The Senate Report on CIA Torture – The Basic Facts

From 2009 to 2014 the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) conducted a comprehensive oversight review of the CIA's interrogation and detention program in the years following 9/11. This is the first independent assessment of the program and its claims of success based on the actual classified records of the CIA. The review has been hailed as among the most important oversight reviews in the history of the Senate.

The SSCI staff reportedly reviewed more than six million pages of documents. The report itself is approximately 6,700 pages long with over 38,000 footnotes citing CIA documents.

The Committee approved the CIA torture report in a bipartisan vote in December 2012. At that time Senator McCain wrote: "[T]orture of the kind described in this report is unworthy of our national honor and should no longer be a matter for discussion." The SSCI voted to release the 500-page Executive Summary to the public in April 2014. The Administration has proposed some redactions to the Executive Summary which is likely to be released in early August.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), the SSCI chairman, has said the report shows that CIA abuse of detainees was "chilling" and "far more systematic and widespread than we thought." According to numerous reports it proves that the CIA repeatedly misled the Justice Department, the White House, and the Congress about the program, making false claims about its scope, nature, successes, and necessity. According to multiple reports, it also concludes that no significant intelligence was obtained through torture that was not already available to the intelligence community through other sources.   In voting to release the Executive Summary to the public, Republican Senator Susan Collins and Independent Senator Angus King wrote jointly that CIA actions "constituted torture" and that, "[We] must make sure that the misconduct and the grave errors made in the CIA's detention and interrogation program never happen again."

The SSCI investigation has had bipartisan support on every vote even though Republican staff members stopped participating actively in September 2009 when the Justice Department initiated an expanded criminal investigation into CIA activities. The vote to launch the review was bipartisan (14-1), the vote to approve the report was bipartisan (9-6) with Sen. Snowe (R-Maine) voting yes and with strong support from Sen. McCain as a non-voting member, and the vote to release the Executive Summary was bipartisan (11-3) with support from Sens. Collins and King. The only "partisan" aspect of the process has been the opposition which has come solely from Republicans who chose not to participate in the review.

While the SSCI staff did not interview CIA officials—in part due to the pending criminal investigations—they had access to hundreds of interview transcripts from internal reviews of the program. More importantly, the Committee had access to millions of pages of contemporaneous records from the program's operation. And according to Sen. Feinstein, the CIA's own internal review (the "Panetta Review") confirms many of the conclusions of the Senate Torture Report.

In short, the Senate Torture Report shows that the CIA used torture and other brutal interrogation techniques and demonstrates why this must never be allowed to happen again.