

VIPS Call on Senate Intel Panel to Vote Against Haspel

With torture-overseer Gina Haspel set to face the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday instead of a judge, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity urge committee members to vote against her nomination.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Opposition to Gina Haspel as CIA Director

We, the undersigned intelligence, diplomatic, law enforcement, and military professionals, are writing to urge you to vote against Gina Haspel to lead the Central Intelligence Agency.

Putting Haspel in charge of the CIA would undo attempts by the agency – and the nation – to repudiate torture. The message this would send to the CIA workforce is simple: Engage in war crimes, in crimes against humanity, and you’ll get promoted. Don’t worry about the law. Don’t worry about ethics. Don’t worry about morality or the fact that torture doesn’t even work. Go ahead and do it anyway. We’ll cover for you. And you can destroy the evidence, too.

Described in the media as a “seasoned intelligence veteran,” Haspel has been at the CIA for 33 years, both at headquarters and in senior positions overseas. Now the deputy director, she has tried hard to stay out of the public eye. Former CIA Director Michael Pompeo has lauded her “uncanny ability to get things done and inspire those around her.”

That is true for those of Haspel’s mindset. But many of the rest of us who knew and worked with Haspel at the CIA called her “Bloody Gina” because of her direct involvement in the CIA’s torture program.

The President’s appointment of Haspel hurts morale among CIA officers who recognize that torture is wrong, inefficient, and counterproductive. It comforts people at the agency who still believe that “enhanced interrogation” is somehow acceptable.

The message it sends to our friends and allies (and the countries we criticize in the State Department’s annual human rights reports) is this: We say we’re a shining city on a hill, a beacon of respect for human rights, civil rights, civil liberties and the rule of law. But that simply is not true. We say those things when it’s expedient. We say them to make ourselves feel good. But when

push comes to shove, we do what we want, international law and the 8th Amendment to the Constitution be damned.

The meaning of Haspel's nomination won't be lost on our enemies, either. The torture program and similar abuses at military-run prisons in Iraq were among the greatest recruitment tools that al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and other bad actors ever had, according to legal experts, U.S. lawmakers and even to the militants themselves. It energized them and gave them something to rally against. It sowed an even deeper hatred of the United States among militant groups. It swelled their ranks. It was no coincidence that the Islamic State paraded its prisoners in front of cameras wearing orange jumpsuits (like those worn by Guantanamo Bay detainees) before beheading them. Haspel and the others at the CIA who engineered and oversaw the torture program are at least partially responsible for that, because they showed the world how the United States sometimes treats captives.

Do we Americans want to be a rogue nation that tortures people, like North Korea? Do we want to be a nation whose CIA Director will not be able to visit the heads of counterpart services for fear of arrest under the principle of universal jurisdiction for the torture she is known to have led? Are we proud of the era when we snatched people from one country and sent them to another to be interrogated in secret prisons? Do we want to be the country that cynically preaches human rights and then violates those same rights when we think nobody is looking?

Do we want to be a government that lies to its own people and then punishes the truth-tellers who have exposed official activities illegal, immoral, unacceptable, and incompatible with our values, even when classification of embarrassing or illegal conduct is expressly forbidden? (Full disclosure: The drafter of this memo, John Kiriakou, spent 23 months in federal prison for revealing that torture had been approved at the highest levels of government.)

Our country cannot afford that. We cannot look the other way. We cannot reward the torturers. Gina Haspel has no business running the CIA. Please vote against her nomination.

On March 25, 2018, we sent President Trump a Memorandum urging him to withdraw Haspel's nomination, citing a long list of cogent, compelling reasons to do so. We have had no response. You and your staff may wish to review it.

Matthew Alexander, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations (retired)

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (retired) and Division Director, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader, Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (retired)

Philip Giraldi, CIA Operations Officer (retired)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, U.S. Air Force, Intelligence Officer, and former Master SERE Instructor (retired)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and Former Senior Investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, LTC, U.S. Air Force (retired)

Clement J. Laniewski, LTC, U.S. Army (retired)

Ray McGovern, Army/Infantry Intelligence Officer and CIA Presidential Briefer (retired)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council (retired)

Diane Roark, Republican Professional Staff, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (retired)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (retired)

Greg Thielmann, Former Director, Office of Strategic, Political, and Military Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State and former staff member, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

Peter Van Buren, former diplomat, U.S. Department of State

Sarah Wilton, Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve (retired) and Defense Intelligence Agency (retired)

Ann Wright, retired U.S. Army reserve colonel and former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

Laurence Wilkerson, Colonel, U.S. Army (retired), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)
