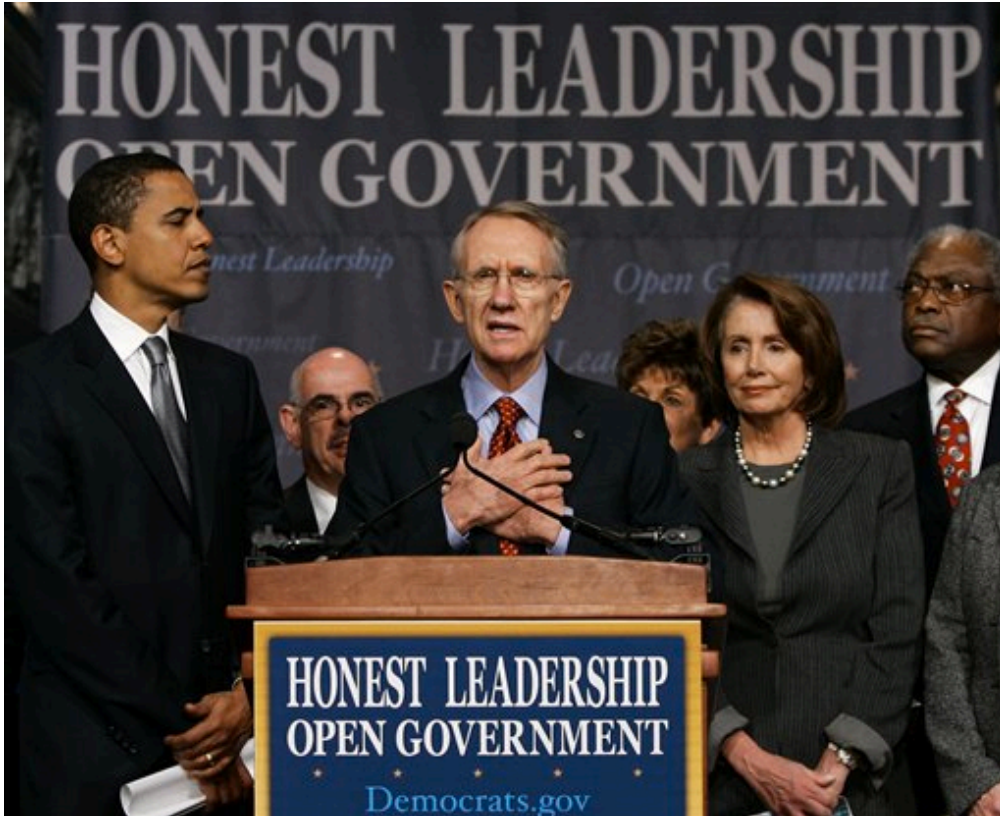


Imperialism and the Politics of Torture

James Petras



Democrats: Idiots or frauds? Maybe both. They knew or should have known about torture all along but chose to do nothing.

Introduction

The US Senate Report documenting CIA torture of alleged terrorist suspects raises a number of fundamental questions about the nature and operations of the State, the relationship and the responsibility of the Executive Branch and Congress to the vast secret police networks which span the globe – including the United States.

CIA: The Politics of a Global Secret Police Force

The Senate Report's revelations of CIA torture of suspects

following the 9/11 bombing is only the tip of the iceberg. The Report omits the history and wider scope of violent activity in which the CIA has been and continues to be involved. CIA organized large scale death squad activities and extreme torture in Vietnam (Phoenix Project); multiple assassinations of political leaders in the Congo, Chile, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, the Middle East, Central America and elsewhere; the kidnapping and disappearance of suspected activists in Iraq and Afghanistan; massive drug-running and narco-trafficking in the "Golden Triangle" in Southeast Asia and Central America (the Iran-Contra war).

The Senate Report fails to locate the current acts of CIA terror and torture in a broader historical context – one which would reveal the systematic use of torture and violence as a 'normal' instrument of policy. Contrary to White House and Senate claims that torture was a "policy error" committed by "incompetent" (or deranged) operatives, the historical record demonstrates that the long term extensive and intensive use by the CIA of torture, assassinations, kidnappings are planned and deliberate policies made by highly qualified, and experienced policymakers acting according to a global strategy approved by both Executive and Congressional leaders.

The Report treats torture as a "localized" set of events, divorced from the politics of empire building. In point of fact, torture is and always has been an integral part of imperial wars, colonial military occupations and counter-insurgency warfare.

Imperial wars and occupations provoke widespread opposition and nearly unanimous hostility. 'Policing' the occupied country cannot rely on community-wide support, least of all providing voluntary 'intelligence' to the imperial officials. The imperial armed forces operate out of fortresses surrounded by a sea of hostile faces. Bribes and persuasion of local collaborators provides limited information, especially regarding the operations of underground resistance movements and clandestine activists. Family, neighborhood, religious, ethnic and class ties provide protective support networks. To break this web of voluntary support network, the colonial

powers resort to torture of suspects, family members and others. Torture becomes "routinized" as part and parcel of policies sustaining the imperial occupation.

Extended occupation and intensive destruction of habitation and employment, cannot be compensated by imperial "aid" – much of which is stolen by the local collaborators. The latter, in turn, are ostracized by the local population, and, therefore, useless as a source of information. The "carrot" for a few collaborators is matched by torture and the threat of torture for the many in opposition.

Torture is not publicized domestically even as it is 'understood' by 'knowing' Congressional committees. But among the colonized, occupied people, through word and experience, CIA and military torture and violence against suspects seized in neighborhood round-ups is a weapon to intimidate a hostile population. The torture of a family member spreads fear (and loathing) among relatives, acquaintances, neighbors and colleagues. Torture is an integral element in spreading mass intimidation – an attempt to minimize co-operation between an active minority of resistance fighters and a majority of passive sympathizers.

The Senate Report claims that torture was "useless" in providing intelligence. It argues that victims were not privy to information that was useful to imperial policymakers.

The current head of the CIA, John Brennan rejects the Senate claim, while blithely admitting "some errors" (underwater submergence lasted a minute too long, the electric currents to the genitals were pitched to high?), he argues that "torture worked". Brennan argues that his torturer colleagues did obtain "intelligence" that led to arrests of militants, activists and "terrorists".

If torture "works" as Brennan claims, then presumably the Senate and the President would approve of its use. The brutalization of human life, of family members and neighbors is not seen as, in principle, evil and morally and politically repugnant.

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According to the explicit rules of conduct of Brennan and the implicit beliefs of the Senate, only “useless” torture is subject to censure – if an address is obtained or a torture victim names a colleague a ‘terrorist’ to avoid further pain, then by the criteria of the Senate Report torture is justified.

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According to the operational code of the CIA, international law and the Geneva Conventions have to be modified: torture should not be universally condemned and its practitioners prosecuted. According to the Senate only torture that “doesn’t work” is reprehensible and the best judge of that is the head of the torturers, the CIA director.

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Echoing Brennan, President Obama leaped to the defense of the CIA, conceding that only some ‘errors’ were committed. Even that mealy mouth admission was forcibly extracted after the President spent several years blocking the investigation and months obstructing its publication and then insisting on heavily editing out some of the most egregious and perverse passages implicating NATO allies.

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The Senate Report fails to discuss the complicity and common torture techniques shared between Israel’s Mossad and the CIA and Pentagon. In defense of torture, the CIA and White House lawyers frequently cited Israel’s Supreme Court ruling of 1999 which provided the “justification “for torture. According to Israel’s Jewish judges, torturers could operate with impunity against non-Jews (Arabs) if they claimed it was out of “necessity to prevent loss of or harm to human life”.

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The CIA and Harvard law professor and uber-Zionist zealot, Alan Dershowitz echoed the Israeli Mossad “ticking time bomb” justification for torture, according to which “interrogators can employ torture to extract information if it prevents a bombing”. Dershowitz cited the efficiency of Israel’s torturing a suspect’s children.

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The CIA officials frequently cited the Israeli ‘ticking bomb’ justification for torture in 2007, at Congressional hearings

in 2005, and earlier in 2001 and 2002. The CIA knows that the US Congress, under the control of the Zionist power configuration, would be favorably disposed to any official behavior, no matter how perverse and contrary to international law, if it carried an Israeli mark of approval or 'logo'.

The US CIA and Israel's Mossad share, exchange and copy each other's' torture methods. The US torturers studied and applied Israel's routine use of sexual torture and humiliation of Muslim prisoners. Racist colonial Israeli tracts about techniques on destroying the 'Arab Mind' were used by US intelligence. Israeli officials borrowed US techniques of forced feeding hunger strikers. Mossad's technique of 'Palestinian hanging' was adopted by the US. Above all, the US copied and amplified Israel's extra-judicial 'targeted' killings – the center piece of Obama's counter-terrorism policy. These killings included scores of innocent bystanders for every 'successful target'.

The Senate Report fails to identify the intellectual authors, the leading officials who presided over and who ultimately bear political responsibility for torture.

Top leaders, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and Senate Intelligence Committee chairperson, Diane Feinstein, resort to the Nazi war criminals plea "we didn't know", "we were misled" and "the CIA didn't tell us".

No judge at the Nuremberg Trials believed them. Nor will any international court of law believe US political leaders' pleas of ignorance of the CIA's decade-long practice of torture – especially after former Vice President Cheney lauded the practice on US television and boasted he would implement the same policies again. (One has to wonder about the 'source' of Cheney's transplanted heart...)

During the administration of President Bush, Jr., CIA leaders submitted detailed reports on intelligence, including the sources and the methods of obtaining the information, on a routine basis – with videos and 'live feeds' for the politicians to view. Nothing was 'held back' then and now, as

current CIA head John Brennan testifies. From 2001 onward torture was the method of choice, as testimony from top military officials revealed during the Abu Ghraib investigation.

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National Security Agency (NSA) meetings, attended by the President, received detailed reports extracted from CIA "interrogations". There is every reason to believe that every NSA attendee 'knew' how the 'intelligence' was obtained. And if they failed to ask it was because torture was a 'normal, routine operating procedure'.

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When the Senate decided to investigate the "methods of the CIA", half a decade ago, it was not because of the stench of burning genitals. It was because the CIA exceeded the boundaries of Senate prerogatives –it had engaged in pervasive and hostile spying against US Senators, including the Uber-Senator Feinstein herself; CIA crimes were compromising client regimes around the world; and most of all because their orgy of torture and dehumanization had failed to defeat the armed resistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

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The Senate Report is an exercise in institutional power – a means for the Senate to regain political turf, to rein in CIA encroachment. The Report goes no further than to chastise "inappropriate" techniques: it does not proceed from crimes of state to prosecute officials responsible for crimes against international and domestic laws.

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We know, and they know, and as every legal authority in the world would know, that without the punishment of political leaders, torture will continue to be an integral part of US imperial policy: Impunity leads to recidivism.

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Richard Cheney, Vice-President under President George W. Bush, notorious war criminal on many counts, and prime advocate of torture, publically declared on December 10, 2014 that President Bush specifically authorized torture. He bragged that they were informed in detail and kept up to date.

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In the political world of torture, practiced by Islamic

extremists and US imperialists, how does the decapitation of non-combatant prisoners, match up with the CIA's refrigeration of naked political suspects? As for "transparency", the virtue claimed by the Senate Report publicists in publishing the CIA's crimes, as "refurbishing the US image", the Islamists went one step further in "transparency": they produced a video that went global, revealing their torture by beheading captives.

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The Senate Report on CIA torture will not result in any resignations, let alone prosecutions or trials, because over the past two decades, war crimes, police crimes, spy crimes, and financial swindles have not been prosecuted. Nor have any of the guilty officials spent a day in court. They are protected by the majority of political leaders who are unconditional defenders of the CIA, its power, techniques and especially its torture of captives.

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The vast majority of Congress and the US President repeatedly approve over \$100 billion annual budgets for the CIA and its domestic counterpart, Department Homeland Security. They approved the annual budget voted on December 10, 2014, even as the "revelations" rolled in. Moreover, as the tempest over CIA torture proceeds, Obama continues to order the assassination by drone of US citizens "without ever crossing the door of a judge".

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Despite over 6,000 pages of documents and testimony, recording crimes against humanity, the Senate Report is unlikely to trigger any reforms or resignations. This is not because of the actions of some mysterious "deep state" or because a ballooning national security apparatus has taken power. The real problem is that the elected officials, Presidents and Congress people, Democrats and Republicans, neo-liberals and neo-conservatives, are deeply embedded in the security apparatus and they share the common quest for world supremacy. If Empire requires wars, drones, invasions, occupations and torture, so be it!

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Torture will truly disappear and the politicians will be put on trial for these crimes, only when the empire is transformed

back to a [truly democratic] republic: where impunity ends and justice begins.

Award-winning Author and Professor Emeritus James Petras—author of [The Politics of Empire](#)— is now getting 8000-10,000 hits on his [website](#) every day.

And now a word from the Editors of The Greenville Post

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THEIR LIES.
THEIR CONSTANT PROPAGANDA.

OUR TRUTH.

HUGE ISSUES ARE BEING DECIDED: Nuclear war, whether we'll live in democracy or tyranny, dignity or destitution, planetary salvation or doom...It's a battle of communications we can't afford to lose.

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