

Haspel Says CIA Won't Torture Again as Ray McGovern is Dragged Out of Hearing

2nd UPDATE: After refusing to directly answer questions about her history as an alleged torturer, Ray McGovern decided to ask Gina Haspel a question or two of his own and he wound up in jail for it, reports Joe Lauria.

Updated with news that McGovern returned home and details of him being charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest.

By Joe Lauria *Special to Consortium News*



Instead of facing a judge to defend herself against prosecution for violating U.S. law prohibiting torture, 33-year CIA veteran Gina Haspel on Wednesday faced the Senate Intelligence Committee in a hearing to confirm her as director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Haspel does not look like someone who would be associated with torture. Instead she would not be out of place as your next door neighbor or as a kindly grade-school teacher. "I think you will find me to be a typical middle-class American," she said in her opening statement.

Haspel is the face of America. She not only looks harmless, but looks like she wants to help: perhaps to recommend a good gardener to hire or to spread democracy around the globe while upholding human rights wherever they are violated.

But this perfectly typical middle class American personally supervised a black site in Thailand where terrorism suspects were waterboarded. It remains unclear whether she had a direct role in the torture. The CIA said she arrived at the black site after the waterboarding of senior al-Qaeda operative Abu Zubaydah had taken place. Some CIA officials disputed that to *The New York Times*. The newspaper also reported last year that Haspel ran the CIA Thai prison in 2002 when another suspect, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, was waterboarded.

Even if she did not have a direct hand in overseeing the torture, she certainly acquiesced to it. And if that were not bad enough, Haspel

urged the destruction of 92 videotaped CIA "enhanced interrogations," conducted at the prison in Thailand, eliminating evidence in a clear-cut obstruction of justice to cover-up her own possible crimes.

At her public hearing Haspel refused to say that the torture was immoral.

Instead she tried to romanticize her nefarious past in adolescent language about the spy trade, about going to secret meetings on “dark, moonless nights,” in the “dusty back alleys of Third World capitals.”

Haspel claimed to have a “strong moral compass.” We really can’t know because we only found out about what she did in Thailand in 2002 because of press reports. Just about everything else she did during her three decades at the agency remains shrouded in secrecy because she refused to declassify almost all of her record for the committee.

“Bloody Gina,” as some CIA colleagues called her, told the hearing she would not re-institute the “enhanced interrogation” program if she became director. One wonders if the US were attacked again like on 9/11 if she would keep her vow, especially as she admitted nothing wrong with “enhanced interrogation” the first time.

Haspel testified that the U.S. has a new legal framework that governs detentions and interrogations forbidding what she refused to call torture. But the U.S. already had a law on the books against it when the Senate ratified the international Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on October 21, 1994. Every time the U.S. “tortured some folks” after that, as Barack Obama put it, it broke U.S. law.

In speaking about it in a folksy way, Obama was minimizing the enormity of the crime and justifying his decision to not prosecute any American who may have taken part in it. That includes Haspel. So instead of facing the law she’s facing a career promotion to one of the most powerful positions in the United States, if not the world.

McGovern Speaks Out

Haspel tried to wiggle out of relentless questioning about whether she thought torture was immoral, let alone illegal. Completely ignoring U.S. ratification of the Convention Against Torture, Haspel clung to the new Army Field Manual, which contains a loophole in an annex added after 9/11 that justifies cruel punishment, but not specifically torture.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who was tortured in Vietnam, had no doubts about Haspel. After the hearing he issued a statement saying, “Ms. Haspel’s role in overseeing the use of torture by Americans is disturbing. Her refusal to acknowledge torture’s immorality is disqualifying.”



Because she wasn't giving any straight answers, Ray McGovern, a CIA veteran of 27 years and frequent contributor to Consortium News, stood up in the hearing room and began asking his own questions.

Capitol police were immediately ordered by the chairman, Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), to physically remove McGovern from the room. As he continued turning towards the committee to shout his questions, four officers hauled him out. They ominously accused him of resisting arrest. Once they got him into the hallway, rather than letting him go his way, four policemen wrestled him to the ground, re-injuring his dislocated left shoulder, as they attempted to cuff him.

After spending the night in jail, McGovern, 78, was to be arraigned on Thursday. He has not responded to several voice messages left on his mobile phone. A police officer at Central Booking told Consortium News McGovern was no longer under their control and had been sent to court. According to DC Superior Court, he has been charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest. Ray returned home Thursday night.

McGovern was one of several people arrested before and during the hearing for speaking out. The spectacle of citizens of this country, and in Ray's case a veteran CIA officer, having to resort to disrupting a travesty of a hearing to put an alleged torturer in charge of the most powerful spy agency in the world is a disturbing indicator of how far we have come.

A Different Kind of Hearing

In 1975, Sen. Frank Church (D-ID) conducted hearings that revealed a raft of criminality committed by the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation over a period of thirty years from the end of the Second World War. It has been more than 40 years since that Senate investigation. After

the release of the CIA Torture Report by the Senate in 2014 and the revelations about the NSA by Edward Snowden, a new Church Committee-style expansive probe into the intelligence agencies is long overdue.

A central question it should ask is whether the CIA really serves the interests of the American people or rather the interests of its rulers, which the agency has done from its founding by Wall Street elites, such as its first director, Allen Dulles.

While the Republican-controlled intelligence committee may have partisan motives to launch such a new Church-like commission to look into the agencies' shenanigans in the Russia-gate fiasco, the majority of Republicans are hawks on intelligence matters and many support torture and want Haspel to be the next CIA director. For instance, Burr told Haspel: "You are without a doubt the most qualified person the president could choose to lead the CIA and the most prepared nominee in the 70-year history of the agency. You have acted morally, ethically and legally over a distinguished 30-year career."

None of this bodes well for the nation.

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