

Opinions

The country needs Gina Haspel in the CIA's top post. Don't delay her vote.

By **Hugh Hewitt** April 3 at 3:13 PM

While CIA Director Mike Pompeo's confirmation as the next secretary of state looks to be a done deal, whether his deputy, Gina Haspel, will be confirmed as the first female director of "the Agency" is less certain. It ought not to be. It ought not to be a close vote or delayed.

We don't know much about the specifics of Haspel's career, only the outlines. After all, it's the lot of intelligence professionals to succeed privately and fail publicly. But we know she has received one of the agency's highest awards for operational success and we know she has dedicated her adult life to protecting the country, often in far-off, dangerous places and with extraordinary competence over a very long time.

Nevertheless, some very menacing political spears are being sharpened for Haspel. It seems some on the left want to re-litigate the early years of the post-9/11 world. Once again they want to debate "enhanced interrogation techniques," including waterboarding and "dark sites" where suspected terrorists were held when on their way via "rendition" to countries where they would be imprisoned and interrogated further.

Every intelligence professional in every agency who was part of the country's response to 9/11 at the start of the war on terrorism has his or her career woven into the complex tapestry of our collective response. The professionals in the intelligence community had to function — and deliver security — when the political leadership couldn't even agree on definitions. Congress and the president were never able to agree on a law detailing what was and was not going to be allowed when terrorists trying to kill Americans were in cells and even as many interrogations were already complete (and [many American lives saved](#)). All of that debate took place far above the pay grades of the intelligence community professionals we asked to protect us and who have largely succeeded. Haspel has been one of those professionals for 33 years.

Serious people understand that all young intelligence operators will be watching this proceeding, deciding whether the hard choices they are being asked to make right now in dangerous places with lives on the line are going to be subject to show trials years or even decades down the road. If Haspel's nomination is defeated, the message will be clear: Don't take the hard jobs. Play everything safe — for you, though not for the country.

Veteran Democrats such as Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), one of the longest-tenured members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, must know Haspel and her résumé. Feinstein should be leading a bipartisan group urging Haspel's quick nomination, not only because Haspel is supremely qualified but also because if Haspel is rejected, liberals will probably dislike President Trump's replacement even more.

But California's senior senator faces a tough primary and probably general reelection campaign against "progressive" (i.e. far-left by less liberal states' standards) state Sen. Kevin de León. (California's bizarre "jungle primary" means the top two vote-getters of the primary advance to the November showdown even if both are Democrats.) So Feinstein, who originally said she was [undecided](#) on how she would vote on Haspel (even though Haspel has been a "good deputy director") appears to have bowed to pressure from the left; now the senator says she is ["very wary"](#) of Haspel's nomination.

That's a bad move politically. Huge numbers of GOP voters in the Golden State are likely to treat the Haspel vote as the measure of Feinstein's genuine "moderate" credentials. If she does the right thing by Haspel and the country, California Republicans will remember in November. If she turns in her "serious on security" badge, why should Republican voters help protect her?

Regardless of Feinstein's political concerns, Senate Democrats should know the president needs the strongest national security team possible heading into the summit with North Korea, as well as standoffs with Russia and accelerating competition with China. The country needs a depoliticized, extremely competent CIA. We need Director Gina Haspel as soon as possible.

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