# US Senate pays homage to CIA torturer

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Wednesday's Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing on the nomination of Gina Haspel as director of the US Central Intelligence Agency provided a revealing exposure of the criminality of the US intelligence apparatus as well as the disintegration of democratic processes within America's capitalist state.

The subject at hand was whether a woman who played a direct and intimate role in the torture of detainees held incommunicado at so-called "black sites" around the world should be appointed to head what one senator described as the "premier intelligence agency in the world."

The hearing was characterized by gushing tributes from both Democrats and Republicans to the work of an agency long ago dubbed "Murder, Inc." for its crimes around the world, including the organization of political assassinations, the creation of terrorist armies and the orchestration of fascist-military coups.

West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, who after the hearing became the first Democrat to announce his support for the nomination, went so far as to tell Haspel that when speaking to constituents, "I brag about what you people do in the Clandestine Services."

What people like Haspel did was amply documented in the Senate intelligence panel's own report on torture released in 2014 over the objections of the CIA, which spied on Senate staffers and even broke into the committee's computer system in a direct assault on the constitutional powers of Congress.

No member of the committee, including Democrat Dianne Feinstein, who chaired the committee at the time, saw fit to cite this report. The 500-page unclassified version of the report found that the activities led by Haspel at a CIA black site codenamed "Cat's Eye" in Thailand included locking prisoners for prolonged periods in boxes as small as 21 inches wide, 2.5 feet deep and 2.5 feet high; "walling," or slamming their backs and heads repeatedly into a wall; and water boarding, a technique where water is poured through a cloth placed over the victim's mouth and nose, inducing drowning.

The committee found that among the hundreds who were illegally abducted, detained and tortured, a significant number had no connection to Al Qaeda or any similar organization. Some died as a result of their torment. Others, including those subjected to Ms. Haspel's treatment, were left permanently damaged, both mentally and physically.

The Senate report became a dead letter within days of its release, never to be mentioned again by the politicians or the media. Now one of the chief perpetrators of the crimes described in the report is highly likely to be promoted to the top post in Washington's main intelligence agency.

Indications that Haspel played a far wider role in administrating the torture program than just her stint in Thailand appeared to find fresh confirmation with the report from Guantanamo Bay that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was water boarded 183 times, had requested permission from a military judge to submit six paragraphs of information on Haspel. Mohammed's attorneys, US military officers, stated their agreement that the information was "important."

In addition to overseeing torture, Haspel is deeply implicated in its cover-up, playing a key role in the decision to secretly shred 92 videotapes of the abuse meted out to detainees at the Thailand black site.

There was a farcical element to the hearing, with Democrats asking Haspel to condemn the torture that she supervised as "immoral." She was having none of it. "I believe that the CIA did extraordinary work to prevent another attack on this country given the legal tools we were asked to use," she replied to one such query.

Hers was a barely modified version of the defense

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made infamous by the Nazis at Nuremberg: She was only following orders and was told by superiors that her actions—in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions, the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution and US statutes forbidding torture—were perfectly legal.

Now that the torture program has been shelved—at least for the moment—she proclaims that the CIA must hold itself to a "higher moral standard." At the same time, she insisted, "We followed the law then, and we follow the law now."

And, if the law is changed again to allow the CIA to torture and assassinate American citizens—hardly a stretch of the imagination given the US president's publicly stated fondness for water boarding "and worse" —she will no doubt follow the law once again.

"Morality has always been class morality," as Friedrich Engels famously wrote. The demands of Democrats for moral testimony from the 33-year CIA operative are both hypocritical and absurd.

No one has been punished for the grave crimes carried out under the Bush administration, from an illegal war of aggression in Iraq that claimed over a million lives to the systematic torture of detainees. Advancing the cynical slogan of "look forward, not backward," Democratic President Barack Obama and his Justice Department blocked any prosecution of either the CIA torturers themselves or those, from George W. Bush and Dick Cheney on down, who oversaw their grisly activities.

Obama promoted John Brennan, who as Haspel's superior at the agency played a major role in the program of illegal abductions, extraordinary rendition and torture. Brennan went on to direct Obama's drone assassination program before going back to the CIA as its director.

The Democrats' prattling about morality is truly obscene. Their sole concern is that the elevation of Haspel will undermine Washington's ability to wave the phony flag of "human rights" in justifying future acts of aggression.

Haspel's backers are making an appeal to identity politics to promote her nomination, which would make her "the first female CIA director," supposedly a victory for women everywhere. The elevation of this woman—known to her fellow agents as "Bloody Gina" for her unhealthy taste for torture—would signal the arrival of the #MeToo movement in the CIA's Langley, Virginia headquarters, one female ex-agent wrote in the *Washington Post*.

Perhaps more significantly, she would be the first operations officer from the agency's Clandestine Services division to become the CIA director since the ascension in 1973 of William Colby, who was infamous for his direction of Operation Phoenix, a massive campaign of assassinations and torture that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of men, women and children in Vietnam.

Haspel's nomination comes as the US intelligence agency, in conjunction with the US military, is preparing for crimes that will eclipse even the atrocities of 45 years ago.

In her opening report to the committee, she spoke of the need for the CIA to confront "destabilizing Iranian adventurism; an aggressive and sometimes brutal Russia, and the long-term implications of China's ambitions on the global stage." She vowed to pursue operations "against these hard targets beginning on day one." Her words were entirely in sync with the Trump administration's National Security Strategy, which has shifted Washington's focus from the "war on terrorism" to preparation for "great power" conflicts with Russia and China, i.e., a third world war.

Those who support Haspel's nomination—including virtually all living ex-CIA directors from Democratic and Republican administrations alike, along with powerful sections of the US ruling establishment—see her as a fit candidate to lead an agency preparing for war abroad and repression at home. For them, Haspel's history as a torturer was merely part of winning her spurs within an agency built upon violence, murder and criminality.

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