

By Melvin Goodman

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The Central Intelligence Agency is rolling out the “big lie” on Capital Hill in order to gain confirmation for Gina Haspel as its director. Haspel became the CIA’s deputy director in February 2017 when then CIA director Mike Pompeo, who has endorsed torture and abuse, ignored the Senate Intelligence Committee’s authoritative report on torture and named one of tortures strongest advocates within the National Clandestine Service. The director of the Senate’s report, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D/CA) actually blocked Haspel’s appointment to become deputy director for operations in 2013 because of Haspel’s links to torture and abuse.

Haspel, who is known as “Bloody Gina” to some of her Agency colleagues, was a leading

protagonist for the torture program on the seventh floor of CIA's headquarters building. She was a deputy and protege to Jose Rodriguez, the CIA's notorious former deputy director for operations and former director of the Center for Counterterrorism. If the CIA's torture and abuse program had a godfather, it was Rodriguez. Haspel was a devoted acolyte.

As a result, Haspel became the commander of the Agency's secret prison in Thailand in 2002, where she oversaw the waterboarding of Abd al-Rahim al-Nishri, who took part in the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. Abu Zubaida was waterboarded at this prison 83 times, although Haspel was not the commander at the time. After the prison closed, Haspel returned to the Counterterrorism Center as an operations officer.

When Rodriguez realized that the CIA's 92 torture tapes would reveal the sadistic extent of the torture program, he realized that it would be less risky to destroy the tapes than to expose the tapes to public scrutiny at home and abroad. Haspel was a strong advocate for destroying the tapes, and it was Haspel who prepared the cable to the prisons that ordered the destruction. The absence of accountability in the Obama administration paid off for both of them.

Thus, Rodriguez and Haspel were major players in the most shameful period in the CIA's history, but neither one received serious punishment. Rodriguez was given a minor administrative reprimand, which was meaningless, and Haspel got off scot-free. The Department of Justice investigated their conduct, but charged no one with an obvious obstruction of justice despite the fact that the White House and a federal judge had ordered that the tapes be protected.

CIA officials want Haspel to be confirmed because they fear that an alternate to her, such as Senator Tom Cotton (R/AR), would be even worse. Therefore, they are corroborating the "big lie" that Rodriguez and Haspel introduced to justify the destruction of the tapes. They maintained that the tapes had to be destroyed in order to protect the identities of the torturers. In fact, the torturers wore hoods that covered their faces. The tapes would have revealed the sadistic conduct of CIA officers and contractors, but not their identities.

Currently CIA officers are repeating this false story to congressional staffers to absolve Haspel of any wrongdoing. Even worse, CIA careerists such as former deputy director Mike Morell are releasing declassified documents to the Senate intelligence committee to vouch for Haspel's qualifications. The CIA did the same for Robert M. Gates during his controversial nomination hearings in September 1991, violating the CIA charter against politicizing intelligence

information for a congressional committee.

Morell's memorandum, written in 2011 as the result of a disciplinary review, "found no fault with the performance of Ms. Haspel" because she drafted the cable "on the direct orders" of her superior and did not release it herself. Obviously, Morell knows nothing of the Nuremberg principles that support punishment for officials who carry out illegal orders. He made no mention about her leadership at the Agency's most notorious secret prison in the war on terror.

Sadly, Senator Feinstein is now referring to Haspel as a "good deputy director" who has the "confidence of the Agency." Meanwhile, editorials in the mainstream media, including *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* also support confirmation as long as Haspel "forcefully renounced the use of torture." President Donald Trump's support for Pompeo and Haspel is particularly ironic since he previously compared the CIA to Nazi Germany's Gestapo. Well, the CIA's "enhanced interrogation program" was right out of the Nazi playbook.

Now it's up to the Senate to do the right thing. Institutions, particularly secret institutions, are unwilling to admit to transgressions, and the CIA has been a leading transgressor over the years. The CIA, however, can erect classification barriers, claim national security protection, and control the message. Unfortunately, congressional oversight is primarily observed in the breach.

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