

Who's Who: American "Torture Apologists" Endorse Gina Haspel for CIA Director

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An array of former intelligence and other government officials signed a letter to the Senate intelligence committee in support of Gina Haspel, the nominee for CIA director.

Haspel, who is currently the deputy CIA director, was briefly in charge of a black site prison in Thailand during President George W. Bush's administration. She helped destroy evidence to cover up torture. Agency personnel [nicknamed](#) her "Bloody Gina."

The officials signed on to the letter make up a veritable who's who of individuals who escaped accountability for their actions in the Bush administration. They also include individuals who have developed a reputation as advocates for The Resistance™ to President Donald Trump.

It was signed by Jeremy Bash, Cofer Black, John Brennan, James Clapper, Porter Goss, Michael Hayden, Henry Kissinger, Mike Morell, Mike Mukasey, John Negroponte, Leon Panetta, John Rizzo, Jose Rodriguez, George Tenet, Fran Townsend, and others.

"Ms. Haspel is a proven leader who inspires others and has what it takes to make tough calls in times of crisis. She is a true intelligence professional who brings care, integrity, and a commitment to the rule of law to her work every day," the letter declares [[PDF](#)].



Her commitment to the "rule of law" includes approving the torture of Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri (image on the right), who was waterboarded at the CIA's secret prison in Thailand when she was in charge.

Haspel also made the "tough call" to be a part of a CIA conspiracy to destroy videotapes showing the torture of Nashiri and Abu Zubaydah, and as the chief of staff to National Clandestine Service chief Jose Rodriguez, she drafted a cable that approved the destruction. It even featured instructions on how to get rid of the tapes with an "industrial-strength shredder."

The act inspired the Senate intelligence committee to pursue a study of the CIA's torture program, which eventually led to a more than 6,000-page report documenting agency abuses.

The letter contends,

"It is truly telling that a broad spectrum of national security leaders from both Republican and Democratic administrations has voiced unequivocal support for her nomination," and celebrates the bipartisan consensus around torture and holding officials accountable for war crimes.

"Given the nature of CIA's mission, most of her achievements cannot be shared publicly," the letter contends. "But we can tell you she has made vital contributions to the strength and security of our country and has dedicated her life to serving her fellow Americans."

Records of her "achievements" or past actions could be declassified if the CIA had any respect for democracy.

In fact, Democratic Senators Ron Wyden and Martin Heinrich [urged](#) CIA director Mike Pompeo to declassify certain information on Haspel so Americans were not kept in the dark when it came to her past. They contended the agency was violating an executive order on classified information, which prohibits keeping information hidden to conceal "violations of law" or to "prevent embarrassment to a person, organization, or agency."

That officials who were involved in the CIA torture program can recommend an official implicated in a crime to head the CIA is but another example of what happens and will continue to happen because there is no accountability for torture.

When Rodriguez [oversaw](#) the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, he played a key role in the adoption of torture techniques for use against terrorism detainees. He is a fervent torture advocate, who in a "60 Minutes" interview said he had to convince the agency to "put their big boy pants on" and authorize torture.

During the same interview, Rodriguez likened sleep deprivation to "jet lag" and muscle fatigue from stress positions to working out at the gym. He said the CIA is the "dark side." When correspondent Lesley Stahl said, "So sleep deprivation, dietary manipulation. I mean, this is Orwellian stuff. The United States doesn't do that," Rodriguez replied, "Well we do." And he insisted he had "no qualms" about committing acts that were once indisputably considered war crimes.

Mukasey, who was attorney general under Bush, defended the CIA after the torture report summary was released. He [argued](#) waterboarding is not torture because it "does not cause severe pain, and it does not cause long-term suffering."

President Barack Obama [released](#) secret memos in 2009, which detailed torture techniques authorized against detainees. It included a memo by Stephen Bradbury that purported to answer CIA lawyer John Rizzo's questions about whether techniques complied with international laws.

Bush officials defend physical abuse described in memos released by Obama

- Techniques used at Guantánamo Bay elsewhere
- Hayden and Mukasey criticise president for releasing memos

Ewen MacAskill in Washington

Fri 17 Apr 2009 18.36 BST



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Senior members of the Bush administration today defended the physical abuse of prisoners by CIA operatives at Guantánamo and elsewhere round the world set out in graphic detail in secret memos released by president [Barack Obama](#).

General Michael Hayden, head of the CIA under president [George Bush](#), and Michael Mukasey, who was attorney-general, criticised Obama for releasing the memos. The two accused him of pandering to the media in creating "faux outrage", undermining the morale of the intelligence services and inviting the scorn of America's enemies.

But the interrogation techniques outlined in the memos prompted a flood of calls from human rights groups and others for the prosecution of politicians, lawyers

Screenshot from [The Guardian](#)

Mukasey and Hayden responded with a column in the Wall Street Journal that criticized Obama.

"Disclosure of the techniques is likely to be met by faux outrage and is perfectly packaged for media consumption. It will also incur the utter contempt of our enemies," they contended.

From May 2006 to February 2009, Hayden misled or provided false information to the Senate intelligence committee on a regular basis. The torture report summary contains 37 pages of such examples, according to [Human Rights First](#).

Hayden testified the "most serious injury" he knew about was "bruising as a result of shackling" and no detainee had died. (Gul Rahman died in CIA custody, and his estate [won a settlement](#) against contracted psychologists who were architects of torture.)

George Tenet was the CIA director from 1997 to 2004. Not only did he help the Bush administration lie America into a war in Iraq, but he also oversaw the institution and development of the torture program. [Reports](#) on interrogations of detainees were regularly sent to his desk. He had no objections. To this day, he defends the program and was part of an official rebuttal to the Senate torture report.

Democratic Senator Carl Levin proposed a 9/11-type commission on detainee abuse. In response, John Rizzo wrote [an email](#) on October 31, 2005, complaining about how it would "surface" the existence of torture tapes showing interrogations of Nashiri and Zubaydah.

"I think I need to be the skunk at the party again and see if the [CIA] director is willing to let us try one more time to get the right people downtown on board with the notion of our destroying the tapes."

As documented by Human Rights First, Rizzo was [aghast](#) at President Bush when he made a

statement on June 26, 2003, for the United Nations International Day in Support for Victims of Torture. Rizzo contacted the legal advisor to the National Security Council, John Bellinger, to say he was surprised and concerned. White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan said all prisoners were treated “humanely,” and Rizzo was worried “enhanced interrogations” might be discontinued.

Rizzo kept details about the torture of detainees from members of the National Security Council because he did not want Secretary of State Colin Powell to find out and “blow his stack.”

Several of the officials who signed the letter have records of exaggerating or lying about the alleged intelligence obtained through torture. Former director Porter Goss is one egregious offender.

One example involves Goss leaking classified information to NBC News’ “Dateline” program in 2005. The segment and accompanying online articles helped the CIA make that case that intelligence from CIA interrogations surpassed “any other intelligence on the subject of al Qaida and the construction of the network.” Articles said the capture of Ramzi bin al-Shibh led to the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, an alleged 9/11 terrorism suspect, and Khallad bin Attash, which was not true.

This kind of fabrication to the press took place while the CIA was fighting Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuits in court. An attorney for the CIA [noted](#) that these disclosures to NBC made a legal declaration recently submitted “about the secrecy of the interrogation program a work of fiction.”

Cofer Black, who was the director of the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center from 1999 to May 2002, famously said after the 9/11 attacks the “gloves come off.” There is much that remains hidden from the public on his role in the rendition and torture of detainees. The CIA [contends](#) torture did not begin until Zubaydah was in custody in March 2002, and so the worst acts would have occurred when Black was no longer with the CIA (if the CIA is telling the truth). Yet, Black was involved in the official rebuttal to the Senate torture report that defended interrogations.

(Note: Black once worked for the mercenary company Blackwater in 2005, which obtained a contract to provide security for United States personnel in Iraq. The company was founded by Erik Prince and responsible for the Nisour Square massacre in Baghdad in 2007, which killed 17 people and wounded 20 people.)

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That brings us to those who support Haspel but often side with The Resistance™ to President Trump.



Mike Morell (image on the left), a former CIA director, served as Tenet's executive assistant when he was the head of the agency. Morell participated in the rebuttal to the Senate torture report and blasted its contents when the summary was released.

"Many of its main conclusions are simply not correct," Morell told CBS News. "And much of the context of the times and much of the discussion that took place inside the executive branch and with the Congress about this program is not in this report."

Morell endorsed Hillary Clinton for president, suggested Trump would threaten national security if elected, and criticized his "lack of respect for the rule of law." But of course, he had no concerns about Trump potentially restarting the CIA's infamous torture program.

Former director of national intelligence James Clapper [lied to Congress](#) when Wyden asked him if the NSA collected data on "millions or hundreds of millions of Americans." He answered,

"Not wittingly. There are cases, where they could inadvertently, perhaps, collect, but not wittingly."

Yet, he has positioned himself as an opponent of Trump, taking a job with CNN as a regular commentator.

Clapper is not an ardent torture advocate like many others who signed the letter. He [did not go along](#) with Trump, when he said during his campaign that the U.S. should go back to waterboarding detainees. But then, how can Clapper endorse Haspel whose record is stained by waterboarding? Is it because he does not believe officials should face accountability?

Former CIA director Leon Panetta, who has appeared several times on NBC News and CBS since Trump's election, is a vigorous opponent of Trump. He is [no supporter](#) of waterboarding.

"No one shouted out [Osama] bin Laden's address when strapped to a waterboard," he said.

However, he seems okay with some “unsavory techniques,” since he argues they led to the killing of bin Laden.

According to [his memoir](#), while working under Obama, then-White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel told him, “The president wants to know who the fuck authorized this release to the committees,” after he provided documents on the Bush administration to the Senate intelligence committee for their report. Yet, apparently, there is some code that prevents him from opposing one of the CIA’s own, who was involved in criminal conduct.

Former CIA director John Brennan is an NBC and MSNBC contributor, who proclaimed on March 17,

“When the full extent of [Trump’s] venality, moral turpitude, and political corruption becomes known, [he] will take [his] rightful place as a disgraced demagogue in the dustbin of history.”

But he [did not shy away](#) from defending the CIA following the torture report summary’s release, and he led the agency when it [spied](#) on Senate staffers involved in producing the report.

And then, there is Henry Kissinger, a well-seasoned war criminal. Kissinger supported the right-wing dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile [and Jorge Videla in Argentina], which [tortured](#) and killed thousands of people in secret detention camps. Many were dumped from planes into rivers. He encouraged these brutal acts.

Kissinger jeopardized efforts to [end mass killings](#) by the military dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s.

His [actions](#) related to Cambodia led to destabilization that fueled the rise of the Khmer Rouge. He was responsible for at least three to four million deaths in Vietnam. He authorized the CIA’s training of the Shah’s brutal secret police, who carried out torture in Iran.

Of all the former officials, his support for “Bloody Gina” is the most understandable. It is also the most infuriating. Because if there were justice for American war criminals, he would have been tried long, long ago.

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