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CIA torture and the crimes of the state

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The unclassified executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s report on CIA torture, released Tuesday, describes, in extensive detail, horrific crimes that unquestionably violate domestic and international laws.

The review of the Bush administration’s “enhanced interrogation program” documents the systematic use of sadistic forms of torture, including waterboarding, sleep deprivation (for up to a week at a time), head-banging, sensory deprivation, exposure to extreme temperatures, holding detainees in stress positions, confinement in coffin-like boxes, “rectal hydration” and “rectal feeding.” See, “Senate report on CIA interrogation details brutal torture methods.”

The report condemns these practices as illegal, immoral and ineffective, and denounces the CIA for withholding information from Congress and falsely claiming that its brutal interrogation methods helped foil terror attacks, capture and kill Al Qaeda operatives and “save lives.”

However, the most pertinent and obvious questions that arise from the report are not even being raised in the political establishment or the media: Who will be held accountable? Who will be indicted? Who will be prosecuted?

The Intelligence Committee Democrats, led by Committee Chairman Dianne Feinstein, do not name a single top Bush administration official, limiting their exposé to former high-ranking CIA officials. There are no formal proposals or calls for criminal prosecutions or other actions to hold those responsible for these heinous actions accountable. The report seeks to maintain the absurd fiction that the torture program was an isolated aberration, involving only a handful of operatives.

In fact, the program of CIA torture was planned, implemented and monitored at the highest levels of the state. The cast of criminals includes President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and CIA directors George Tenet, Porter Goss and Michael Hayden.

The response to the report by many of these very same criminals leaves no doubt that such methods continue, in one form or another, today, and will be employed on an even broader scale in the future. In advance of the release of the report, Bush gave an interview in which he rejected the Senate committee's suggestion that he was deceived by the CIA about the scope and nature of the interrogation program and categorically defended it.

Cheney called talk of CIA deception "a crock" and all but accused Feinstein and her allies on the committee of treason. Hayden and a number of other former top CIA officials launched a media campaign in advance of the report's release calling the report flawed and biased and warning that it would spark anti-American protests and terror attacks around the world. The propaganda campaign against the report continued after its release, with top Republicans and most Republican members of the Senate Intelligence Committee joining in.

The Obama administration too is culpable, functioning as an accomplice to the crimes described. From his first day in office, Obama worked might and main to shield CIA torturers and Bush administration officials and prevent their prosecution. In 2010, Obama's attorney general, Eric Holder, announced that the Justice Department would not prosecute CIA operatives who destroyed videotapes of CIA waterboarding sessions in 2005.

Obama made John Brennan, who oversaw the torture program as a CIA official under Bush, his chief counterterrorism adviser during his first term and elevated him to become CIA director in his second. Brennan and the White House have worked together to attempt to suppress the Senate report, withholding documents from the committee and then sitting on the completed draft of the report for two years. Under Brennan, the CIA spied on Senate staffers preparing the report, violating the constitutional separation of powers, the Fourth Amendment ban on arbitrary searches and seizures, and a number of US laws.

Congress itself, including Feinstein and the rest of the Democratic lawmakers, are also complicit in the torture program and other criminal practices. They were briefed repeatedly about the interrogation program, and if they were misled by the CIA, it is because they wanted to be misled.

Feinstein has for years been an unswerving defender of the US intelligence apparatus. She has categorically defended the National Security Agency spying programs and denounced whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and Chelsea (Bradley) Manning as criminals and traitors.

The so-called liberal media has played no less an integral part. The Intelligence Committee report includes an entire section that details the manner in which the CIA fed leaks of classified information on its interrogation program to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to manipulate public opinion in favor of such methods. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, articles were published and television programs produced aimed at legitimizing torture.

In her speech on the Senate floor Tuesday introducing the Intelligence Committee report, Senator Feinstein presented the torture program as an unfortunate and wrongheaded, if understandable, response to the 9/11 attacks and the need to wage the “war on terror.” This is a lie.

As the WSWS repeatedly warned, the phony war on terror was a criminal conspiracy to justify endless war abroad and a massive attack on democratic rights at home.

The CIA torture program itself was only an extreme expression of a break with bourgeois legality that characterizes every aspect of US policy. The theft of the 2000 election set the stage for the post-9/11 assault on democratic rights and creation of a police state-in-waiting, including Guantanamo Bay, the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Department, the Northern Command, rendition, indefinite detention, drone assassinations and mass NSA spying.

Within the United States, the police, operating in close collaboration with the military and intelligence agencies, function ever more openly as an instrument of social and political repression. The “war on terror” is being brought home.

The acts described in the Senate report reveal the essence of bourgeois rule in the United States. The response must be not merely shock and horror, but an independent political movement of the working class to put an end to the capitalist system and hold accountable the criminals that preside over it.