

Torture, Police Killings and the Militarization of America

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The fact that the Senate Select Intelligence Committee's report exposing CIA torture has been released in the United States as the country is being swept by angry protests over a series of vicious and unpunished police killings has been little noted by the American mass media.

What are treated as unrelated stories are, in fact, two facets of the same phenomenon: the growth of a massive and criminal police state apparatus that enjoys absolute impunity. The crimes carried out abroad and the crimes carried out at home have a common source in an economic and social system that is in deep crisis and whose overriding features are social inequality, militarism and a relentless assault on basic democratic rights.

The cops who shot down unarmed teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, strangled to death Eric Garner in Staten Island and killed defenseless individuals in Cleveland, Phoenix and elsewhere go unpunished as prosecutors employ a deliberate system of exoneration by grand jury to prevent them from ever being called to account for their crimes.

The actions in the Senate report are sufficient to require the immediate arrest and prosecution not merely of the CIA's killers and torturers, but of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, George Tenet, Condoleezza Rice and other top officials who authorized and oversaw a system of depravity and violence in violation of both US and international law.

Yet no one in the US Congress, the Obama administration or any other section of the American ruling establishment suggests that such prosecutions are even remotely possible. On Thursday, Obama's CIA Director, John Brennan, himself implicated in the crimes, organized a press conference from CIA headquarters in Langley to defend the "enhanced interrogation" torture program and denounce the Senate report.

It was Cofer Black, the former director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, who told an approving congressional committee in 2002 that "there was 'before 9/11 and after 9/11.' After 9/11 the gloves came off."

The phrase, conjuring up the image of a bare-knuckled brawl, became a favorite cliché within both the Bush White House and the US military command. It was translated into far more gruesome forms of violence, ranging from waterboarding to hanging people from manacles and "rectal hydration."

But the "gloves" that were taken off had more far-reaching implications. They involved dispensing with any adherence to the US Constitution, the Geneva Conventions or other

bodies of domestic and international law.

The gloves came off not just for the interrogators at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram and CIA black sites scattered across the globe, but for every level of the state, down to the local police.

Whatever Obama may say today about torture being “contrary to our values,” this process has only qualitatively deepened over the course of his presidency.

Mr. Obama’s “values” allow him to arrogate to himself the power to designate American citizens as enemy terrorists and order their execution via drone missile strikes with absolutely no judicial review. They permit the codification into law of his supposed right to declare anyone, American or foreign national, an enemy combatant and lock him away in indefinite detention without charges or trial. And they are in concert with his presiding over a massive expansion of domestic and foreign spying that encompasses virtually all forms of communication of innocent people across the globe.

This same process has found noxious expression within local police departments across the United States. “Homeland security” policing has become the new standard, in which “national security” is the overriding principle, and the entire population is looked on as potential enemies. The fraudulent narrative of a never-ending “war on terrorism” has become an all-purpose justification for arbitrary and disproportionate violence leading to murder.

The military-police mindset has been embodied in the creation of Joint Terrorism Task Forces around the country, bringing local cops together with Homeland Security, the FBI and other federal agencies. At the same time, billions of dollars worth of military hardware, from assault rifles to armored vehicles, are being funneled annually from the Pentagon to local police departments, creating a militarized force suitable for deployment in a domestic war.

The real significance of these developments was demonstrated first in the martial law lockdown of the Boston metropolitan area following the Boston Marathon bombings of April 2013. An entire population was turned into prisoners in their own homes and subjected to warrantless searches by helmeted and machine-gun toting police backed by armored vehicles—all supposedly to capture one 19-year-old youth.

More recently in Ferguson, peaceful protests against police murder have been met with cops who look like they are headed for combat in Afghanistan, followed by the Missouri governor’s preemptive declaration of a state of emergency and callout of the National Guard in anticipation of further protests over the grand jury’s failure to indict the killer cop.

In the course of the current protests over the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, there has been a concerted attempt by political forces ranging from President Obama to the millionaire operative Al Sharpton, along with a network of organizations orbiting the Democratic Party, to insist that the entire issue is one of racism, to be answered by a “conversation on race,” a “new civil rights movement” or various police reform palliatives.

All of this is meant to divert popular outrage into safer channels and conceal a far more sinister reality. A militarized police force, working in close collaboration with the US military and intelligence complex, is being prepared for violent repression against the working class as a whole. It will be used against strikes, demonstrations, protests and other forms of opposition to the policies of the corporate and financial elite.

Torture, police killings, the destruction of core democratic rights—all are methods employed by a criminal ruling class whose wealth is secured through financial parasitism. It has built up its fortunes by transferring social wealth from the working class—the overwhelming majority of the population—to the top 1 percent, while employing militarist violence to further its plunder abroad.

These ruling layers operate not out of strength or confidence in their system, but rather out of fear. They know that record levels of social inequality are not only incompatible with democracy, but must give rise to social revolt at the next, inevitable eruption of global financial crisis. If the torturers and the police killers enjoy impunity, it is because preparations are being made to turn them loose against a rebellious population.

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