

Washington buries the CIA torture report

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One month ago, the Senate Intelligence Committee released the 525-page summary of its voluminous report on the torture of prisoners in secret CIA facilities overseas, conducted between 2002 and 2007. In grisly detail, the report documented such practices as waterboarding, systematic beatings, and hitherto unknown tortures such as “rectal feeding.” But in practice, the report has been buried, its evidence of government criminality ignored, the perpetrators and organizers of torture going scot-free.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* declared at the time, “Two irrefutable conclusions flow from the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture: 1) The United States, during the Bush administration, committed criminal acts of the most serious character, in violation of international and domestic law; and 2) None of those responsible for these crimes will be arrested, indicted or prosecuted for their actions.”

Far from being shamed or humiliated by the detailed exposure of their criminality, those most implicated in the establishment and operation of the torture chambers have brazenly defended their conduct. From former Vice President Dick Cheney to ex-CIA directors George Tenet, Michael Hayden and Porter Goss, to the operational head of the interrogation program, Jose Rodriguez, they have displayed a well-justified confidence that the Obama administration will protect them from any consequences.

The Obama administration has officially shut down the secret CIA prisons and adopted a policy of blowing up its enemies with drone-fired missiles rather than capturing them. The shift from interrogation to extermination has increased the number of innocent victims many-fold. Whereas dozens of those jailed in CIA prisons were found to have no connection to terrorism, the drone-missile strikes have killed thousands of civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen

and other countries.

Two recent incidents demonstrate the complicity of the Obama administration with the torturers. On December 30, the outgoing chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator Dianne Feinstein, sent a nine-page letter to the president outlining proposed legislative and administrative actions to be taken on the basis of the torture report.

The changes were largely cosmetic, such as enacting into law the ban on waterboarding and other forms of torture imposed by executive order after Obama took office in 2009. Even these minimal legislative actions will go nowhere in the new Republican-controlled Congress, and the proposed administrative actions will be ignored by the military-intelligence apparatus. The White House has not bothered to respond to Feinstein’s letter.

In a statement issued January 5, the CIA announced that after four years in office, the agency’s inspector-general, David Buckley, was resigning, effective the end of the month, to “pursue an opportunity in the private sector.” Buckley ran afoul of the CIA top brass with a report last July acknowledging that five CIA operatives had penetrated the computers used by Senate Intelligence Committee staffers who prepared the torture report, in an effort to find out how the Senate panel had obtained certain CIA internal documents the agency had decided to withhold from the committee that has legal oversight authority.

This electronic surveillance of the legislative branch was so brazenly criminal that Senator Feinstein felt compelled to deliver a one-hour address on the floor of the Senate last March denouncing the agency’s actions. She charged that the agency “may well have violated the separation-of-powers principle embodied in the United States Constitution,” and also “the Fourth Amendment, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, as well as Executive Order 12333, which prohibits the

CIA from conducting domestic searches or surveillance.”

CIA Director John Brennan denounced Feinstein’s charges, and the agency sought Justice Department prosecution of the Senate staffers for alleged “theft” of CIA documents—i.e., evidence that CIA officials had lied about the torture and withheld information from the Senate panel. After Inspector-General Buckley’s investigation upheld Feinstein’s claim, Brennan had to publicly apologize to Feinstein, but he was not fired either for authorizing the surveillance of the Senate panel or for lying about it. Now Buckley has been pushed out.

Buckley’s resignation follows a report last month by the *New York Times* that a CIA review panel appointed by Brennan had rejected the inspector-general’s recommendations for punitive action against five CIA officials in connection with the surveillance of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and would propose that no one be disciplined. The panel’s two outside members are both Democrats—former Senator and Intelligence Committee member Evan Bayh, its chairman, and Robert Bauer, who served as White House Counsel during President Obama’s first term.

This confirms the pattern that the only torture-related “crime” that the Obama administration punishes is the effort to expose it. Hundreds of CIA agents and contractors were involved in the illegal torture program over a six-year period, but only one has ever been prosecuted: John Kiriakou, who publicly described the waterboarding of suspects and was jailed for 30 months for violating the Intelligence Identities Protection Act. Only one high-ranking CIA official has been sacked over the torture program: the inspector-general who undercut the agency’s efforts to cover it up.

The American media is an essential partner in this ongoing cover-up of government criminality. The report was initially the subject of massive media publicity, and the *New York Times* went so far as to publish a strongly worded editorial headlined, “Prosecute the Torturers and Their Bosses,” urging that charges be brought against Cheney, Tenet, Rodriguez and other former top officials. As the WSWP said at the time: “In effect, the most influential newspaper in the United States has declared that the Bush administration was a criminal government.”

In the weeks that followed, however, the media has

dropped the subject. There have been no followup reports on the biggest exposure of criminal actions by the military-intelligence apparatus since the revelations about CIA assassination plots in the early 1970s. The *Times* editorial urging prosecution of the torturers was evidently the last gasp of a guilty conscience. The leading US daily has not reported either Feinstein’s letter or Buckley’s resignation, a silence joined by the *Washington Post* and the television networks.

Behind the scenes, as Buckley’s ouster and Feinstein’s appeal demonstrate, a struggle is raging within the US ruling elite. The media silence is not merely to protect the criminals responsible for torture and murder. It is above all directed at disguising the ongoing political crisis, and excluding the vast majority of the American population, the working class, from any role in determining its outcome.

No section of the ruling elite will defend democratic rights. That task falls to the working class, which must take up the demand for the prosecution of all those responsible for the atrocities documented in the Senate report, and those responsible for the crimes of American imperialism that have continued and even escalated under the Obama administration.



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