

# What is behind the German media's condemnation of CIA torture?

By Johannes Stern  
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The US Senate report on the brutal torture program of the CIA has triggered sharp reaction in Germany. Over the last few days, many articles and commentaries in the media have addressed the bestial practices of the US government and its intelligence agency.

The latest edition of *Der Spiegel*, the country's most widely circulated weekly news magazine, was titled, "The Dark Side of Power: How America lost its values". The edition's lead article, "America's Abyss", amounts to an indictment of the United States. It noted that the Senate's torture report revealed "with brutal frankness, how the country betrayed its values after September 11, 2001—and continues to struggle with the consequences of its moral failure to this day".

The torture program was said to constitute one of the "darkest moments of the nation's history", the news magazine wrote, adding that the America of George W. Bush had reacted to terrorism in ways "that differ only slightly from those of repressive regimes". America was "now a rogue state", it continued, writing that the "moral foundation of the United States" had been ravaged "along with its authority as the leading nation of the West". *Der Spiegel* even links the torture techniques of the CIA with the crimes of the Nazis. "By 1937, similar methods of 'enhanced interrogation' had already been invented by the Gestapo", the magazine writes, and goes on to detail the crimes of the Bush administration.

The *Spiegel* article lays blame not only on those mainly responsible, including former President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, but also implicates current US President Barack Obama. Obama appears "like a president who is constantly (trying to) wash his hands" of the matter. He had stopped the torture, but was unwilling to follow up on the consequences. He wanted to close the "Guantanamo terror prison", but had not done so. He professes to stand "indeed for liberal values", but "nevertheless arranges for alleged terrorists to be killed in drone attacks" and hardly ever says anything about police violence against blacks. *Der Spiegel* also refers to the complicity of the German authorities. A second article, entitled "Better not to ask", describes "German politicians' outrage over the CIA report" as "hypocritical". The prevailing principle for a long time had been: "When in doubt, avoid taking risks". *Der Spiegel* notes that German officials had

interrogated prisoners at Guantanamo and in Syria and recalled the refusal of the Social Democratic-Green Party government in 2002 to aid Murat Kurnaz, the German-Turkish citizen imprisoned at Guantanamo. In 2007, the Munich public prosecutor issued arrest warrants against 13 CIA agents, who had renditioned German-Lebanese Khaled El-Masri to Afghanistan, but then no action was taken against the US agents in Germany.

While government representatives distance themselves from the torture, some leading opposition figures are demanding the prosecution of US officials in the German courts. *Der Spiegel* quotes Green parliamentary deputy and former minister Renate Künast, who "at last" is demanding the launching of "criminal investigations in countries such as Germany". She said, "This report should finally put an end to diplomatic pussy footing."

Last Tuesday, Left Party parliamentary faction leader Gregor Gysi brought a legal charge against George W. Bush and the responsible CIA staff members. In his letter to federal prosecutor Harald Range, Gysi said their activities revealed "profoundly bestial and sadistic motives, tendencies and methods".

On Wednesday and following the convening of the legal rights committee of the German parliament, Range called for a full, i.e. unredacted, copy of the entire CIA report. According to media reports, Range sought to establish if there was a basis for opening up an investigation.

Voices in favour of a legal prosecution are growing louder even among well-known pro-Americans. Jochen Bittner, the *Die Zeit* newspaper editor who usually devotes his labours to calling for stronger German participation in US-led wars, writes in his paper's latest issue about "a blatant contradiction of values" within the European judiciary. Victims of US torture have been "compensated", says Bittner, "but the perpetrators have not been brought to account".

He also writes, "Even if Germany began with such a task, the question would soon arise as to where the prosecutors should draw a halt (to their investigations)." After all, says Bittner, Obama has "put his signature to more orders for targeted killings than his predecessor". Investigators would be treading on difficult terrain. "On the other hand, how can Germany conduct credible human rights dialogues with China, if it turns

a blind eye to what its allies are doing?” he asks at the end of his article.

What lies behind such reactions? Representatives of the German media and politicians who have worked closely together with the US for years and undoubtedly were aware, or even collaborated in the CIA’s medieval torture practices, have not been transformed overnight into pious defenders of peace and democratic rights.

It was *Der Spiegel*, together with the former pacifists of the Greens, which were amongst the most aggressive warmongers against Russia last year. They completely ignored the crimes committed by the fascist militias, which fought on the side of the Kiev regime. The Left Party has criticized the government’s war policy in the Middle East from the right and calls for more intensive military intervention against the Islamic State. Gysi’s accusations against the CIA have nothing to do with opposition to the war crimes committed by the imperialist powers.

There are a number of reasons for the increasingly fierce criticism of the US from sections of the ruling elite. After its defeat in World War II and the crimes of National Socialism, the German elite based its legitimacy on a close alliance with the United States. The reference to the “Western values” and the struggle of the “free world” against the Soviet Union were the basis not only for the rearmament of West Germany and its integration into NATO, but also, at a later date, the reunification of Germany and its return to an aggressive foreign policy.

The torture revelations further undermine the ideological foundation of Western capitalism. For millions of people, it is becoming increasingly clear that the social system in which they live is based on a lie. The wars waged by the US and its allies have not brought “peace”, “prosperity” and “human rights”, but have instead violated the most basic norms of international law and conventions. In order to pursue their economic and strategic interests, tens of millions are realizing, the ruling elites are prepared to murder and torture.

At the same time, the criminal policy of the West is leading to increasingly exacerbated tensions between the imperialist powers. At the start of this year, the US and Germany cooperated closely in organizing a fascist-led coup in Ukraine, thereby tightening the military noose around Russia while imposing massive economic sanctions against Moscow. Since then, tensions between Washington and Berlin have steadily increased. While the US government is evidently intent on regime change in Russia, Germany wants to put Russia on the defensive but, for the time being, does not want to provoke a complete breakdown of economic relations.

Under these conditions, there is a growing lobby demanding that Germany pursue its imperialist interests more independently of the US. Symptomatic of this trend was the criticism of the government’s policy toward Russia made by 60 high-ranking politicians, including ex-chancellor Schröder (SPD), at the beginning of December.

Now layers of the German media and political elite are using the torture report to foment anti-American sentiment. They make the American people responsible for the torture rather than the administration in Washington.

“Many Americans seem to be so jaded, maybe even brutalized, they are no longer disturbed by atrocities,” commented the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. The majority of Americans find torture to be “not so bad”, the newspaper claims.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)* writes in a similar vein. The terrorists of September 11 had not only destroyed the skyscrapers in New York, “but also damaged the legal sensibilities of many Americans”. Now they are quite prepared to approve things “that have previously been legally taboo”. The conclusion of the SZ is that Europe is obliged to prosecute those responsible, even if this “severely burdens its political relations with America”. This was “unavoidable, however, if Europe wants to show the world that it believes in Western values”.

Here anti-Americanism is combined with German nationalism and, of all things, German imperialism is presented as the champion of democratic values! This has nothing to do with opposition to imperialism and its crimes. For the past 13 years the German political and military establishment has worked closely with their American “partners” under the pretext of the “war on terror”. In doing so, the German and European elites have made clear that they are on the same page as their counterparts in Washington and the Langley, Virginia headquarters of the CIA when it comes “Western values”.

The increasingly anti-American tones of the German media should be taken as a warning. Historically, the great-power ambitions of German imperialism were also directed against the United States, which it fought in two world wars. In the course of those wars, the German elite committed far more odious crimes than the CIA’s barbaric torture program.

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