

U.S. Torture and Tyranny: Lies, injustice and the CIA way

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“Today, the U.S. government is a symbol of tyranny against humanity.”

—Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei¹

As a boy in the United States in the 1950s, I recall watching a weekly television program about a benevolent alien with superhuman powers who came to earth from the distant planet Krypton. Disguised as a mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, this superhero always managed to rescue the good citizens of Metropolis from the fiendish plots of depraved villains. The epitome of bravery, humility and self-sacrifice, he fought “a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American way.”²

A half century later, the American way has become an icon of torture and tyranny with the CIA on the cutting edge of lies and injustice as detailed in a recently released U.S. Senate study. “While the Office of Legal Counsel found otherwise between 2002 and 2007, it is my personal conclusion that, under any common meaning of the term, CIA detainees were tortured,” wrote Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that authored the study on the Central Intelligence Agency’s detention and interrogation program. As far as the program’s effectiveness, the report cited that the use of “enhanced interrogation techniques was not an effective means of acquiring intelligence,” and that “multiple CIA detainees fabricated information, resulting in faulty intelligence.”³

Senator Dianne Feinstein’s investigation of the CIA was not the first time the U.S. super sleuth agency has gone under the congressional microscope. Back in 1974, then Republican president Gerald Ford precipitated a congressional confrontation with his hints that the CIA had been targeting foreign leaders for assassination. Based on Ford’s allegations, the White House and both houses of the U.S. Congress established independent committees to look into CIA wrongdoings. The purpose of these investigations was to reestablish Congressional oversight on the U.S. intelligence community, which also included the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the NSA (National Security Agency).

Intelligence officials at the time complained bitterly of “hostile Congressional committees bent on the exposure of abuses by intelligence agencies and on major reforms.”⁴ Lying and stonewalling became the established norm. For example, then CIA director William Colby, testifying in closed session before the Senate investigators, denied allegations of CIA involvement in the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, but admitted the NSA had eavesdropped on overseas phone calls made by U.S. citizens.⁵ Of course, Colby was lying under oath at that time as shown by subsequently declassified CIA documents, which admitted the agency’s involvement in covert operations in Chile from 1962.⁶

At the end of the investigation, which did not result in an approved report, Senator Otis Pike confided, “It took this investigation to convince me that I had always been told lies, to make me realize that I was tired of being told lies.”⁷ Nevertheless, Daniel Schorr of CBS News managed to obtain a draft copy of the Pike committee’s investigation and to leak it to the Village Voice,

which published parts of the report under the title “The CIA report the President doesn’t want you to read.”⁸ Key figures behind the Ford administration’s less than cooperative stance toward substantive investigations of the CIA, FBI and NSA were the now familiar names of then Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld and his assistant, Dick Cheney.⁹

Having mentioned Rumsfeld, it is worth digressing to place his involvement in context. As a first term congressman, Rumsfeld had made his name by accusing Paul Nitze, the ultra-hawkish cold warrior and author of the CIA’s anti-communist manifesto NSC-68, of being an “accommodationist,” that is, of caving in to the former Soviet Union on nuclear disarmament issues. Ironically, Rumsfeld was Nixon’s director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and along with his assistant, Dick Cheney, had been tasked to disembowel the anti-poverty agency. When Nixon suddenly resigned in disgrace, newly appointed president Ford turned to his colleague Rumsfeld, whom he made White House Chief of Staff with Dick Cheney as his assistant. By the fall of 1975, Rumsfeld had convinced his boss to replace CIA director William Colby with George H.W. Bush, move Kissinger from the NSA to the State Department, fire Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and have himself appointed that post. This purge, called the “Halloween massacre,” allowed Rumsfeld to empower neocons Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Richard Armitage, Condoleezza Rice and many others, thus laying the foundation for the militaristic policies of the Reagan, Bush Sr. and Bush Jr. administrations.¹⁰

When Rumsfeld was once again appointed Secretary of Defense under Bush II, he played a key role in guarding covert operations from congressional oversight. By expanding the Defense Human Source Intelligence Agency, an existing bureau within the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Rumsfeld not only was able to hide expenses for covert activity in the Department of Defense’s “black budget,” which included funding for 80 percent of the U.S. intelligence apparatus, but also freed his so-called “Operational Support Elements” from congressional scrutiny. So with the entire world a battle field in Bush’s Global War on Terror, Rumsfeld was able to carry out covert actions unrestrained even inside countries considered nonthreatening to U.S. interests.¹¹ Rumsfeld also approved the use of 24 specific “counter-resistance techniques,” otherwise known as torture, on detainees at Guantanamo in a detailed April 2003 memo.¹²

Dick Cheney also vigorously defended the use of torture, which some have referred to as “enhanced interrogation techniques.” “We’ve avoided another mass-casualty attack against the United States,” he retorted without remorse, adding, “I’d do it again in a minute.” Denying that the techniques used in the interrogation of detainees constituted torture, he declared, “We were very careful to stop short of torture.” Cheney vehemently insisted that not only had the U.S. Justice department signed off on the legalities of the program, but also Bush II was fully aware of and had approved the use of the brutal interrogation methods. “This man knew what we were doing,” Cheney said of his boss Bush II. “He authorized it. He approved of it.”¹³

Based on Cheney’s statements, Bush II indeed gave the orders for torture but did so in a way to maintain “plausible denial.” For example, the report claims “the CIA instructed personnel that the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah would take ‘precedence’ over his medical care, resulting in the deterioration of a bullet wound Abu Zubaydah incurred during his capture,”¹⁴ suggesting that perhaps the order came directly from within the CIA itself and Bush II was not aware of this. However, other sources have reported that George W. Bush himself inquired of then CIA

director George Tenet about the progress of Abu Zubaydah's interrogation. Upon being told by Tenet that Abu Zubaydah was on painkillers because of severe wounds and thus was not yielding much information, Bush II responded, "Who authorized putting him on pain medication?"¹⁵

George W. Bush's deputy attorney general and top torture justifier,¹⁶ John Yoo, criticized Feinstein's report, claiming that "the report cannot quarrel with the ultimate fact: Contrary to the expectations of terrorism experts inside and outside of government, the United States has succeeded in preventing a second large-scale terrorist attack for the last 13 years."¹⁷ Disputing claims of thwarted terrorist plots, the Senate report states, "Some of the plots that the CIA claimed to have 'disrupted' as a result of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques were assessed by intelligence and law enforcement officials as being infeasible or ideas that were never operationalized."¹⁸

Yoo's allegation is a classic example of the logical fallacy, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, meaning "after this, therefore because of this." All we know is that some U.S. officials claimed to have foiled a number of alleged terrorist plots. Whether or not the officially sanctioned torture tactics had anything whatsoever to do with the absence of another 9/11-scale attack is simply unknowable and hence, unprovable, as CIA director John Brennan himself confirmed.¹⁹ Even if we were to concede that U.S. torture policies have prevented terrorist attacks, certainly the aggressive and militaristic nature of U.S. foreign policy has negated any imagined benefit by nurturing an ample supply of terrorists for decades to come.

In June 2004 after the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib in Iraq was exposed, George W. Bush emphatically pontificated, "We do not condone torture. I have never ordered torture. I will never order torture. The values of this country are such that torture is not a part of our soul and our being."²⁰ To the contrary, the latest "torture report" by the U.S. Senate not only has shown that Bush II was a pathological liar, but also that the use of torture, far from his fallacious words, was and remains part of the soul and being of America's leaders, who have made the U.S. government a symbol of tyranny against humanity.

Endnotes

¹ Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, "Today, US govt. is symbol of tyranny against humanity," Twitter, December 10, 2014, accessed December 13, 2014, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/542647507717599232.

² Erik Lundegaard, "Truth, justice and (fill in the blank)," *New York Times*, June 30, 2006, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/30/opinion/30iht-ederik.2093103.html?_r=1&.

³ Dianne Feinstein, Forward to "Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program," *Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, December 3, 2014, 4, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/study2014/sscistudy1.pdf>.

⁴ Gerald K. Haines, "The Pike Committee Investigations and the CIA," Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, April 14, 2007, Last modified, June 27, 2008, accessed December 13, 2014, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter98_99/art07.html.

⁵ Harold Ford, *William E. Colby as Director of Central Intelligence* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, 1993), 167, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB362/chapters_11_through_13_and_appendices.pdf.

⁶ "CIA Activities in Chile," *CIA*, September 19, 2000 2-3, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20000919/01-01.htm>.

⁷ Alan Grayson, "Congressional oversight of the NSA is a joke. I should know, I'm in Congress," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2013, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/25/nsa-no-congress-oversight>.

⁸ James R. Jacobs, "Doc in the news: Pike report on the CIA," *Free Government Information*, October 28, 2013, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://freegovinfo.info/node/4013>.

⁹ "Profile: Church Committee," *History Commons*, no date, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www.historycommons.org/entity.jsp?entity=church_committee_1.

¹⁰ James Carroll, *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 281-282, 322, 358-360.

¹¹ James Risen, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 62, 69-70.

¹² Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to Gen. James T. Hill, April 2003, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB127/03.04.16.pdf>.

¹³ Matea Gold, "A defiant Dick Cheney defends CIA's brutal interrogation program," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2014, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/12/14/a-defiant-dick-cheney-defends-cias-brutal-interrogation-program/>

¹⁴ Study by Senate Select Committee, *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ James Risen, *ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ Neil Lewis, "A Guide to the Memos on Torture," *New York Times*, accessed December 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/ref/international/24MEMO-GUIDE.html?_r=0.

¹⁷ John Yoo, "Dianne Feinstein's flawed torture report," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2014, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-yoo-torture-feinstein-20141214-story.html#page=1>.

¹⁸ Study by Senate Select Committee, *ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁹ Dustin Volz, "Dick Cheney Pushes Back on Torture Report: 'I'd Do It Again in a Minute'," *National Journal*, December 14, 2014, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/white-house/dick-cheney-defends-the-bush-administration-against-the-senate-torture-report-20141214>.

²⁰ James Risen, *ibid.*, 24.