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UNITED STATES: TORTURES AND LIES

On September 17 2001, six days after the attack on the Twin Towers, US President George W. Bush signed a "Memorandum of Notification" in which he granted the CIA new powers in the struggle against terrorism. Among these there was the possibility to secretly arrest individuals and to detain them without restrictions. But that specific Memorandum didn't consider the possible interrogation techniques.

Exporters of Democracy

Six months later, on March 11th 2002, President Bush ordered the opening of a prison camp inside the naval base of Guantanamo, Cuba. To prevent the implementation of the Geneva Convention on the prisoners, the inmates were classified as "outlaws". After a few months the first news regarding the mistreatment of the prisoners surfaced. Another year went by, it was June 2003. The Iraq war had begun just 3 months earlier when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke out. Pictures and evidence of tortures and abuses towards prisoners hit the news. The setting changed, but not the essence. In Bagram, Afghanistan, in May 2005 two prisoners died because of the tortures inflicted on them in one of the CIA's secret prisons. They were fastened with chains to the ceiling and beaten up over and over again.

After a few days, on May 25th, during a press conference at the White House, a journalist asked: "Amnesty International report today, saying the US is a top offender of human rights. Does the White House dispute that assessment?". The then White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan replied without a blink: "I think the allegations are ridiculous and unsupported by the facts. The United States is leading the way when it comes to protecting human rights and promoting human dignity. We have liberated 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have worked to advance freedom and democracy in the world so that people are governed under a rule of law and that there are protections in place for minority rights, that women's rights are advanced..."

But this is not the end. On May 30th a journalist asked the then Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, about FBI rumours regarding the desecration of the Koran in Guantanamo. Rice didn't get into the details of the episode asserting she didn't know the facts, but then she did make a comment about Guantanamo: "I want to say something about the treatment of people and Islam in Guantanamo. We are a country that respects all religious faiths and differences. American personnel at Guantanamo Bay have shown great respect for detainees' religion, for example providing them with prayer mats and arrows pointing to Mecca, the direction that Muslims turn to pray".

But the world of the exporters of democracy was filled with black holes. One of them was Iraq. On June 19th 2005 the Los Angeles Times published a report on Iraqi jails, where 12 thousands

prisoners suffered from intimidations, beatings, tortures, some of which were lethal. A key fact contained in the article was that in the brand-new Iraq 90% of prisoners admitted they had made a confession under torture. It was surely the legacy from the days of Saddam Hussein, but the abuses took place under the nose of the American troops that controlled the activities of the Ministry of Interior and of Defence and that were involved in the training of the people that ran the detention centers.

A week later, on June 26th 2005, the UN's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, President Bush stated that freedom from torture is a "inalienable human right". That same day, from the White House, the US President declared that the United States ""is committed to building a world where human rights are respected and protected by the rule of law".

A thorny relationship

After years of recurring charges and denials, the evidence about tortures in Guantanamo and elsewhere in the world were finally exposed by a report released on December 2, 2014 and prepared by the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, led by Democratic congresswoman Dianne Feinstein. This is a complex document (over 6000 pages, with a summary of more than 500 pages, while the rest of it is still protected by secret), written by only the Democratic members of the Committee (the Republicans refused to take part in it) and that examined 6 millions CIA documents over 4 years (2009-2013). A report that costed the US taxpayers some 40 millions dollars.

The finding by the US Senate are somewhat striking. First of all, the "enhanced interrogation techniques", the tortures, were not effective in collecting the information for which they had been authorized. We can add to this the fact that the CIA lied to politicians, to the Department of Justice, to Congress and to the White House about what they were really doing. And the unlucky ones that ended up in the black hole of the secret CIA jails, were left at the mercy of a system without controls, supervisions and restrictions; nobody oversaw the jail-keepers in stars and stripes, nor the external companies or foreign intelligence services that were contracted to carry out the dirty work.

The report was completed in December 2012 and then given to the CIA, who initially rejected the findings of the Committee, branding them as "inaccurate". In 2013 the Committee accused Langley of spying its members and of breaking in the computers where they collected their data. CIA chief, John Brennan, had to publicly excuse himself for this breach; at the same time, the redacted version of the report the CIA meant to release was rejected by the Committee because "too many informations have been deleted". As was predictable, the political instigators of the operation, President George W.Bush and his Vice, Dick Cheney, defended the indefensible. Cheney declared that the interrogations involving torture were "absolutely justified" and that "the men from the CIA should be praised". Put under scrutiny, former President Bush, after a few days of silence, also opted to defend the Agency's work and declared that CIA agents are "patriots".

The CIA, on its part, has maintained that its interrogation techniques, even the most brutal ones, did not amount to torture. Despite their playing with words, the accusations contained in the report will not have any legal consequence for any of the officers involved, including those that sat at the White House. The two former CIA chiefs in office at the time of the tortures, John Tenet and the General Michael Hayden, have stated that: "We are not here to defend torture, but to defend history".

Let the historians decide

The still ongoing debate is taking place at different levels. The political arguments tend to justify some measures in the context of the security emergency that followed 9/11; the juridical debate is arguing on whether these techniques can or cannot be labelled as torture; what is striking though is that the US Senate report argues that the enhanced interrogation techniques failed in extorting information from terrorists and, hence, did not save human lives.

In the background of this entire story lies an ethical issue that is particularly embarrassing for a nation like the United States, the self-proclaimed defenders of the world's civil liberties and human rights. Can the United States be accused of violating the very rights they pretend to defend? Could an emergency and a criminal attack justify the authorization to use torture? If terrorism leads an unconventional war, this could lead us to think that the response should be the same. It's up to each of us, based on our culture and sensibility, to decide the verdict.

The most questionable aspect of the whole affair is that these activities, today unequivocally defined as "illegal", were denied till it was possible to deny them. According to Cheney tortures didn't exist, while he now defends the torturers. The same goes for Bush. Lies, disinformation prepared the ground for the war against Saddam Hussein. Those same lies fueled the invasion and the occupation of Iraq and the search of an alleged enemy who was just given a brand-new battleground to fight in.

The best response to the publication of the Senate report was given by Senator John McCain. Captured by the North Vietnamese in 1967 and detained till 1973, he suffered prolonged tortures and beatings while in detention; he was refused treatment, kept in isolation for 2 years and the beatings left him with a series of broken ribs. He was the guest of Hanoi's worst prison, the Hoa Lo, also known as "Hanoi Hilton", where he attempted to commit suicide to escape from the tortures. During his statement in Senate, and after having recalled that any prisoner would say or do just about anything to stop his suffering, he said: "In the end, the failure of tortures in reaching their purpose isn't the main reason to adversing them. As I often used to say, and always will, this matter isn't about our enemies; it's about us. It's about who we were, who we are and who we look to be. It's about how we introduce ourselves to the rest of the world".

THE CIA CONFUSES INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES WITH TORTURE

The CIA, employing a rather scholastic appellation, used to call them "enhanced interrogation techniques". They were presented as nothing more than codified, regulated procedures that could be employed because the rulebooks stated so. There were about 10 interrogation techniques, introduced in August 2002, while four more were added in May 2005. All of them had received the green light from the US Department of Justice, that set out their legal framework and assured they did not amount to torture.

A disputable record

Those that were supposed to use these techniques, be they CIA, military or contractors, never posed themselves the question of whether what they were doing was permitted or lawful. Someone had already provided them with a reply. Therefore, the war on terrorism was waged without the slightest moral dilemma. If the politicians asked that these techniques be employed, all the CIA men had to do was to evaluate whether the results they obtained were satisfactory or not. What mattered was that the prisoner confess, regardless of the truthfulness of his statements, as pointed out in the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report. And, as in some cases highlighted in the US Senators' report, the detainees were subject to these techniques despite the fact that they had already confessed and provided valuable information. Some probably thought that by doing so they could have obtained even more.

Were there steps in the application of these techniques based on the level of collaboration of the prisoners? The CIA said yes, but the Senate Committee came to a different conclusion.

Did these techniques used during interrogations produce any valuable result? The CIA claims they were effective, but the Senate Committee disputes this claim.

Could the same information have been obtained by other means, that did not amount to torture? There is no way, of course, to prove this assertion.

The interrogations were brutal? The detainees suffered? The prisoners were not collaborative? This was not an issue for those that had ordered the use of these techniques and for those who used them.

It was up to those in charge of the interrogations to decide which technique would suit better, how long they would use it for and for how many times in order to extort the information they sought. And it was up to the interrogators to decide on whether to employ more techniques at once.

The techniques

The US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report lists and describes a number of techniques used by the CIA and the US military. In some cases they are referred to specific detainees (Abu Zubaydah, Sheykh Khaled Mohammed, Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, Ramzi bin al Shibh and others).

In detail, there was a wide array of options to choose from.

- "Waterboarding" is a technique in which water is poured over a cloth covering the face and breathing passages of an immobilized captive, causing the individual to experience the

sensation of drowning. It can last from 20 to 40 seconds. The prisoner can't breathe, gulps down water, feels pain on his arms and legs, sometimes goes unconscious, panics fearing for his own life, has a nervous break down, convulsions and vomiting. The US Senate Committee has found that a detainee suffered this treatment 183 times over one year, in some cases up to four times during the same day. Both the Committee and the men that used it on the ground agree it was one of the most effective and feared techniques.

- "Sleep deprivation" forces the captive to stay awake for several hours. The Committee has found this techniques to have been used during interrogations lasting as long as 180 consecutive hours, more than a week. The detainee is left standing up or in a stress position, with his arms chained over his head. He can only move within a half a meter range. The victim begins suffering from hallucinations, loses time perception. This technique is often combined with loud music and light control.

- "Cramped confinement" is a technique whereby a prisoner is left in the dark inside a "coffin-like box" that leaves him with no room to move, or turn around. This causes claustrophobia and muscular pain. In the case of Saudi detainee Abu Zubaydah, he was held with his handcuffs on, inside a coffin, with his hands over his head for 11 days.

- "Total isolation" in solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time causes both psychiatric and psychological problems in the detainees. Hallucinations, paranoia, insomnia, self-inflicted bruises or mutilations are among the direct consequences of this technique. The captive is kept in the dark, in chains or with his handcuffs on, a single bucket for his physical needs. The Committee has identified a detainee that was held in one of the CIA-run interrogation centers (the report has not identified them, nor have they revealed any names of CIA personnel) and that perished of hypothermia while in solitary confinement.

- "Rectal rehydration" provides that the detainee be forcefully injected water from his anus. Despite the fact that this could also be a medical treatment, the technique was used without any medical supervision or authorization. At least 5 CIA detainees have been subject to this treatment. A similar technique is the rectal feeding of the prisoners, employed when inmates carry out hunger strikes. Both the rehydration and the feeding cause high levels of humiliation and frustration in the victims.

- "Rough takedown" techniques include having the detainee walking naked with his hands chained above his head. The enhanced version of this technique includes having five CIA operatives yelling in your face, tearing your clothes to bits and dragging you with your hood on up and down the prison's corridor, while swiping the floor with your naked skin they would continue beating you.

- "Nudity" forces a prisoner to be constantly naked. This technique aims at humiliating the detainees and to make them feel vulnerable. Its effects are enhanced when it is a female interrogator that carries out the questionings. Nudity also increases sufferings and hypothermia.

- "Walling" involves pushing a prisoner against a wall while his neck is encircled by a collar made up of a rolled towel. The collar is meant to protect the detainee from bruises. This technique causes frustration and depression in the prisoners.

- "Wall standing" forces the prisoner to stand facing a wall with his arms stretched forward and his fingers touching the wall. It causes extreme muscular pain. The Senate report includes the case of an inmate that was chained in this position for 17 consecutive days.

- "Stress positions" cause pain in detainees that are obliged to hold an uncomfortable position for several hours. It is a variation of both the "coffin" and "wall standing" techniques.

- "Cold bath" is when ice-cold water is splashed over a prisoner. The US Department of Justice that licensed this technique required that the water used be potable and that it hit not the prisoner's nose, mouth or eyes. The "shower" usually lasted around 20 minutes. In some detention centers the inmates were plunged into ice-cold baths. An additional torture was added when the captive was brushed with a hard brush that caused a series of abrasions.

- "Abdomen strikes" and "Insult slaps" were among the initiatives authorized by the DOJ. The only requirement being the interrogator not wearing any rings on his hands. Both can be combined with other, more stressing techniques.

- "Cramped confinement with insects" is the enhanced version of the coffin-like reclusion. Aby Zubayadah was among the first ones to experience this technique.

- "Facial Hold" includes the interrogator holding the prisoner's face with both hands and keeping it immobile. The Department of Justice recommended that the interrogator not poke the inmate's eyes.

- "Attention grasp" instead provides for the interrogator to hold the captive's face, but with his hands around the prisoner's neck.

- "Diet manipulation" included feeding the prisoners with just liquids, in order to weaken them and cause them to lose weight. Both the quality and quantity of food fed to the inmates are affected. This technique postulates that a physical weakening will also have a psychological effect. Some prisoners assumed their food contained drugs or poison.

- "Use of diapers". The CIA forced detainees to wear diapers "to cause humiliation" and "induce a sense of helplessness". A bucket was promised if the prisoner began to collaborate. This technique was usually combined with sleep deprivation and, according to the DOJ, should not exceed 72 hours. Each transfer of prisoners by plane included having the inmates chained to the floor, hoods on their heads, diapers on their arses.

If the above are the main techniques that were used to inflict physical and psychological harm on the detainees, the US Senate Committee report includes other, devious forms of violence. The prisoners were told they would have never left the detention centers alive, their children and relatives were threatened with death, their mothers and wives menaced with rape. Mock executions were also staged, as were attempts to choke the prisoners. And if a detainee required a doctor, any medical aid was simply denied.

The cells in which the prisoners were confined had no windows, were cramped and were either left in the dark or flashed with blinding light. Squalid and dirty, the cells were meant to convey a feeling of desolation; prisoners were usually held with a hood over their heads and in chains. In some cases their hands were tied to a bar over their head. The prison's corridors were also left dirty, and

that's where the detainees were often dragged. The temperature in the detention centers was always low, between 5 to 7 degrees Celsius.

The prison guards wore dark clothes, boots, gloves and balaclava. They never spoke to the inmates and used signs to communicate with one another. A light was always lit above their heads: to instill fear, to enhance the prisoner's feeling of isolation and, of course, to avoid being recognized.

The US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report highlights how each interrogator was free to put his fantasies and, in some cases, sadism to good use while torturing the prisoners. Despite the rulebooks included in the "Detention and Interrogation Program", the men and women working for the CIA knew their agency would have always sanctioned their behaviours and shielded them from prosecution. Both were aware of the fact that what they were doing was illegal.

THE AISE, SOVEREIGNTY AND INTERFERENCE

The designation, in April 2014, of Alberto Manenti as Director of the AISE (External agency for information and security, previously SIMSI, i.e. The Italian secret services) has passed nearly unnoticed by the local media. The choice of finding a professional from within the agency itself, thus barring the way to the usual political wrangle, appeared normal, although innovative. It is for sure one of the few occurrences, if not the first, that the designation of the AISE director lands on a person who knows the structure that he is to command inside out. Such designation, however, was not totally inconsiderate of political parameters. Manenti was staunchly sponsored by the undersecretary in charge of Intelligence, Marco Minniti, whom had recommended Manenti's candidacy to Enrico Letta (the then-PM of Italy). The designation was subsequently blocked by the ousting of Letta by now-PM of Italy Matteo Renzi. But there is more to this story: the firm advocacy of two foreign Secret Services.

The designation of Manenti was in fact favored by the pressures of the Mossad and CIA on the Italian authorities. If, on the one hand, it is qualifying to be highly considered by foreign Intelligence agencies, one may wonder if – in a world like that of Intelligence services where there exist no friendships but only interests - such designation could be the fruit of another country's interests. Indeed, to reduce room for national sovereignty in such a particularly delicate sector as this produces a very dangerous antecedent. The case of Alberto Manenti is emblematic of how it is possible to climb the corporate ladder within an Intelligence apparatus by use of not only local good words, but foreign ones as well.

A young captain

A young captain Manenti joins the Intelligence services in the 80's not as an operative, but as an administrative officer; someone who prepares payslips and keeps the books. Yet this job does not satisfy him. Rather, he feels that his talent is squandered on the books. Or perhaps someone didn't want him in administration anymore. Whatever the case, Manenti begins to seek a new chair more fitting with his aspirations and knocks at the doors of those that could help him find one, including the bodyguards of Admiral Fulvio Martini, the then-Director of SISMI.

As we all know, fortune favors the bold. Around that same time the Intelligence service is forming the 8th Division, dedicated to the activity of counter-proliferation. It is a new, expanding, sector, headed by an officer of stature such as the Admiral Giuseppe Grignolo, someone who was surely not after technical assistance but rather unskilled labor. Manenti is the perfect choice for the Admiral: he has no specific experiences, he doesn't know foreign languages much, he has no notable international precedents; in a word, he doesn't cast a heavy shadow on nor limits the uncontested hegemony of Admiral Grignolo himself.

The operative configuration of Manenti is thus born; he goes from being an obscure administrator – at first he even keeps the books for the newborn division – to becoming a member of an operative structure. Manenti follows Admiral Grignolo, learns the trade and begins to knit his network in Italy and, mostly notably, abroad. He learns lesson number one: not all of the Intelligence agencies with which you come in touch are the same. Some have a greater specific weight because their opinions or counsel, if whispered in the ears of the SISMI Director pro tempore, increase his esteem for Manenti and, consequently, help him in his corporate climb.

The right man in the right place

Alberto Manenti is very keen to please and immediately spots the subjects with which he should keep a preferential lane open. In this he is aided by the specificity of the work he carries out; work which is centered on the traffics of arms and technology around the world. Due to its geographical location, Italy is the launching pad or the transit place of traffics or direct shipments coming from the Middle East and North Africa; a very interesting sector both for the CIA and the Mossad. The relationship with these two Intelligence agencies are of an institutional nature, but Manenti adds to it that personal touch that makes the difference and that produces merit. The two Intelligence agencies immediately understand that they can count on his uncritical availability in every operation; that they can move around Italy without ever meeting with obstacles or excessive difficulties. This grants Manenti consideration and thankfulness.

Manenti is also an attentive observer of the happenings internal to the Italian secret service. He always manages to know ahead of time who will be the new Director; who will rise or fall in the spoils system that accompanies every change at the top. He always lands his feet in the right side at the right time.

When Grignolo leaves the agency and moves to the United States, where he will spend the tail-end of his career, Manenti has already consolidated his power and replaces Grignolo with ease at the head of the 8th Division, becoming his old boss' walking stick in the USA. When Nicolò Pollari moves in as a Director of the SISMI, Manenti immediately joins the ranks of his most trusted executors. It is Manenti who 'pilots' the false Nigergate files, thus achieving the dual goal of fulfilling his Director's aspirations and scoring points with the Americans. His name appears in the Telekom Serbia scandal; he has frequent contacts with Finmeccanica (and thus appears in the reports of a number of prosecutors); he always plays on multiple tables, but always in the winning team. All this despite a few 'sentimental' adventures within the agency that probably should have given rise to doubts about the opportunity of his behavior.

In 2006, Pollari leaves the office of Director of SISMI, while his head of personnel remains behind to tidy up after his boss. The latter, in a clumsy attempt to consolidate the power of their financiers and correlated friends, gets the DIS (Department of Information Security) to approve a new regulation under the guise of a renewal of the management: those that have worked for the agency for 20 years, are aged 57 or above and have 40 qualifying years of national insurance contributions must leave the agency. It doesn't matter if, in the meanwhile, the prefect Paolo Scarpis, 65 years of age and three months away from retirement, has just landed at the AISE; Scarpis doesn't break the rule; he hasn't worked for the agency for 20 years. But for Manenti the regulation becomes a big problem. He is over 57 years old, he has 40 qualifying years of national insurance contributions under his belt and has worked for the agency for over 20 years. Therefore, he should go. But, as soon as they receive the call, his foreign friends come to his aid. There follows a series of contacts and pressures, both through diplomatic and Intelligence channels, aimed at keeping Manenti in his seat. But what about the new regulation? There is no need to stick to regulations, every rule has its exception.

The rise

It is not clear whether Manenti was re-militarized (the pro tempore Chief of Staff of the Defense, Claudio Graziano, is a companion of Manenti from the times of the Academy), but his career was restructured, he was suddenly made General and Vice Executive Director of the AISE. The goal is achieved. Both for Manenti and for the CIA and Mossad who could count on the gratitude of a

person operating at the highest levels of Italian Intelligence. With his designation as Director of the AISE, Manenti's 'ad honorem' career for the aims of the Americans and Israelis is now complete.

According to sources within the agency, all of this happened – it must be said – after a period of “inadequate” management by General Adriano Santini at SISMI and Ambassador Giampiero Massolo at the DIS. The same inadequacy that persists in the new Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, who didn't know the first thing about a world that he never belonged to, and who chose to be advised by others in his choices. This summing-up of inadequacies has allowed Manenti to widen his base of consensus and to play his professional game in a masterful way, beating the lobby of the Navy – who wanted the Admiral Filippo Maria Foffi at the helm of AISE – and that of the head of cabinet Carlo Magrassi, once sponsored by the Ministry of Defense Mario Mauro and who is now politically free-falling. In order to obtain the results he wanted, Manenti had to enact a complicated lobbying activity; proof of this is the fact that Santini left his seat in February and Manenti was designated two month later, in April.

The National Interest

Alberto Manenti undoubtedly has the right know-how to lead the AISE, an agency which he knows inside out. Some will say that, in Manenti's case, continuity was rewarded. However, when faced with the latest Directors of the agency – and Manenti has been close to all of them – a more 'discontinuous' designation would have been more fitting.

The question that comes to mind, when thinking of preserving the Italian national sovereignty, is not solely of an ethical nature, but of a practical one as well: is it in the national interest of Italy to designate at the head of such a delicate structure a man whose privileged relationships could undermine those very same national interests? The same question could be asked in a different way: does Manenti work with the Americans or for the Americans? In the world of Intelligence there exist no 'love matches', just matches for interest; and seen as such 'matches' soon become of common domain, it is also legitimate to ask oneself whether the preferential connection that now exists between AISE, CIA and Mossad could jeopardize the relationships with other Intelligence agencies in other parts of the world.