

Congressional Republicans seek to obliterate record of CIA torture

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It was reported last week that the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture is being “retrieved” from executive agencies in the Trump administration. Congressional Republicans have demanded the confiscation of all copies of the report in order to cover up and, if possible, erase entirely the record of the investigation into the agency’s torture program.

A heavily redacted executive summary of the report was released to the public in December of 2014, but the full 6,700-page “Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program” remains secret. Only a limited number of copies were made, which were distributed to a handful of federal executive agencies. Since 2015, when the US Senate passed into the hands of the Republican Party, the new committee Chairman Richard Burr has led efforts to suppress the report, declaring that the report should become a “footnote to history.”

In a statement released June 2, Burr declared, “I have directed my staff to retrieve copies of the congressional study that remain with the executive branch agencies and, as the committee does with all classified and compartmented information, will enact the necessary measures to protect the sensitive sources and methods contained within the report.”

The 525-page executive summary documents the secret rendition and torture program launched during the Bush administration, as well as subsequent efforts to cover up the agency’s crimes. Even with its extensive redactions, the summary paints a picture of the CIA as a globe-spanning criminal conspiracy, deceiving, kidnapping, torturing and murdering its way around the world with impunity. In a network of secret dungeons in various countries, its agents gave free reign to their violent and porno-sadistic impulses.

Among the facts presented in the executive summary are the following:

- The report introduced the broader public to the sadistic practice of “rectal feeding,” in which pureed food is pumped into the victim’s rectum “without evidence of medical necessity.” One medical officer described the brutal technique: “you get a tube up as far as you can, then open the IV wide. No need to squeeze the bag—let gravity do the work.” In one case, a torture victim was “diagnosed with chronic hemorrhoids, an

anal fissure, and symptomatic rectal prolapse.” In other words, his large intestine was protruding from his body.

- Around 22 percent of the individuals kidnapped and tortured by the CIA “did not meet the standard for detention.” In other words, even according to the CIA’s own policies, many of the victims were entirely innocent and the CIA knew it.

- In November 2002, Gul Rahman, a blameless victim who was apparently mistaken for someone else, was murdered at the secret COBALT torture camp in Afghanistan. Rahman was “shackled to the wall of his cell in a position that required the detainee to rest on the bare concrete floor,” and the warden “had ordered that Rahman’s clothing be removed when he had been judged to be uncooperative during an earlier interrogation.” He died of hypothermia. The CIA subsequently presented the warden with a “cash award” of \$2,500, praising him for his “consistently superior work.”

- The regime of torture, degradation and humiliation took its toll on the victims physically as well as mentally. The victims developed “psychological and behavioral issues, including hallucinations, paranoia, insomnia, and attempts at self-harm and self-mutilation.” One victim, as a result of repeated waterboarding, became “hysterical” and “distressed to the level that he was unable to effectively communicate.”

The committee’s report characterizes the CIA as a collection of bumbling incompetents when it comes to actually gathering intelligence, tangled up in their own deceptions, preoccupied with petty intrigues and turf wars, and constantly misleading the rest of the state as to their activities.

During the committee’s investigation into its torture program, the CIA was combative and belligerent throughout, resentful of any semblance of democratic oversight, destroying evidence, lying shamelessly, provoking and threatening its would-be overseers. At one point it hacked into Senate computers in an effort to delete incriminating files.

The Trump administration apparently intends to comply with the requests to return copies of the report. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has returned the report. The CIA and its inspector general’s office have also returned the report. Additional copies are believed to be held by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, the Justice

Department and the Department of Defense.

President Trump, for his part, boasted during his election campaign that he would encourage torture, which is defined as a war crime under international law. “Would I approve waterboarding? You bet your ass I’d approve it, in a heartbeat,” he declared at one rally. “And I would approve more than that.” The day after his inauguration, Trump visited CIA headquarters to pledge his “love” and “1,000 percent” support for the agency.

Instead of prosecuting the criminals exposed by the report, the American government is doing the opposite—tracking down and confiscating the evidence. Indeed, Burr’s reference to the need to “protect the sensitive... methods contained within the report” suggests that torture, murder and war crimes are “methods” that the US intelligence agencies plan to continue to employ in the future—and in secret.

In their efforts to suppress the report, Burr and his co-conspirators have been emboldened by the positions taken by the Obama administration, which opposed the investigation throughout. From the moment Obama took office, under the mantra of “looking forwards not backwards,” he refused to investigate or prosecute CIA torturers. The Obama administration took no action when the CIA destroyed evidence or hacked into Senate computers in an effort to destroy evidence.

Once the report was prepared, the Obama administration tried to delay its publication until 2015, in hopes that the new Republican leadership in Congress would abandon or bury the project. During his last two years in office, his administration litigated against any effort to secure the report’s release under the Freedom of Information Act, including by vigorously opposing a case brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Obama administration rested on close ties with the CIA, employing the agency for its campaign of terror and mass murder using drones in the Middle East. During the 2016 elections, none of the Democratic Party’s presidential contenders, including Bernie Sanders, called for the prosecution of torturers. Hillary Clinton bragged of her support in the “intelligence community,” relying on the support of the intelligence agencies to attack Trump as being insufficiently belligerent with respect to Russia.

Only one copy of the report appears likely to survive the attempt to erase the history of the torture program. In December of last year, federal district Judge Royce Lamberth, sensing which way the winds were blowing, ordered a complete copy to be preserved.

The Senate Intelligence Committee is one of the most powerful institutions in the legislative branch. The formal title of the committee is “United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” reflecting the fact that eight of its 15 members consist of two members (one from each party) of the Senate Appropriations, Armed Services, Foreign Relations and

Judiciary committees. The fact that such a prominent body in the government issued such a damning report on the CIA, only to have it essentially overruled by the CIA and its allies, demonstrates how illusory and threadbare the forms of democratic rule are in America.

It goes without saying that if a working class youth in any number of America’s poverty-stricken cities is caught shoplifting or possessing illicit drugs, the state prosecution is swift and merciless. If that youth is suspected of committing a particularly heinous crime, sections of the corporate media squeal for the death penalty. But 6,700 pages of evidence of CIA criminality of the most cold-blooded and bestial character results in the prosecution of exactly nobody. The only person convicted and jailed to date in connection with CIA torture is former agent John Kiriakou, who was prosecuted for publicly acknowledging that torture had occurred.

The fact that the CIA criminals who perpetrated these atrocities have walked around free for years after their crimes were exposed, with scarcely a word about it breathed in the media, and without any political figure calling for their arrest and prosecution, is one of the greatest scandals in American history. Instead, the CIA and its political allies are browbeating their critics while they confiscate the evidence in broad daylight. One torturer, James E. Mitchell, contributed an article to the *Wall Street Journal* in December 2016 in which he bragged that “waterboarding works” and characterized himself as a patriot.

The fate of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s report is a historical milestone in the collapse of the rule of law and the emergence of a police state in America. Words like “rot,” “decay,” “erosion” in connection with America’s democratic institutions no longer seem adequate. The American government functions ever more openly as a crude instrument of plunder, money-making, war and repression in the hands of the military/intelligence/corporate-financial elite.



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