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## The CIA's Torture Program Breeds Hate

An Interview with Norman Pollack

by KOUROSH ZIABARI

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*The recent report issued by the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence disclosing the sophisticated torturing methods used by the CIA against the terrorism suspects has stirred widespread debate across the world on the permissibility of using such torture techniques against prisoners of war.*

*An American historian and political commentator says the CIA's Detention and Interrogation program which oversaw the torturing of tens of prisoners in the overseas jails of the US government, including the Guantanamo bay detention facility, the Bagram air base in Afghanistan and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq has not only failed to address the United States' national security concerns, but has turned "much of the world against America."*

*According to Prof. Norman Pollack, the United States used the soil of third countries to set up its jails and detention facilities there in order to escape accountability before the international law.*

*Prof. Pollack tells Fars News Agency that such methods as waterboarding, rectal feeding, sleep deprivation and chaining to wall that were used by the CIA agents and operatives against the terrorism suspects are utterly illegal and "represent the full negation of human rights."*

*Norman Pollack is a professor of history emeritus at the Michigan State University. He got his Ph.D. from the Harvard University in 1961 and has been a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship and Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. Pollack regularly writes commentaries and essays for the CounterPunch newsletter. His book “The Populist Response to Industrial America” was published in 1962 by the Harvard University Press.*

*Prof. Norman Pollack talked to FNA about the recent Torture Report and its repercussions for the United States intelligence apparatus and how this scandal has embarrassed President Obama internationally. The following is the text of the interview.*

**Kourosh Ziabari:** *Do you think that the CIA officials deceived the Bush and Obama administrations regarding the efficacy of the torture methods used against the terrorism suspects held in the overseas US-run prisons, referred to as the Enhanced Interrogation Techniques? Have the CIA operatives really been able to elicit useful information from the inmates through resorting to the complicated torture methods detailed in the SSCI’s recent report? Has the torture program contributed to the solidification of US national security?*

**Norman Pollack:** The antecedent question, not did the CIA deceive these administrations about the efficacy of EITs, but, as the Senate Report claims, were the administrations even aware of the programs? The Senate Report is seeking to give Obama deniability—i.e., that he was kept in the dark—lest he be held accountable for war crimes. I am in no position to judge whether EITs yielded relevant information. But on solidification of security, no; if anything, torture has turned much of the world against America, and has created the basis for the rise of militant groups and the desire for retribution.

**KZ:** *There have been different reports regarding the outsourcing of the CIA’s “interrogation programs” and that about 85% of the interrogation teams consisted of private contractors, not the CIA employees. Does it mean that the CIA operatives refused to take part in torturing the inmates at Guantanamo bay detention facility, Parwan Prison at the Bagram air base and other US jails?*

**NP:** First, I don’t accept the 85% figure; in addition to CIA, there were US service personnel, e.g., Bagram, as well as foreign nationals at the black sites [in] Poland, Thailand, etc. Outsourcing, of course was to shield US individuals from prosecution for war crimes, but outsourcing [was] also for giving vent to sadism. My sense is that once black sites are involved, Americans were perfectly willing torturers, their identities protected.

**KZ:** *Had the torture methods used against the 119 individuals detained by CIA following the invasion of Afghanistan been authorized by the Bush administration and the Justice Department? Was George W. Bush personally aware of the fact that the terrorism suspects were subject to the most humiliating and degrading types of torture and persecution?*

**NP:** I have no specific knowledge about how much Bush knew, but it is clear [that] the Office of Legal Counsel, especially under John Yoo, crafted legal opinions which were then taken as authorizations drawn in such a way as to keep pace with the tortures. In turn, these memos

served as rationalization and legitimation for the practices. The Eichmann Syndrome, we were only following orders.

**KZ:** *What's your viewpoint regarding the complicity of some 50 nations with the United States in its extraordinary rendition program? It's said that countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Thailand, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Finland and Poland allowed the CIA to abduct, secretly imprison and torture terrorism suspects in their soil. Most of these countries have resisted accountability and refused to comment on their cooperation with CIA. What do you think about that?*

**NP:** Complicity is the operative term. The US has a vast web of political, economic and military penetration, both through the establishment of bases and the granting of military aid, to the countries named—and a good deal more. The purpose of rendition, the prison system, etc., on foreign soil is to discourage and deny accountability. Why else black sites? Accountability should by rights lead directly to The Hague and the International Criminal Court. Essentially, this whole aspect of the counterterrorism effort is that it is a covert operation.

**KZ:** *Jose Rodriguez, the former director of the CIA's National Clandestine Service and the officer who was in charge of running the torture and abuse program has recently argued that the interrogation techniques were quite legal and effective. We've already talked about their effectiveness. What about their legality? Are there certain legal gaps in the US statutory laws that permit the intelligence apparatus to use coercive means of torturing against the inmates held on political and security charges?*

**NP:** I am not a lawyer, and therefore not versed on US statutory laws, but the whole point of covert action, torture, drone assassination, is to be able to practice with impunity what are viewed as imperative means of creating and operating The National Security State. We don't need Kafka to recognize that Law is readily perverted in a totalitarian state. To address these activities, one must start with the nature of the society itself. In a democracy, statutory law sanctioning these known practices would be nullified and the practices themselves exposed, perpetrators tried and imprisoned, and the general public properly angered and disgusted.

**KZ:** *Have the policies adopted by the Bush administration following the 9/11 attacks, including the National Security Agency's eavesdropping program and monitoring the phone calls and email conversations of the American citizens, the enforcement of the USA PATRIOT Act and unwarranted searches and seizures been consistent with the principles of the US Constitution? Don't such practices undermine democracy and civil liberties in the American society?*

**NP:** The questions answer themselves. These practices are abhorrent to constitutionalism. By themselves, the individual is stripped of privacy and identity, exactly the human condition on which totalitarianism thrives. Democracy and civil liberties are misnomers under condition of massive surveillance. That NSA has been given such wide latitude, including eavesdropping on foreign leaders, all pretence at guidance or enforcement by the FISA court a sick joke, speaks to the repressive nature of state and society.

**KZ:** *Which officials have been complicit in the wrongdoings that paved the way for the illegal invasion of Iraq and the intensified US military presence in the Middle East, contributed to the withholding of the documents that showed Saddam Hussein didn't possess Weapons of Mass Destruction and embroiled the US government into a horrific program of prosecuting terrorism suspects across the world and torturing them using the most complicated and brutal methods?*

**NP:** My take is quite different. Specific individuals—members of national security staffs, leaders of the military and intelligence communities, public intellectuals and think-tank members of Neo-con persuasion, and the list goes on, to Congress, major industrial, financial, commercial leaders, Treasury and other Cabinet officials, the president himself—names, in most cases, with whom I am unfamiliar, all have a significant role to play, but more important, one starts with the historical development of public policy, the actual record of intervention, the clear delineation of US foreign-policy goals, a total context within which all that is mentioned, Middle East, Iraq, WMD, counterterrorism measures, could not otherwise arise. Policy, however irrational as measured by democratic-humanistic standards, is consecutive, integrative and systematic, perfectly in order from a society bent on unilateral global hegemony, including the expansion of its political economy. The names mentioned are implementing a course whose boundaries have been in progress for decades, predicated on, among other things, the ideology and political economy of the society. But yes, individuals do count, primarily those at the highest levels of government and business, themselves holding policies, views, goals defining a common core.

**KZ:** *With the disclosure of the Senate's Torture Report which shows the terrorism suspects held by the CIA in Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba and other countries were treated in the most denigrating and humiliating ways, it seems that the United States has lost its moral standing for criticizing other countries for their alleged violation of human rights, because these torture methods, including waterboarding, rectal feeding, sexual harassment, sleep deprivation and psychological persecution explicitly represent the most cruel violations of the human rights one may think of. Do you agree?*

**NP:** Yes, emphatically, [they are] practices which represent the full negation of human rights. The question is, why such depravity of conduct? Here one enters a cold realm of psychopathology, not just the torturer, but societal leadership indifferent to, if not perversely wanting to destroy, human rights—and for clues one must go to the foundations of the society. What factors engender moral emptiness? What promotes the desire to hurt, injure, even kill? Rather than try for an explanation, I would emphasize the abnormality, yes, evil, itself. A society must be judged by how it treats its human beings and all others with which it comes in contact. And as part of that evaluation of society, one must not neglect its institutional features: culture, law, political economy, etc. Too, one must take such cases, e.g., waterboarding, and demand prosecution and punishment, no matter how high up the ladder—and in these cases labeled as war crimes committed by war criminals.