

Senate Intelligence Committee approves “black site” torturer to head CIA

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The imminent Senate confirmation of veteran Central Intelligence Agency operative Gina Haspel to head Washington’s main spy agency is a new milestone in the collapse of American democracy.

On Wednesday, the Senate Intelligence Committee voted 10-5 to recommend Haspel’s confirmation by the full Senate. Two Democrats joined all eight Republicans on the panel in approving President Trump’s pick to succeed Mike Pompeo, who just three weeks ago was confirmed as the new secretary of state. The Democrats have already supplied a sufficient number of “yes” votes to assure Haspel’s confirmation by the full Senate as early as this week, just as they ensured the confirmation of Pompeo.

While Pompeo is notorious as a defender of the Bush administration’s use of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” i.e., torture, against terror suspects, Haspel ran a secret CIA torture prison in Thailand for two years. In addition, she drafted a 2005 memo ordering the destruction of videotapes of torture sessions at the Thailand “black site” in the face of demands that the evidence be turned over to congressional investigators.

The Intelligence Committee vote in her favor, coming just two days after the virtually unanimous defense from Democrats and Republicans of Israel’s murder and wounding of hundreds of unarmed Palestinian protesters, exposes the criminality that pervades the American ruling class and its state. The American capitalist class has endorsed the mass killing of civilians and the use of torture as tools of both foreign and domestic policy.

Haspel, a 33-year veteran of the CIA, directly oversaw the repeated waterboarding of Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri at the Thailand torture center.

According to the declassified, heavily redacted version of a Senate Intelligence Committee report on the CIA torture program released in December of 2014, in addition to waterboarding, which induces drowning, the techniques

used against terrorist suspects included: forcing prisoners to stand chained to a wall for weeks on end, depriving them of sleep for more than a week, confining them to coffin-sized boxes, placing them in ice water baths to the point of hypothermia and death, and repeatedly banging them against a wall.

The perverted and sadistic methods used included “rectal feeding” and “rectal rehydration”—the forcible insertion of liquid and food into the rectum.

These are all violations of both US and international law. Their perpetrators, including Haspel, belong in prison, not in high government office.

The elevation of Haspel is a bipartisan operation. From the outset, the Democratic leadership had no intention of blocking her nomination. The Democrats’ nominal opposition was a charade behind which the party leadership decided in advance, based on electoral considerations, which senators would be allowed to vote for her confirmation and which would be permitted to vote against to maintain a pretense of opposition to torture.

In a farcical attempt to cloak his support for Haspel, Mark Warner, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, announced on Tuesday that he had received a letter from the nominee that convinced him the ex-torturer would not revive such methods. In fact, in her letter to Warner, Haspel did not shift from her confirmation hearing defense of the program and her role in it, writing only that in retrospect she had concluded that, on balance, it was counterproductive. She told Warner: “While I won’t condemn those that made these hard calls, and I have noted the valuable intelligence collected, the program ultimately did damage to our officers and our standing in the world.”

In his own statement released after Wednesday’s vote, Warner praised Haspel as “an independent voice who can and will stand up on behalf of our nation’s intelligence

community.”

Warner’s vote highlights the reactionary basis on which the Democratic Party is opposing Trump. The multi-millionaire tech executive, along with his Democratic counterpart in the House of Representatives, Adam Schiff, has been in the forefront of the anti-Russia witch hunt and the related drive to censor the Internet and suppress free speech on the fraudulent pretext of combating “fake news.”

But those Democrats who plan to vote against Haspel are no less hypocritical in their supposed opposition to torture. The Democratic leadership of the Senate and the House, as well as their Republican counterparts, were fully briefed by the CIA and Bush officials on the torture program. They gave their tacit support and kept the American public in the dark.

Moreover, Obama and his CIA Director John Brennan sought to quash the Senate torture report, blocking its release for two years and illegally hacking into the computers of Intelligence Committee staff who were drafting the final version. Following the report’s publication, Brennan held a press conference at CIA headquarters at which he denounced the report and defended the CIA torturers. Brennan, who served as deputy CIA director under Bush, was Haspel’s superior and is directly implicated in the torture program.

In response to the report, Obama called the CIA agents involved in criminal activities “dedicated men and women” and “patriots,” whose “heroic service and sacrifices” the entire nation should praise. He blocked any prosecution of Bush and CIA officials who oversaw the program. He appointed Brennan, who as counterterrorism director had overseen his drone assassination program during his first term, as CIA director during his second.

While shielding Bush officials, the Obama Justice department prosecuted CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou for exposing the agency’s use of waterboarding. The only CIA operative to go to jail is Kiriakou, who spent two years in prison for informing the American people about the criminal program.

As for the Senate torture report, no sooner had it been released than it was dropped by the Democrats and buried by the media. Now, one of the chief perpetrators of the crimes the report exposed is being elevated to head the CIA, with the Democrats supplying the necessary votes in a narrowly divided Senate that otherwise, due to opposition from Republicans John McCain and Rand Paul, would lack the votes to confirm Haspel.

There is no faction of the Democratic Party that

seriously opposes torture. Last week, Bernie Sanders in a TV interview said he would oppose Haspel, but in the next breath said Brennan “did a good job” as CIA director.

The *New York Times* on Wednesday summed up the consensus hope within the political establishment that Haspel’s confirmation will spell the end of discussions about torture. “Ms. Haspel’s apparently clear path of confirmation,” it wrote, “essentially ends a cycle of debate about the agency’s use of torture after the Sept. 11 attacks...”

A commentary posed on *The Hill* website by Larry Pfeiffer, the chief of staff to Bush administration CIA Director Michael Hayden, was more frank about the motives for backing Haspel. He said Haspel should be given unanimous support because “she has acquired intimate knowledge applicable against today’s revived Russian threat.”

Appealing to the upper-middle-class Democratic layers obsessed with identity politics, he went on to tout the ex-black-site *gauleiter* as the first woman CIA director, writing: “The Senate should ensure that a talented girl in our country today who aspires one day to run the CIA can be told by her mom or dad: ‘Go for it! Look at Gina Haspel—she’s running it today.’”

American bourgeois “democracy” has been reduced, behind the threadbare trappings of parliamentary procedures, to a dictatorship run by a military/intelligence/industrial apparatus that operates outside of any legal restraints. This apparatus is allied to a financial oligarchy that is no less immune from accountability for its actions than the CIA torturers. The entire state is implicated in a criminal conspiracy against the social and democratic rights of the working class, internationally and within the United States.



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