

CIA whistleblower calls for prosecution of officials responsible for torture

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John Kiriakou, the former CIA agent who helped reveal the agency's use of waterboarding in a 2007 interview, was released from prison on February 3 after serving a two-year sentence.

Kiriakou was convicted in 2013 on trumped-up charges of violating the Intelligence Identities Protection Act, which he said was retaliation for "blowing the whistle on the CIA's illegal torture program and for telling the public that torture was official US government policy."

In an interview with *Russia Today* last week, Kiriakou called for the prosecution of those responsible for CIA torture, declaring, "no one went to jail but me."

"But what really bothers me, is that there is no prosecution of CIA officers who obviously violated the law; those CIA officers who were conducting interrogations in which prisoners were killed," Kiriakou said. "I have no idea why there is no outrage, and why those officers are not being prosecuted."

Kiriakou said he was proud to have helped expose torture by the government, despite the great cost to him personally. "You know, I really do believe that it was worth it. I'm proud to have played a role, however small, in the outline of torture in the United States."

He also recounted the subhuman conditions he faced while in federal prison, about which he is planning to write a book. "American prisoners aren't even fed human-grade food," he said. "And the medical care was even worse. There were almost a half a dozen deaths of prisoners when I was there in prison, and almost every one of those deaths was preventable."

News reports from Kiriakou's time in prison allege that he also faced harassment from the prison administration for posting on the liberal news site Firedoglake, in which he published an open letter to

Edward Snowden urging him not to cooperate with the FBI and declaring that the FBI "is the enemy; it's part of the problem, not the solution."

Kiriakou's 2007 interview with ABC News was the first time that the use of waterboarding by the CIA was publicly confirmed by a government agent, and earned him the enmity of the political establishment. With characteristic vindictiveness, the Obama administration indicted Kiriakou on trumped-up charges in 2012, including three counts of espionage under the WWI-era Espionage Act, which would have carried a maximum sentence of 45 years in prison.

Although the espionage charges were dropped, Kiriakou pled guilty to a lesser charge out of concern for the well-being of his family, who were reduced to subsisting on food stamps as a result of skyrocketing legal expenses. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison. He now faces a further three months of house arrest and another three years of probation.

Kiriakou was a 14-year veteran of the CIA and the head of counterterrorism in Pakistan at the time of the September 11 attacks. He oversaw the raid which captured Abu Zubaydah a few months later in March 2002, the first high-profile capture of an alleged Al Qaeda operative, who was then falsely described by the Bush administration as an Al Qaeda "mastermind" and the group's third-highest ranking operative. Zubaydah was severely wounded in the operation, and at some point had his left eye removed by CIA agents.

It was Zubaydah's case that Kiriakou's 2007 interview centered on. Basing himself on an internal CIA cable, Kiriakou admitted that the agency had once waterboarded Zubaydah, describing the practice as official government policy. In fact, that cable turned out to be false, and it has since been revealed that Zubaydah was waterboarded a total of 81 times in CIA

“black sites.”

Moreover, last fall’s Senate torture report, which mentioned Zubaydah a total of 1,001 times, revealed that the agency used him as a “guinea pig” for developing its “enhanced interrogation” techniques after 9/11. Zubaydah’s lawyer says that he is the only detainee known to have been subjected to all of them. One procedure, developed after it was discovered that Zubaydah had a fear of bugs, involved locking him in a tiny “confinement box” filled with insects. His lawyer says that Zubaydah has suffered permanent brain damage from his ordeal and can no longer even recognize his parents.

The Obama administration finally admitted in 2011 that Zubaydah was neither a top Al Qaeda leader, nor a member of Al Qaeda, nor even “formally” identified with the organization. Nevertheless, the administration refuses to release him from Guantanamo Bay, where he is held to this day without charges. Zubaydah’s unimportance was practically admitted by Kiriakou in his 2007 interview, when he told ABC News that “we didn’t go after him because he was Abu Zubaydah. We went after him because he just happened to be in Pakistan and we thought there was a chance we could catch him.”

While Kiriakou struck an ambivalent tone during his 2007 interview, defending the effectiveness of waterboarding in obtaining information, he has since become a public opponent of the federal government’s torture program. In 2010 he wrote an autobiography, *The Reluctant Spy: My Secret Life in the CIA’s War on Terror*, which contained a damning exposure of the policies pursued by Washington under the guise of the “War on Terror.” The book release was delayed for two years by the CIA, and one of the charges tacked onto his 2012 trial was that he had allegedly lied to the CIA’s Publications Review Board while attempting to receive clearance for his book.

Last week, Reporters without Borders released its Press Freedom Index for 2014, in which the United States sunk to 49th place in the global ranking, directly below countries such as El Salvador and Burkina Faso. Reporters Without Borders justified their decision on the basis of the US government’s continued witch-hunting of whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden, the vindictive hounding of journalists such as James Risen and Julian Assange, and the wanton attacks on

journalists by riot police during the violent crackdown of protests in Ferguson, Missouri last fall.

The Obama administration, which came into office on a wave of anti-war sentiment and promising the most transparent presidency in history, has not charged a single government official for war crimes stemming from the so-called “War on Terror.” Meanwhile, Obama has indicted seven whistleblowers on espionage charges, more than twice as many as all previous administrations combined.

Last month a federal court convicted former CIA agent Jeffrey Sterling on six counts of unauthorized disclosure of state secrets for revealing details of the government’s campaign of sabotage and assassination against Iran’s nuclear program to *New York Times* reporter James Risen. Risen, a respected Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who himself was threatened with a lengthy prison sentence for refusing to disclose his sources as part of the investigation, denounced Obama last August as the “greatest enemy to press freedom in a generation.”



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