

Senate report on torture exposes collusion between corporate media and CIA

By Niles Williamson
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The executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee's torture report sheds light on the manner in which the corporate media knowingly served as a conduit for the CIA to selectively and anonymously leak favorable reports on its interrogation program to the public. The Senate document also discloses that the media acceded to requests from CIA officials and Vice President Dick Cheney to withhold information about the program that was deemed unfavorable.

The report makes clear that the so-called "free press" in America functions as a propaganda arm of the state, with journalists serving as stenographers of official lies. Through the input of the CIA, the media sought to obscure the heinous character of the actions being carried out and condition public opinion to tolerate, if not support, so-called "enhanced interrogation" methods.

An entire section toward the end of the Senate report is devoted to the role of the media. It explains that the CIA's Office of Public Affairs (OPA) fed information to journalists on the torture program while the program was still officially classified in order to undercut critics and project a more favorable image of the program to the public. When such classified information was published, the CIA did not press for criminal investigations, as the leaks had been approved by the agency itself.

Classified information on the torture regime was provided to journalist Ronald Kessler, who used the information in his book *The CIA at War*, published in 2003. The Senate report states that the CIA decided not to investigate this as a leak of classified information because "the book contained no first time disclosures," and "OPA provided assistance with the book."

Senior Deputy General Counsel for the CIA John Rizzo is quoted as saying that an investigation was not

opened because the transfer of information to Kessler had been "blessed" by then-CIA Director George Tenet.

The CIA again provided Kessler with classified information in 2007 in an attempt to undercut FBI agents who had begun to openly criticize the intelligence agency's torture program. Kessler provided a draft of his book, *The Terrorist Watch*, to the CIA for editing. The CIA's director of public affairs, Mark Mansfield, suggested revisions that would make the book less favorable to the FBI and its agents' criticisms of the CIA and "more balanced" in favor of the agency and its torture program.

The CIA also worked closely with Douglas Jehl, the current foreign editor of the *Washington Post*, who was then a deputy Washington bureau chief for the *New York Times*. The report details one instance in which classified information concerning the torture program was passed from the CIA to Jehl and published in the *Times* in 2005.

Concerns were subsequently raised by the House Committee on Intelligence about the publication of an article containing classified information related to the torture program. The CIA's Counter Terrorism Center legal team replied that the information had been provided by the OPA and thus did not warrant an investigation.

Jehl once again turned to the CIA in December 2005 for assistance with a new story concerning the agency's torture program. Jehl submitted a detailed outline of his proposed article to the agency, assured them that the article would reiterate that the "enhanced interrogation techniques" were effective, and that the program had been authorized by the White House and Department of Justice. That article was never published.

However, another *New York Times* reporter, David Johnston, contacted the CIA with a proposal for a story on the interrogation program the following year, and his article did appear in the *Times* .

The Senate report asserts that both Kessler's book and Jehl's published article from 2005 contained "inaccurate claims about the effectiveness of CIA interrogations" which were largely consistent with information being provided to Congress by the CIA.

The CIA sought to control the media and public perception of its interrogation program not only through selective leaks to journalists, but also by requesting that news outlets sit on information it did not want to reach the public.

The CIA as well as Vice President Cheney pressured the *New York Times* in November 2002 not to reveal the fact that terrorism suspect Abu Zubaydah was being held at the intelligence agency's secret prison in Thailand. The CIA feared that if the information was released, the Thai government would not accept future detainees. The newspaper complied with the request and concealed these facts until March 2003, after the prison had been shut down and Zubaydah and other detainees had been transferred to other black sites.

Zubaydah was held at various CIA black sites for four-and-a-half years, until he was transferred in 2006 to the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, where he is still being held. While in US custody, he was waterboarded approximately 83 times and subjected to a host of other forms of torture, including sleep deprivation, confinement in a small coffin-like box, and being repeatedly slapped, hit and slammed against a wall. Zubaydah, who lost his left eye at some point while in the custody of the CIA, has yet to be charged with a crime after more than 12 years of detention.

The reports on Kessler, Jehl and Johnston are the just tip of the iceberg. They point to the integration of the mass media, including supposedly authoritative outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, into the military-intelligence apparatus. Prominent and highly paid "journalists" on a routine basis voluntarily allow their articles to be vetted by CIA censors.

The American corporate media is an accessory to the immense crimes carried out and covered up by both the Bush and Obama administrations, aiding and abetting torture, abductions, targeted assassinations and other atrocities.

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