

Part three

What is in the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture

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The 525-page executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee's 6,700-page report on CIA torture is an exposition of a criminal operation to detain and torture dozens of people under the most brutal conditions at a series of secret "black site" prisons throughout the world.

Carried out under the auspices of the "war on terror," the programs detailed in the executive summary were carried out in flagrant violation of the law, both domestic and international.

The first two parts of this three-part series, which summarize the report's findings related to the history of the CIA torture program and its component parts, read like criminal indictments of those responsible for overseeing the program. At every level of the torture operation—from the pseudo-medical professionals whose job it was to keep prisoners alive for further torture, to the program's architects in the CIA and Bush administration—the executive summary provides proof beyond a shadow of a doubt of the guilt of those involved.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, the Obama administration has announced that it will shield those responsible for torture from prosecution or punishment. Under the banner of "looking forward not backward," Obama has rewarded the architects of the torture operation, appointing John Brennan—a top CIA official under Bush and one of the program's supporters—as CIA director in 2013.

The third part of this series will deal with the relationship between the CIA and Congress, the White House and the media. Though the executive summary and Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, seek to portray the torture programs as a rogue operation carried out behind the backs of the rest of the government, the details contained in the report itself make clear that the entire political establishment is complicit in the torture program.

What emerges in the latter portions of the executive summary is the degree to which every level of the torture program was carried out and deepened on the basis of an ever-expanding web of lies. This is underscored by the report's third appendix, which is comprised of quotations from the closed-door testimony of then-CIA Director Michael Hayden to the Senate Intelligence Committee on a single day: April 12, 2007.

The 37-page appendix contains tables with two columns. In the left column are statements made by Hayden that day on a wide range of torture-related subjects. In the right column—in bullet point form—is overwhelming factual evidence, based on internal CIA documents reviewed by the Committee, refuting each of Hayden's claims.

The executive summary notes that Hayden and other top CIA officials lied about 17 different subjects, including "the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah," "the backgrounds of CIA interrogators," "the number of CIA

detainees and their intelligence production," "the interrogation process," "threats against detainees' families," "the punching and kicking of detainees," "denial of medical care," "dietary manipulation," "the use of waterboarding and its effectiveness," and "the injury and death of detainees."

According to the summary, a high-ranking officer of the Counter Terrorism Center "provided inaccurate information on the CIA's use of stress positions," and "Acting General Counsel John Rizzo provided inaccurate information on the legal reasons for establishing CIA detention facilities overseas."

In other words, multiple CIA officials told repeated lies relating to virtually every aspect of the torture program, all in a single day's work. Beneath each lie told on April 12, 2007 there is a vast foundation of related falsehoods.

The content of each lie is worth breaking down in closer detail. There is not space here to enumerate each of the lies. Only some of the most damning can be included.

First, the CIA lied repeatedly about the importance of detainees in order to justify their torture. In the case of Abu Zubaydah, initial CIA claims that the prisoner was the "third or fourth man" in Al Qaeda were false. Although the CIA in 2002 wrote that he "has been involved in every major terrorist operation carried out by Al Qaeda," and that he "was one of the planners of the September 11 attacks," the executive summary notes that "CIA records do not support these claims," and that "Abu Zubaydah was not a member of al-Qa'ida."

Second, the CIA lied when it said in 2002 that torture was necessary because "Abu Zubaydah was withholding information related to planned attacks against the United States." In fact, an internal CIA email from the same week explains that "[Abu Zubaydah] is not holding back actionable information concerning threats to the United States..."

Third, the CIA regularly lied about the extent of the torture it was inflicting upon detainees. CIA officials told the Department of Justice in 2004 that nude detainees were "not wantonly exposed to other detainees or by detention facility staff." In reality, prisoners "were 'walked around' by guards as a form of humiliation," a 2003 internal review shows.

In 2003, a CIA official "testified that standing sleep deprivation is discontinued when swelling or 'any abnormality' appears. This was inaccurate," the executive summary states. "For example, [Khalid Sheikh Muhammed's] standing sleep deprivation continued, notwithstanding pedal edema and abrasions on his ankles, shins and wrists, as well as the back of his head."

In 2004, the CIA told Acting Attorney General Daniel Levin that "there are no medical and psychological contraindications to the use of [interrogation] techniques" in the case of Janat Gul, who "had been subjected to the attention grasp, walling, facial hold, facial slap, wall

standing, stress positions, and sleep deprivation.”

CIA records, however, indicated that Gul was suffering from serious swelling in the legs and “that standing sleep deprivation continued despite Gul’s visual and auditory hallucinations and that Gul was ‘not oriented to time or place.’” The torture of Gul continued despite the fact that “CIA interrogators did not believe that Gul was ‘withholding imminent threat information.’” Gul’s interrogators wrote in 2004 that the interrogation team “does not believe [Gul] is withholding imminent threat information, however, team will continue to press [Gul] for that during each session.”

In 2005, the CIA lied to Assistant Attorney General Steven Bradbury about the role played by the medical aids through the CIA’s Office of Medical Services. The CIA asserted that torture victims had not complained about pain when they had, and that the torture does “not involve application of heat, cold pressure, any sharp objects (or indeed any objects at all).”

The summary explains that “much of this information was inaccurate,” and that when asked about discerning pain thresholds, the CIA explained that “all pain is subjective, not objective.” The CIA further noted in 2005 that “if [a prisoner] is in pain,” medical officers “do provide... Tylenol and Aleve to detainees who report headache and other discomforts during their interrogations.”

The CIA also wrote in an internal 2005 memo that the physical consequences of waterboarding “end when the application ends.” According to the executive summary, “this information is incongruent with CIA records,” and that detainees vomited after waterboarding, and, in the case of Abu Zubaydah, “became completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth.”

In his April 12, 2007 testimony, Hayden said that “Threats of acts of sodomy, the arrest and rape of family members, the intentional infection of HIV [!] or any other diseases have never been and would never be authorized. There are no instances in which such threats took place.”

The executive summary reads: “This testimony is incongruent with CIA interrogation records.” CIA records reveal an interrogator telling one prisoner, for example, that “we could get your mother in here,” and “we can bring your family in here,” and that “we’re going to kill your children.”

Hayden also told the Senate Intelligence Committee that “the most serious injury that I’m aware of... is bruising as a result of shackling.” When asked point-blank whether anyone died during the interrogations, Hayden said: “No,” despite the fact that one prisoner, Gul Rahman, died of hypothermia in CIA custody in 2002 after being subjected to “ice baths.”

Fourth, the CIA lied about who was carrying out the interrogations. The CIA told the Department of Justice in 2005 that all interrogators “have been appropriately screened.” However, the CIA selected the most sadistic of its officers to serve as torturers. The executive summary explains that “this group of officers included individuals who, among other issues, had engaged in inappropriate detainee interrogations, had workplace anger management issues, and had reportedly admitted to sexual assault.”

Fifth, the CIA falsely told the Department of Justice and Congress that the interrogation program prevented a number of terrorist attacks from taking place. These assertions, the executive summary states, “were almost entirely inaccurate.” Internal reports show that the CIA was aware of the false nature of the alleged terrorist plots. An internal CIA email from 2003 indicates that one threat to blow up the Brooklyn Bridge was “half-baked” and was “more of a nuisance [sic] than a threat.”

Sixth, the CIA lied about its destruction of videotapes of torture sessions in 2005. Following a 2007 *New York Times* article detailing the agency’s tape destruction, the CIA claimed that it had notified the Senate Intelligence Committee about the tape destruction in 2006. Not only was this “inaccurate,” according to the executive summary, but “CIA

witnesses testified at the [November 16, 2006] hearing that the CIA did not videotape interrogations, while making no mention of past videotaping or the destruction of videotapes.” In 2007, Hayden gave testimony on this subject to the Senate Intelligence Committee that “was inaccurate or incomplete,” according to the executive summary.

Seventh, Hayden lied about the response of some interrogators to the depravity of the torture. “I’m not aware of any [reservations],” he told the Senate Intelligence Committee. However, several internal CIA reviews establish that the opposite was the case.

From August 8, 2002: “Several on the team profoundly affected... some to the point of tears and choking up,” and “Today’s first session... had a profound effect on all staff members present... it seems the collective opinion that we should not go much further... everyone seems strong for now but if the group has to continue... we cannot guarantee how much longer.”

From August 9, 2002: “‘two, perhaps three [personnel] likely to elect transfer’ away from the detention site if the decision is made to continue with the enhanced interrogation techniques.”

From August 11, 2002: “Viewing the pressures on Abu Zubaydah on video ‘has produced strong feelings of futility (and legality) of escalating or even maintaining the pressure.’ With respect to viewing the interrogation tapes, ‘prepare for something not seen previously.’”

Jose Rodriguez, director of the Counter Terrorism Center, “instructed the CIA interrogation team to not use ‘speculative language as to the legality of given activities’ in CIA cable traffic.”

Though the Senate Intelligence Committee has attempted to pose as unknowing victims of the CIA’s lies, the evidence is to the contrary. Beyond their unwillingness to prosecute any of the torturers, Congress and the White House are complicit in all of the crimes carried out by the CIA during this period.

It is not as though the regular implementation of torture tactics on prisoners of the “war on terror” was unknown to the Senate even before details of the tape destruction were made public in 2007. In 2004, Congress worked with the Bush administration to suppress photographic evidence of torture carried out at the infamous Abu-Ghraib prison in Iraq, and later, in 2009, President Obama blocked the release of further photos, stating the release would “further inflame anti-American opinion” and “put our troops in greater danger.”

But despite the widespread knowledge of repeated torture by US forces, high-ranking members of the Senate Intelligence Committee refused to begin an investigation into the programs until 2009. Even then, the investigation was not to prevent the use of torture, but “to review the program and to shape detention and interrogation policies in the future.”

This delay took place even though senators had been well aware for years of the torture programs run by the CIA. In 2006, Feinstein wrote to Hayden, stating that she was “unable to understand why the CIA needs to maintain this program.” In 2007, Senators Chuck Hagel, Feinstein, and Ron Wyden wrote to Hayden and expressed their “discomfort” with the program. Thus, senators who had voiced their qualms about the torture program directly to the CIA put off any investigation until 2009.

Both former President George W. Bush and former Vice President Dick Cheney have undercut the Senate Intelligence Committee’s official narrative, which posits that culpability for the torture programs stops at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

Bush gave an interview in which he flatly denied that the CIA had misled him and affirmed that the program was carried out at his behest and with his knowledge.

Speaking on NBC News’ *Meet the Press*, Cheney said: “The notion that we were not notified at the White House about what was going on is not true. I sat through a lengthy session in ’04 with the inspector general of the CIA as he reviewed the state of the program at that time. The suggestion, for example, that the president didn’t approve it, wrong.

That's a lie. That's not true... There would be special meetings from time to time on various subjects that he would be directly involved in. This man knew what we were doing. He authorized it; he approved it."

It was not only Congress and White House that were involved in hiding the crimes of the CIA from the public. The Senate report details a CIA operation to recruit (or, in the words of then-CIA Director George Tenet, to "bless") loyal sections of the media (including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*) to aid the agency in lying to the population about the efficacy and extent of the torture programs. (See: "Senate report on torture exposes collusion between corporate media and CIA.")

Both the full extent of the program's depravity and its real purpose emerge from behind the CIA's veil of lies. If most of the victims of CIA torture were not high-ranking Al Qaeda leaders, and if the interrogators knew beforehand that the victims had no information to give, then the torture program subjected dozens of individuals to hallucinogenic levels of pain seemingly for no reason.

But this does not quite capture the full purpose of the programs.

They had, in part, the character of social experiments, in which the CIA tested not only the effects of torture on prisoners, but also on the interrogators themselves. They played, moreover, a critical role in the efforts of the US government to totally subordinate and crush the populations of the countries targeted by American imperialism. In this sense, the torture programs paralleled the US Marines' destruction of Fallujah in 2004.

The programs also tested the extent to which officials at the highest levels of the state could carry out war crimes without facing any repercussions. In this sense, the immunity granted by the Obama administration and Congress to the architects of CIA torture have proven the extent to which authoritarian and semi-fascistic elements dictate the actions of the government as a whole.

All of those responsible for the torture program, including Bush, Cheney, Tenet, Porter Goss, Hayden, Condoleezza Rice, Rumsfeld, Colin Powell and John Brennan, must be brought to justice and tried as war criminals.

It is clear that there are no means of bringing these criminals to justice within the framework of the current political set-up. Workers and young people must not appeal to the American ruling class to hold itself accountable for its own crimes. Instead, it is the working class itself which bears the responsibility for putting the torturers on trial, as part of a mass political movement in opposition to the existing economic and political system.

Concluded



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