

Brennan's Defense of CIA Torture

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CIA Director John Brennan's televised press conference Thursday at the agency's headquarters, an unprecedented event, marked a new threshold in the collapse of American democracy and the erection of a police state.

The very fact that it was left to the head of the spy agency rather than President Obama to issue the government's rebuttal to this week's devastating Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture makes clear who is really in control of the American state.

In statements riddled with lies, and with little attempt to conceal his contempt for democratic procedures and the law, Brennan defended the agency's use of horrific forms of torture during the Bush administration as a legitimate and "patriotic" response to the 9/11 terror attacks. He recycled all of the official myths associated with the "war on terror" to imply that the CIA and the military/intelligence apparatus as a whole had to remain outside of any congressional or legal restraints.

While declaring nominal support for Obama's decision to end the Bush-era program of "enhanced interrogation techniques," he fiercely defended the administration's expanded program of drone assassinations, saying "the US military has done some wonderful things with these platforms."

He also suggested that "EITs" might have to be revived to deal with future security threats. In reply to a reporter's question, he said, "I defer to the policy makers in future times when there is going to be the need to be able to ensure that this country stays safe if we face a similar type of crisis."

At one point in his potted narrative on the origins of the "war on terror" and the CIA torture program, he hailed as an example of the agency's heroism paramilitary operations officer Mike Spann, the first US casualty in the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. The invocation of Spann summed up the criminality of the policies being defended by Brennan and the Obama administration and the link between imperialist war abroad and the destruction of democratic rights at home.

Spann was killed in the November, 2001 uprising of Taliban prisoners at the Qala-i-Jangi Fortress in Mazar-i-Sharif. He was the chief CIA interrogator of hundreds of captured Taliban who were held in barbaric conditions at the fortress.

Among those he questioned and abused was the American Taliban soldier John Walker Lindh, one of 86 survivors out of 800 prisoners who were victims of a massacre carried out by US-allied forces led by CIA and Special Forces troops.

Brennan painted a grotesquely false picture of an American public clamoring for the most brutal possible measures to defend them against new and imminent terror attacks. "Our government and our citizens recognized the urgency of the task," he declared. Why then, despite the shock and disorientation produced by the 9/11 attacks and the relentless fear-mongering of the government and media, did the Bush administration and the CIA feel obliged to keep their torture program secret?

Among his other lies was his denial that the CIA misled Congress and the American people about its interrogation program. The Senate Intelligence Committee's unclassified executive summary, however, concludes with a 37-page appendix devoted entirely to listing the lies told to it by then-CIA Director Michael Hayden at an April 12, 2007 hearing.

Brennan said, with a straight face, that the CIA had fully supported and cooperated closely with the Senate Committee's investigation. In fact, he and Obama obstructed the investigation, withholding thousands of documents, and then held up the report for two years after its December 2012 completion. Brennan then had the CIA hack into the computers of Committee staffers working on the final version of the document, a brazen violation of congressional oversight and the US Constitution.

Demanding "collaborative and constructive" congressional oversight, as opposed to what he called the partisan and "flawed" report issued on Tuesday, he pointed to the Senate Intelligence Committee's whitewash of the CIA's lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a model of such collaboration.

He went on to characterize abuses in the interrogation program as aberrations carried out by a few bad apples who went beyond the bounds laid down by the Bush administration. The "overwhelming majority" of CIA interrogators, he insisted, acted properly. "I look back at the record," he said, "and I see that this was a workforce that was trying to do the right thing."

He rejected the Senate Committee's conclusion that torture did not produce useful intelligence and declared that the interrogation program "saved lives."

He then echoed the position of the White House in demanding that there be no prosecutions of high-ranking state officials who ordered and oversaw the torture program, such as President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, CIA Directors George Tenet, Porter Goss and Michael Hayden, and others. In this, Brennan has a direct interest, since he was deputy executive director of the CIA at the time the program was being carried out.

He demanded that "this debate" on torture be "put aside" in order to focus on "issues that are relevant to our current national security challenges."

Showing his contempt for the public's right to know, Brennan refused to answer a reporter who asked him directly if he supported the release of the Senate report, quipping, "I think there's more than enough transparency that has happened over the last couple of days. I think it's over the top."

Brennan and others who have come forward publicly to denounce the Senate report and defend the CIA torture program, such as Bush, Cheney and a host of former CIA officials, have been emboldened by the Obama administration's repeated declarations of confidence

in Brennan and opposition to launching criminal investigations in the light of the crimes exposed by the Intelligence Committee—and even more so by the impotence and cowardice of the liberal critics of the torture program.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Democratic chairman of the Committee, was reduced to carping at Brennan’s statements via Twitter, after which she issued a groveling statement praising Brennan for showing “that CIA leadership is prepared to prevent this from ever happening again—which is all important.”

In fact, the establishment critics of the CIA all accept the basic framework of the “war on terror,” which provides the political and ideological justification for militarism abroad and the militarization of American society at home.

The *New York Times* summed up the craven position of the so-called liberal establishment in an editorial titled “Dark Again After Report on CIA Torture.” Praising Feinstein and the Intelligence Committee Democrats for bucking pressure from the CIA and Obama and releasing their report, the newspaper wrote: “Sadly, that is pretty much it on the disclosure front. In post-9/11 America, when it comes to momentous matters of national security, democratic tradition and the rule of law, there is precious little disclosure and no justice and accountability. It’s a bipartisan affliction.”

Of Brennan’s press conference, the *Times* wrote: “Mr. Brennan’s lack of interest in further discussion was fairly clear... Unhappily, he’s likely to get his wish.”

Indeed, after Brennan laid down the law on Thursday, the mass media all but dropped the entire subject of CIA torture. It virtually disappeared from the front pages of newspapers and the television news.

The working class, however, cannot allow the criminal perpetrators of torture to go unpunished. It is not only a matter of crimes committed overseas. If the argument that “torture works” is allowed to go unanswered, then what remains of the Eighth Amendment’s ban on “cruel and unusual punishment” within the United States?

The criminal conspiracy partially documented by the Senate report is directed at the American working class as much or more than at the victims of US imperialism internationally. It cannot be halted by appeals to any of the institutions of a state that is run by criminals. It can be stopped only by a mass, independent and revolutionary political movement of the working class.

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