

Trump taps torturer to head CIA

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14 March 2018

In replacing US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson with CIA Director Mike Pompeo Tuesday, US President Donald Trump tapped a more than 30-year CIA veteran, Gina Haspel, to head the premier US spy agency. In doing so, he is attempting to place the CIA back under the leadership of an individual who is directly implicated in the crimes of torture and forced disappearance, as well as the destruction of evidence of these crimes.

Trump declared Haspel's nomination an "historic milestone" because she would be the first woman to head an agency that long ago earned the epithet of "Murder Inc."

Haspel, 61, joined the CIA in 1985. Among the positions she has held in the agency are chief of station in several world capitals, senior manager of the Counterterrorism Center and, under the Obama administration, acting deputy director of the National Clandestine Service, which carries out covert operations around the globe. Then-CIA Director John Brennan shifted her out of the position, however. The fact that Haspel was considered within top government circles to have been compromised by her torture record was a likely factor in that personnel move.

Her rise within the agency was bound up with her participation in the criminal methods adopted by the CIA in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, when thousands of individuals were illegally detained, forcibly disappeared and subjected to horrific forms of torture.

Haspel ran one of the first secret prisons set up by the CIA, where alleged Al Qaeda suspects were brought under the "extraordinary rendition" program of abduction and extra-judicial transfer of individuals to third countries to be interrogated and tortured.

Haspel oversaw operations at the "Cat's Eye" secret prison in Thailand, where Abu Zubaydah and Abd el-Rahim al-Nashiri were taken after being kidnapped by

CIA operatives.

Secret records of this torture were released last year as a result of a Freedom of Information Act suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) against the CIA. They reveal that the prisoners were subjected to prolonged confinement in boxes, as small as 21 inches wide, 2.5 feet deep and 2.5 feet high; walling, or having their backs and heads slammed repeatedly into a wall; and water boarding, a technique in which water is poured through a cloth placed over the victim's mouth and nose, inducing drowning.

Zubaydah was subjected to water boarding 83 times. While in CIA custody, he lost his left eye.

Haspel ordered and supervised these acts of torture even under conditions in which she knew they were illegal and suspected that her victims had no information to give the CIA even if they wanted to.

Sixteen years later, Abu Zubaydah and Abd el-Rahim al-Nashiri are both detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba. A psychological expert has described al-Nashiri as "one of the most damaged victims of torture" she has ever examined.

One of Zubaydah's attorneys wrote of his client nine years ago that his "mental grasp is slipping away. Today, he suffers blinding headaches and has permanent brain damage. He has an excruciating sensitivity to sounds, hearing what others do not. The slightest noise drives him nearly insane. In the last two years alone, he has experienced about 200 seizures. Already, he cannot picture his mother's face or recall his father's name. Gradually, his past, like his future, eludes him."

Haspel also played the central role in the illegal destruction of videotapes made by the CIA of the torture sessions that she oversaw. In 2005, she served as chief of staff to Jose Rodriguez, then the head of the agency's clandestine service, who ordered the destruction of tapes. She was reportedly among the

strongest advocates of destroying the videotapes, which directly implicated her, and was the only person cc'd on the memo to the Thailand station to shred the evidence.

The Obama administration sought to cover up these crimes, ordering that the full report on CIA torture remain sealed until 2028, opposing all prosecutions of crimes carried out by Haspel and her cohorts and dropping investigations into both the torture itself and the destruction of evidence.

Under Trump, Haspel was tapped as deputy director to Pompeo, who, like the Republican president, had made public statements supporting waterboarding and forms of torture. During the Republican primary debates, Trump declared, "I would bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding," and claimed that military officials had told him that "torture works."

The proposed elevation of Haspel to the post of CIA director is an unmistakable indication of the criminality of the US government and the increasing domination of every aspect of its activities by the US intelligence agencies and the military.

Haspel's nomination has been roundly condemned by civil liberties organizations. The ACLU demanded Tuesday that the CIA "declassify and release every aspect of Haspel's torture record" before her nomination is considered.

The Center for Constitutional Rights said in a statement that "Gina Haspel should be prosecuted not promoted."

There was no such outcry from leading Democrats, however. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York, who joined a dozen other Democrats in voting to confirm Pompeo's nomination as CIA director, announced on Tuesday that he was not calling on Democrats to oppose Haspel being installed in the same position.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat who, as the former chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, oversaw its investigation into the CIA rendition and torture program, voiced support for Haspel.

"Since my concerns were raised over the torture situation, I have met with her extensively, talked with her," Feinstein told the *New York Times*. "She has been, I believe, a good deputy director. She seems to have the confidence of the agency, which is good."



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