

Obama CIA director defends “enhanced interrogation” torture program

Niles Williamson, Joseph Kishore
12 December 2014

CIA Director John Brennan gave an extraordinary press conference from CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia on Thursday, aggressively defending the agency and the “enhanced interrogation” torture program exposed in a recently-released Senate Intelligence Committee report.

Brennan, who was a top official in the CIA when the torture program was planned and implemented by the Bush administration, echoed many of the comments made by Obama himself in a prepared statement released on Tuesday.

Speaking as the head of an agency that operates outside all legal restraint, Brennan said he hoped that it would be possible to “put aside this debate and move forward to focus on issues that are relevant to our current national security challenges.” In other words, no one is to be held accountable for clear and grave violations of domestic and international law.

Brennan opened his press conference with a lengthy and tendentious account of the September 11, 2001 attacks. He claimed that an aggressive response from the CIA was necessary, as there were “credible” reports of further attacks on the United States. Repeating the previous statement from Obama, Brennan said that the Bush administration “faced agonizing choices about how to pursue al-Qaeda and prevent additional terrorist attacks against the country.”

In other words, according to Brennan, the torture program was an entirely legitimate response to the threat of terrorism. This is the same argument deployed by every military dictatorship to justify torture and other crimes: The only way to ensure “national security” is to employ the most brutal forms of violence and adopt police state forms of rule.

In fact, the September 11 attacks—the circumstances of which have still not been the subject of an

independent investigation—were not the cause of the CIA response, but rather were utilized as the catchall justification for torture, aggressive war and the destruction of democratic rights within the US.

Brennan presented what he repeatedly called “EITs” (enhanced interrogation techniques) as lawful and appropriate, though he added that in the view of the current president they “made it harder to pursue our interests with allies and partners.” In other words, the decision on whether or not to adopt a policy of torture is a question not of legality, but the tactical considerations of the ruling class in pursuing its geostrategic interests.

The current CIA director, who under the Bush administration served as the deputy director to CIA chief George Tenet, insisted that all the “EIT” methods were “determined at the time to be lawful and...were duly authorized by the Bush administration.” This only confirms that top officials in the administration, including the president and vice president, are implicated in the crimes.

While defending the “enhanced interrogation program” as a whole, Brennan indicated that there were a “limited number of cases” in which agents made “mistakes” and used methods that “had not been authorized.” He did not indicate which of the torture techniques—waterboarding (repeated near-drowning), death threats, forced standing for days on end, sleep deprivation for over a week at a time, shackling prisoners to walls and forcing them to stand on broken limbs, “ice baths” causing hypothermia and death, and sodomy (“rectal rehydration”)—Brennan considered to be “mistakes,” and which ones he considered to be “lawful.”

Brennan also followed Obama’s previous statement in heaping praise on the CIA officials, calling them

“patriots,” who had carried out “heroic service and sacrifices.” “They are among the best and brightest our nation has to offer,” he added.

While admitting that some representations by the CIA of its enhanced interrogations were “inaccurate, imprecise, or fell short of our tradecraft standards,” Brennan insisted that the CIA never misled Congress, the White House or the media about the effectiveness of the enhanced interrogation program.

Brennan also denounced the Senate Intelligence Committee for reaching its conclusion without “agreeing on a bipartisan way forward,” and without interviewing CIA personnel. It was the CIA itself, working with the Obama White House, which actively sought to block the Senate report from being published by withholding vital documents. Toward this end, the CIA under Brennan spied on Senate Intelligence Committee staffers preparing the report, in violation of the law and the US Constitution.

Questions from the media at the press conference focused largely on whether or not the CIA torture “worked.” In response, Brennan said that prisoners subjected to “EITs” provided “useful information,” but, “The cause and effect relationship between the use of EITs and useful information subsequently provided by the detainee is... unknowable.”

The US media as a whole has attempted to shift the discussion on the torture report from the illegality of the actions depicted to the efficacy of the methods as an instrument of policy.

Expressing the attitude of the CIA to any form of accountability, Brennan said as an aside to one question about his views on the torture program, “I think there’s more than enough transparency that has happened over the last couple days. I think it’s over the top.”

Asked whether the torture program might be formally reinstated in the future, Brennan said that he would “defer to the policymakers in future times when there is going to be the need to be able to ensure that this country stays safe if we face a similar type of crisis” as September 11.

These remarks expose the fact that the Obama administration’s decision to formally end the CIA torture program is entirely tactical in character. To the extent that the programs themselves have been temporarily halted, they have been replaced by the equally criminal policy of drone assassination, which

has killed thousands of people in countries throughout the world.

Responding to a question about the drone program, which Brennan helped devise and implement, he said that it had “done tremendous work to keep this country safe... It has advanced the counterterrorism mission, and the US military has done some wonderful things with these platforms.”

Brennan’s comments are further confirmation that, in the aftermath of the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report, the political establishment in the US is determined to ensure that no one will be held accountable. This is because the entire state apparatus—including the Obama administration—is culpable in the criminal conspiracy.

Brennan’s own evolution underscores the continuity between the Bush and Obama administrations. He was deputy executive director of the CIA between March 2001 and August 2004. This was the very the period in which the enhanced interrogation program was established and brutal torture techniques were carried out against detainees at black sites across the globe.

When he first came to office, Obama sought to appoint Brennan to head the CIA, but this proved politically impossible due to Brennan’s association with the torture programs. He was instead brought on as Obama’s counterterrorism advisor, a position that he occupied until his appointment as director of the CIA in 2013.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest reasserted the president’s absolute confidence in Brennan. “The president wakes up every morning pleased to know that John Brennan and the men and women of the CIA are hard at work using their skills and expertise to protect the American people.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact