

Obama and the cover-up of CIA torture

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On the eve of Barack Obama's acceptance of the Democratic Party nomination for reelection as president, a new report detailing the waterboarding and other forms of CIA torture meted out to Libyan detainees served to demolish the Democrats' image, endlessly promoted at their convention in Charlotte, as the "party of the people."

Coming barely one week after Obama's attorney general, Eric Holder, announced the Justice Department's shutting down of all investigations into CIA torture and other crimes committed in the "global war on terrorism," the report makes clear that the use of torture was far more extensive than previously acknowledged and underscores the continuing criminality of US foreign policy and both major political parties.

The 156-page report produced by Human Rights Watch (HW) is based upon interviews with 14 Libyans subjected to "extraordinary rendition" and torture by the CIA and then forcibly returned to Libya, where they were imprisoned and in some cases tortured again by the government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi. Substantiating their testimony are classified documents—communications between the CIA and Libyan intelligence—found in the abandoned offices of former Libyan intelligence chief Musa Kusa after Tripoli fell to NATO-backed rebels in September 2011.

Thus, the evidence exposing one set of crimes by the US government—rendition and torture under the Bush administration—was uncovered as a by-product of another: the launching of a war of aggression under Obama to lay hold of Libya and its vast energy reserves. Indeed, those who in 2003 and 2004 were imprisoned and tortured as "terrorists"—Libyan Islamist jihadists—were proclaimed as "freedom fighters" when employed by the US and NATO to topple the Gaddafi regime.

Virtually all of those interviewed by HRW were leading members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a group of veterans of the 1980s CIA-backed war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, which carried out armed attacks inside Libya in the 1990s. Most of its members returned to Afghanistan, where elements of the group joined Al Qaeda. Veterans of the LIFG include Abdul Hakim Belhadj, who led a brigade trained by US special operations troops that overran Tripoli in 2011, and Khalid al-Sharif, who now heads the Libyan National Guard. Both are interviewed in the report.

The 14 Libyans were "detained in US-run prisons in Afghanistan for between eight months and two years," according to the report. "The abuse allegedly included: being chained to walls naked, sometimes while diapered, in pitch dark, windowless cells, for weeks or months at a time; being restrained in painful stress positions for long periods of time, being forced into cramped spaces; being beaten and slammed into walls; being kept inside for nearly five

months without the ability to bathe; being denied food and being denied sleep by continuous, deafeningly loud Western music.”

Some of the former detainees refer to perverse forms of sexual humiliation, while others recall approaching the brink of insanity after spending months alone in the dark, naked, shackled and subjected to continuous torment and torture. “I want to die, why don’t you kill me?” one of them recalled screaming to his captors.

Among the most significant revelations in the report is testimony by two of the former detainees that they were repeatedly waterboarded by their CIA captors. This exposes as a lie claims made by CIA and Bush administration officials that only three so-called “high value” detainees—Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim Nashiri—had been waterboarded under the agency’s “enhanced interrogation” program.

Nonetheless, Holder announced last week that no one would be prosecuted for the torture deaths of a CIA detainee in Afghanistan in 2002 and another in Iraq in 2003. These were the last crimes to be reviewed by the Justice Department after it narrowed its investigation’s focus to preclude every other atrocity carried out by the US intelligence agency.

Previously, Holder had shut down a probe into the destruction of videotapes of CIA waterboarding in defiance of the courts, concluding that no one could be prosecuted for waterboarding and other forms of torture approved by the Bush administration. From the outset, the Obama administration made it clear that, in the interest of “looking forward, not backward,” its Bush White House predecessors would face no sanction for the crimes they initiated.

Not only did Holder refuse to bring any criminal charges against those involved in these crimes, he also said that the Justice Department investigation did not bear on the “propriety” of these methods.

The net result of this entire filthy process is that CIA torturers enjoy impunity, and that these crimes will continue to be inflicted upon those deemed hostile to US imperialism’s interests.

This is not merely a matter of cowardice, but rather class policy. The Obama administration has continued and deepened the crimes of its predecessor—arrogating to itself the “right” not only to condemn alleged enemies of the state to indefinite detention without charges or trial, but to order assassinations, including of US citizens, with the president personally selecting his victims. This is the savage response of the US ruling establishment to the global decline of American capitalism and to the unchecked growth of social inequality in the United States.

As the Democratic Party wound up its charade in Charlotte as the party of “progress” and the “little guy,” it could not conceal the ugly reality of a party immersed in torture, criminal war and the wholesale assault on democratic rights of working people—all in the interests of defending the financial oligarchy’s monopoly of economic and political power.

Opposition to war abroad and the buildup of a police state at home can only develop in direct struggle against both capitalist parties, through the building of an independent mass party of the working class armed with a socialist and internationalist program. This is the program fought for only by the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates—Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president.

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