

CIA Torture and the Threat of Dictatorship

By [Patrick Martin](#)

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Only one conclusion can be drawn from the report published in the Washington Post Tuesday giving grisly details of CIA torture of prisoners and systematic lying by government officials to cover it up: the US ruling elite as a whole is guilty of war crimes for which it must be held accountable.

The *Post* report, based on leaks from unnamed “US officials,” describes the findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation into the operation of CIA “black sites”—the secret prisons in Afghanistan, Poland, Romania, Thailand and other countries where prisoners were held for “interrogation,” i.e., waterboarding, sleep deprivation, beatings, stress positions, induced hypothermia and other forms of torture.

The article provides only a brief extract of the material compiled in the massive committee report, which the CIA has been fighting for more than a year to suppress. On Thursday, the Senate committee is expected to vote to seek the declassification and publication of a 400-page executive summary.

The bulk of the report, which runs to 6,300 pages, is never to be made public, according to both Democrats and Republicans on the Senate panel. The *Post* article describes its text as divided into three volumes, one giving a full chronology of the secret interrogations, a second contrasting what CIA officials said about the program with what they knew was really happening, and a third giving a detailed accounting of nearly all of the roughly 100 prisoners held at “black sites” between 2002 and 2006.

According to a McClatchy News Service follow-up to the *Post* report, more than half of the 100 prisoners were subjected to some form of torture, and as many as five died during interrogation. These included Gul Rahman, who died of hypothermia after being doused with freezing water and then left in a cold cell with only a scrap of clothing, and Manadal al Jamadi, who died after his head was wrapped in a plastic bag and he was hung on a wall crucifixion-style.

What the report describes is not “excess” or the actions of “rogue” individuals, but a systematic, organized, fully authorized program, endorsed by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. The cover-up, in turn, continues to this day, with the active involvement of the Obama administration, implicating top officials up to and including the president. Directly involved is CIA Director John Brennan—a former top aide in the Obama White House and official in the Bush administration.

After initial reports of the torture program began to surface, despite the best efforts of the American media to cover it up, the Bush administration officially declared it over. The

prisoners in CIA cells were transferred either to Guantanamo or to the prisons and torture chambers of their countries of origin (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.).

Obama ordered an end to waterboarding and other forms of torture in 2009, while blocking any prosecution of the agents and officials responsible for the torture program. This was part of a shift in tactics against suspected Islamist militants, from detention and interrogation to extermination by drone-fired missile.

All these methods of state brutality and murder are illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions, as well as in violation of the US Constitution and laws prohibiting torture and assassination. These are not blemishes on an otherwise healthy military-intelligence apparatus, but the products of a depraved and deeply criminal American ruling class.

The Washington political establishment consists largely of those who have ordered murder and torture, those who facilitate, enable and cover up for murder and torture, and those who draft legal rationales and media apologies for the first two groups.

Overseeing this entire political apparatus is an intelligence agency that operates outside any legal constraint, a fact revealed by the systematic efforts of the CIA to block the release of the torture report. The agency went so far as to spy on the Senate Intelligence Committee itself, as revealed by committee chair Dianne Feinstein last month. Speaking on the floor of the Senate, Feinstein accused the agency of violating “the separation-of-powers principle embodied in the United State Constitution.” She further accused the CIA of violating “the Fourth Amendment, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, as well as Executive Order 12333, which prohibits the CIA from conducting domestic searches or surveillance.”

Feinstein went on to charge the CIA with attempting to intimidate her committee and override the principle of congressional oversight of the executive branch—implicitly accusing the CIA of attacking the constitutional foundations of the United States.

Feinstein is not a principled opponent of the crimes of the intelligence apparatus. She is among the most adamant defenders of the illegal surveillance of telecommunications and the Internet by the National Security Agency, as exposed by Edward Snowden. She has refused to elaborate on her criticism of the CIA since her Senate speech and collaborates closely with both the intelligence agencies and the Obama White House.

No different are the liberal “critics” of the NSA program within the Democratic Party, such as senators Ron Wyden and Mark Udall, who sit on the Intelligence Committee. Both hailed the cosmetic changes to the NSA collection of telephone metadata announced last week by the Obama administration. They are concerned not that these police state methods threaten democratic rights, but that the Snowden exposures are generating a powerful and growing opposition from the American people.

No section of the American ruling elite will lift a finger to defend democratic rights. That is because their own class interests are at stake. The fundamental driving force of the police-state buildup is the colossal growth of social inequality. In the final analysis, a relative handful of multi-millionaires and billionaires can maintain their wealth and privileged position against the masses only through methods of political dictatorship and state repression.

Among the revelations contained in the Senate report is the fact that the CIA repeatedly lied about the results of the torture, falsely claiming that it produced information that prevented terrorist attacks. What then, is the real motivation behind the torture programs? It is the establishment of a system of illegal repression directed at all opposition to the policies of the American ruling class—above all, within the United States itself.

The defense of democratic rights, in the United States and every other country, depends on the political mobilization of the working class, the most powerful social force. This requires the building of a mass political party of the working class, based on a socialist and internationalist program.

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