided a multi-year indemnification agreement to protect [Swigert and Dunbar’s company] and its employees from legal liability arising out of the program.”

At least 26 prisoners are acknowledged to have been held without any basis whatsoever. One of these prisoners was an “intellectually challenged” person “whose CIA detention was used solely as leverage to get a family member to provide information.”

The report summary enumerates dozens of occasions when high-ranking CIA officials lied to Congress and the public. In the course of a single hearing to the Senate Intelligence Committee on April 12, 2007, then-CIA Director Michael Hayden lied about a total of 17 subjects related to the torture programs.

The report summary also contains very revealing information about the relationship between the CIA and the corporate media.

The report details how “in seeking to shape press reporting on the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program, CIA officers...provided unattributed background information on the program to journalists for books, articles, and broadcasts...”

CIA Senior Deputy General Counsel John Rizzo noted on one occasion that the CIA director had “blessed” a journalist who was friendly to the torture programs. These efforts were made as part of a “public campaign” which included a strategy to provide journalists with inaccurate information on the torture programs.

The document notes that the CIA had a particularly cooperative relationship with the *New York Times*, that the paper had “provided the CIA with a detailed outline” of at least one article, and that *Times* journalist Douglas Jehl had “informed the CIA that he would emphasize that the CIA’s enhanced interrogation techniques worked, that they were approved through an inter-agency process, and that the CIA went to great lengths to ensure that the interrogation program was authorized by the White House and the Department of Justice.”

Obama, who has worked with CIA Director John Brennan—himself one of the architects of the CIA torture program under Bush—to block and obstruct the Senate report, released a statement on Tuesday praising the CIA. He added that he hoped the decision to formally end the torture program would help refurbish the image of the United States internationally.

The report, Obama said, “reinforces my long-held view that these harsh methods were not only inconsistent with our values as a nation, they did not serve our broader counterterrorism efforts or our national security interests.”

Since coming to office, Obama has insisted that there would be no accountability for the crimes carried out by the Bush administration. He sought again on Monday to exonerate those responsible, saying in a prepared statement, “In the years after 9/11, with legitimate fears of further attacks and with the responsibility to prevent more catastrophic loss of life, the previous administration faced agonizing choices...”

“Rather than another reason to refight old arguments,” Obama added, “I hope that today’s report can help us leave these techniques where they belong—in the past.”

The White House/CIA effort to quash the report continued up to last Friday, when Secretary of State John Kerry took the extraordinary step of appealing directly to Feinstein to delay the release of the report. The transparent aim of this request was to allow the new, Republican-controlled Senate to come to office in January, guaranteeing that the then-Republican-controlled Intelligence Committee would bury the executive summary.

Meanwhile, former Bush administration officials, led by former Vice President Dick Cheney, have rushed to defend the program and denounce the release of the committee report.

Speaking on NBC News on Tuesday night, former CIA Director Michael Hayden claimed that the methods described in the Senate report did not amount to torture. “As bad as some people think CIA behavior was... if everyone on the planet used CIA behavior as the model, the overall treatment of detainees on earth would actually improve,” Hayden said.



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