



Rand Paul Vows to Block Pompeo and Haspel Confirmations

President Trump will face opposition in the Senate when it comes to the confirmation of his newest picks for secretary of state and CIA director. A large part of that opposition will come from Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who said Wednesday that he will work to “block” both Mike Pompeo and Gina Haspel from being confirmed for those appointments.



The president announced Tuesday that with the firing of Rex Tillerson, he was nominating Pompeo to head the State Department. Since that would leave Pompeo’s current slot as CIA director empty, Trump also nominated Haspel to head the spy agency. Senator Paul said on Wednesday, “My announcement today is that I will oppose both Pompeo’s nomination and Haspel’s nomination,” adding, “I’m going to do everything I can to block them.”

As this writer [reported](#) previously, Haspel has a record of practicing torture. She was station chief at what is believed to be the CIA’s first-ever overseas detention center (located in Thailand), where she oversaw the torture of detainees. One of the prisoners tortured there was Abu Zubaydah, who was waterboarded 83 times in a single month, after which his tormentors figured out that he had no intelligence to share. And while Haspel was not part of that torture (it appears that initial reports were mistaken and that her tenure at that center began *after* Zubaydah’s torture), she did order the videos of that torture destroyed to keep Congress from seeing them.

Paul read aloud an account from a former colleague of Haspel’s from when she supervised a torture session at the Thailand center: “The quote says that Gina Haspel said, ‘Good job. I like the way you’re drooling.... It adds to the realism. I’m almost buying it. You wouldn’t think a grown man would do that.’”

Paul, who failed to block Pompeo’s confirmation as CIA director last year, said he is committed to making sure Haspel does not occupy that office. He said, “It’s galling to read of her glee during the waterboarding,” adding, “It’s absolutely appalling.” Paul also said, “I find it just amazing that anyone would consider having this woman at the head of the CIA. My opposition to her is over her direct participation in interrogation and her gleeful enjoyment at the suffering of someone who was being tortured.”

It is unclear whether the statement Paul quoted is a reference to the torture of Zubaydah. If it is, it is in error, since she would not have been involved in that torture. If, though, it is a reference to some other torture, then Paul’s quotation would mean that Haspel demonstrated a heartless disregard — a



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on March 15, 2018

sense of “glee” — at seeing another human being tortured to the point that he lost control of his faculties. In either case, it is known that Haspel ordered the videos of that torture destroyed to keep Congress from seeing them — a deliberate attempt to dodge Congressional oversight.

Paul sees his vote along with “the solidarity of the Democrats” as his best chance of blocking Haspel. Since confirmation requires a simple majority vote of the Senate, and Republicans control only 51 seats, Paul said his vote “may be enough,” but “it depends on the solidarity of the Democrats. Of course, if any Republicans join Paul in his principled stand against the inhumane practice of torture, Haspel’s confirmation could go down in well-deserved flames.

If Paul is the only Republican “no” vote, and Democrats do remain unified against the confirmation, the vote would be split 50-50 and Vice President Pence would be called on to cast the deciding vote.

There is also Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) to consider. McCain, who is being treated for a brain tumor, has not voted in months. If he is unable to return for this vote, and Paul’s hope of “the solidarity of the Democrats” holds true, the vote would be 49-50 and Haspel would not be confirmed as CIA director.

On the other hand, when Paul attempted to block Pompeo from that same office, more than a dozen Democrats crossed the aisle to vote for his confirmation.

Paul will attempt to block Pompeo’s confirmation as secretary of state because Pompeo supports “enhanced interrogation techniques,” including waterboarding, which he says are not torture.

Rand also objects to Pompeo because he supported the Iraq war and is on record as supporting “regime change” in Iran. Paul mentioned his previous statement about Pompeo — made when he was confirmed as CIA director — in his recent pledge to block Pompeo from being confirmed as secretary of state. Paul said, “I’m perplexed by the nomination of people who love the Iraq War so much that they would advocate for a war with Iran next. I think it goes against most of the things President Trump campaigned on.” He also said, “It perplexes me that he is now nominating, for secretary of state, someone who has advocated and pushed for regime change in Iran.” In calling Trump out publicly for failing to deliver on a major promise of his campaign, Paul echoed his previous statements about Trump staffing his administration with “crazy neocons.”

Paul has a good point: Trump’s campaign was about putting an outsider in the White House to “Make America Great Again.” But if that outsider surrounds himself with insiders, the net effect is that the insiders are still inside.

Perhaps Paul’s efforts to block these two insiders will succeed. That, at least, would be a step in the right direction.

Correction: *This article originally indicated that Haspel personally oversaw some of the events of torture the article describes. The underlying report on which that assertion was based has been redacted. Because of that, this article has been corrected to say that while Haspel was involved in torture and did order tapes of torture destroyed to dodge congressional oversight, she was not involved in the tottrure of Abu Zubayadah.*

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