

Trump's Shameful Choice of Gina Haspel to Head the CIA

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Leave it to Donald Trump, besieged by denunciations of his torturous behavior toward women, to have nominated a female torturer to head the Central Intelligence Agency. It was a move clearly designed to prove that a woman can be as crudely barbaric as this deeply misogynistic president. When it comes to bullying, [Gina Haspel](#), whose confirmation hearing begins Wednesday, is the real deal, and The Donald is a pussycat by comparison. Whom has he ever waterboarded? Haspel has done that and a lot worse. Haspel is Trump's ideal feminist, a point tweeted by White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders:

There is no one more qualified to be the first woman to lead the CIA than 30+ year CIA veteran Gina Haspel. Any Democrat who claims to support women's empowerment and our national security but opposes her nomination is a total hypocrite

— Sarah Sanders (@PressSec) [May 5, 2018](#)

They call her "[Bloody Gina](#)," and for some of her buddies in the torture wing of the CIA and their supporters in Congress, that is meant as a compliment. For a decade after the 9/11 attacks, Haspel served as chief of staff, running the vast network of secret rendition torture prisons around the globe. As a definitive [Senate Intelligence Committee report](#) established, torture is not legal, according to U.S. law and international covenants signed by President Ronald Reagan, nor does it produce any actionable information in preventing acts of terror.

After the public revelation of the vast extent of the torture program horrified the world, Haspel deliberately destroyed 92 videotapes depicting the barbaric practice, violating a Justice Department order that the tapes be preserved, and thus clearly obstructing a criminal investigation. Yet in March, Trump chose to nominate Bloody Gina to be the new head of our super-spy agency.

Give Trump credit for consistency: He did campaign on the theme that torture—or "enhanced interrogation," as his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush, justified it—is only wrong when nations other than our own do it. And by nominating Haspel to head the CIA, Trump is clearly seeking to take torture out of the covert dark side, as former Vice President Dick Cheney termed his revival of the medieval dungeon art; Trump has branded it as a legitimate, made-in-America weapon, wielded by a woman, no less. Trump seemed to be saying,

“Label me a bully; I’ll show you what a woman can do!”

When it comes to authorizing the near-drowning of shackled prisoners and smashing their heads against prison walls, this lady is the equal of any macho man.

The best witness to the crimes of Bloody Gina is offered by a true hero of the real war against terrorism, former FBI agent Ali Soufan, who is credited with having done the most significant interrogation of captured terrorist suspects. Soufan shunned torture and skillfully gained the confidence of prisoners who went on to provide reliable information.

“It is a matter of public record,” [Soufan wrote](#) in The Atlantic magazine, “that Gina Haspel ... played a key role in the agency’s now-defunct program of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques,’ an Orwellian euphemism for a system of violence most Americans would recognize as torture. ... I know firsthand how brutal those techniques were—and how counterproductive. ... Unsurprisingly, the CIA’s own inspector general concluded that the torture program failed to produce any significant actionable intelligence; and I testified to the same effect under oath in the Senate.”

While there is no evidence that this indelible stain on America’s legacy produced any reliable information, the nomination of Bloody Gina sent a message to the world from this president that torture is to be rewarded. There are many, including Republican Sen. John McCain, who has his own story of being tortured as a prisoner in Vietnam and who raised questions about Haspel’s support of the torture program.

“The use of torture compromised our values, stained our national honor, and threatened our historical reputation,” [McCain said](#).

But even some Democrats may support Haspel’s nomination given that members of their party have been complicit in excusing the heinous practice of torture. After all, it was Democratic President Barack Obama who decided not to prosecute anyone for ordering or committing the torture that is one of the great stains on American history. In fact, Obama prosecuted former CIA agent [John Kiriakou](#) after he revealed the torture program’s existence to a journalist. He did so after President Bush’s memorable statement that the United States “does not torture people!” Ironically, the Bush Justice Department cleared Kiriakou of any charges, while Obama revived them two years later and sent the former agent to prison for 30 months.

Whether or not the Senate confirms Haspel, the very fact of her nomination defines Trump as a fatally callous leader totally contemptuous of basic human rights and the rule of law. Trump did not indelibly link America to torture; that disgrace is owned by George W. Bush, a “moderate” Republican, but it remained for this American president to brand torture as a favored American sport.

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