

Evidence that Drugs Were Used on CIA “Ghost Detainees” During Coercive Interrogations

The Return of MKULTRA?

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Terrorism](#)

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In *A Question of Torture*, historian Alfred W. McCoy tracks the nightmarish world of the CIA’s Project ARTICHOKE and its later metastasis, MKULTRA through two distinct, though overlapping phases:

First, esoteric, often bizarre experiments with hypnosis and hallucinogenic drugs, from 1950 to 1956; then, more conventional research into human psychology until 1963 when the agency compiled the fruits of this costly investigation in a definitive interrogation manual. (Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006, p. 26)

As revelations emerge that top Bush administration officials gave the intelligence “community” and Pentagon a “green light” to torture, evidence mounts that CIA and Special Operations Command interrogators used mind-altering drugs on prisoners subjected to coercive interrogations.

According to a report published in Tuesday’s [Washington Post](#),

At least two dozen...former and current detainees at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere say they were given drugs against their will or witnessed other inmates being drugged, based on interviews and court documents.

Like [Adel al-] Nusairi, other detainees believed the injections were intended to coerce confessions. (Joby Warrick, “Detainees Alleged Being Drugged, Questioned, The Washington Post, Tuesday, April 22, 2008, Page A01)

The Pentagon and the CIA deny the charges, claiming that the stories are “either fabrications or mistaken interpretations of routine medical treatment,” Warrick reports.

However, the allegations have returned with a vengeance after this month’s release of a Justice Department memo that explicitly approved the use of drugs on prisoners.

The March 2003 memo, penned by Office of Legal Counsel attorney John Yoo, rejected a decades-old ban on the use of “mind-altering substances,” on prisoners. Yoo argued that drugs could be used provided they did not inflict permanent and “profound” psychological damage. The memo claims that U.S. law, as interpreted by Bushist torture enablers, “does not preclude any and all use of drugs.”

When coupled with “reverse-engineered” interrogation techniques derived from the military’s Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) program, the forced drugging of detainees at Guantánamo Bay’s Camp Delta detention facility and CIA “black sites,” all but guarantee a regime of “profound” psychological torture.

In a report published earlier this month, *Congressional Quarterly’s* Jeff Stein [reports](#),

“The new Yoo memo, along with other White House legal memoranda, shows clearly that the policy foundation for the use of interrogational drugs was being laid,” says Stephen Miles, a University of Minnesota bioethicist and author of *Oath Betrayed: Torture, Medical Complicity, and the War on Terror*. “The recent memo on mood-altering drugs does not extend previous work on this area,” he said. “The use of these drugs was anticipated and discussed in the memos of January and February 2002 by DoD, DoJ, and White House counsel using the same language and rationale. The executive branch memos laid a comprehensive and reiterated policy foundation for the use of interrogational drugs.” (Jeff Stein, “Evidence Grows of Drug Use on Detainees,” *Congressional Quarterly*, April 4, 2008)

With a “green light” from the administration, Guantánamo Bay torturers’ got what they wanted from Adel al-Nusairi: a forced “confession.” A former Saudi policeman captured in 2002 by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, el-Nusairi told his attorney during an interview at America’s premier gulag, that after hours of interrogation, always preceded by an injection of an unknown drug, his interrogators would rouse him from a fitful sleep—for more questions.

“I was completely gone,” he remembered. “I said, ‘Let me go. I want to go to sleep. If it takes saying I’m a member of al-Qaeda, I will,” according to *The Washington Post*.

As documented by investigative reporter Stephen Grey in *Ghost Plane*, prisoners destined for CIA “black sites” or other notorious dungeons in Central Asia or the Middle East, were administered sedatives by “rendition teams” to “calm” their shackled and hooded victims.

These new reports suggest that upon arrival, suspected “terrorists”—real or imaginary—have been drugged as an integral element of their “enhanced interrogation” experience.

French national Mourad Benchellali, a Guantánamo prisoner for three years related how after being administered “medicine” or “vitamins” by his captors said that “these medicines gave us headaches, nausea, drowsiness,” Benchellali wrote in an e-mail to *The Washington Post*. “But the effects were different for different detainees. Some fainted or threw up. Some had reactions such as pimples.”

But then there were periods when things were demonstrably worse. Benchellali described that periodic injections, “often administered by force,” left him by degrees, feeling nauseated and light-headed. “We were always tired and always felt groggy.”

Benchellali related to Warrick how “a different type of injection seemed to be reserved for detainees who were particularly uncooperative.” The former prisoner described episodes also related by four other detainees in interviews or court documents, of a particularly chilling quality. “The injection would make them crazy. They would have a crisis or dementia

— yelling, no longer sleeping, soiling themselves. Some of us suspected they were given LSD.”

As did the attorney representing accused “dirty bomber” Jose Padilla during his three year stint as an “enemy combatant” in a naval brig.

Michael Caruso, the chief federal defender who represented Padilla asserted in a motion last year that his client “was given drugs against his will, believed to be some form of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) or phencyclidine (PCP), to act as a sort of truth serum during his interrogations,” according to *Congressional Quarterly’s* Jeff Stein.

Nor would it be the first time the U.S. government used drugs as a means to induce a “confession” from a “resistant subject.” The CIA’s [KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation](#) manual, has this to say:

Drugs can be effective in overcoming resistance not dissolved by other techniques. As has already been noted, the so-called silent drug (a pharmacologically potent substance given to a person unaware of its administration) can make possible the induction of hypnotic trance in a previously unwilling subject. ...

Particularly important is the reference to matching the drug to the personality of the interrogatee. The effect of most drugs depends more upon the personality of the subject than upon the physical characteristics of the drugs themselves. If the approval of Headquarters has been obtained and if a doctor is at hand for administration, one of the most important of the interrogator’s functions is providing the doctor with a full and accurate description of the psychological make-up of the interrogatee, to facilitate the best possible choice of a drug.

Persons burdened with feelings of shame or guilt are likely to unburden themselves when drugged, especially if these feelings have been reinforced by the interrogator. And like the placebo, the drug provides an excellent rationalization of helplessness for the interrogatee who wants to yield but has hitherto been unable to violate his own values or loyalties.

Like other coercive media, drugs may affect the content of what an interrogatee divulges. Gottschalk notes that certain drugs “may give rise to psychotic manifestations such as hallucinations, illusions, delusions, or disorientation”, so that “the verbal material obtained cannot always be considered valid.” For this reason drugs (and the other aids discussed in this section) should not be used persistently to facilitate the interrogative debriefing that follows capitulation. Their function is to cause capitulation, to aid in the shift from resistance to cooperation. Once this shift has been accomplished, coercive techniques should be abandoned both for moral reasons and because they are unnecessary and even counter-productive. (KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation, J. Narcosis, July 1963) [emphasis added]

Note the emphasis above: *if a doctor is at hand for administration*. Which inevitably gives rise to the question: were physicians or other health care professionals present during torture sessions? The answer unfortunately, may be “yes.”

According to psychoanalyst Stephen Soldz, a fierce critic of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) cozy relationship with the CIA and Pentagon throughout Washington’s

“war on terror,” some APA members advised interrogators on the most “effective” techniques to psychologically “break” detainees. Soldz [writes](#),

At this point it is unknown if psychologists are involved as among those “health” professionals who involuntarily administered drugs. But we should remember that, thanks partly to military support, a number of psychologists can now legally prescribe drugs. And some of those prescribing psychologists were with the Behavioral Science Consultation Teams [BSCTs] at Guantánamo. It also should be remembered that in 2003 the American Psychological Association co-sponsored with the CIA an invitation-only [Science of Deception Workshop](#) that discussed, among other topics, “What pharmacological agents are known to affect apparent truth-telling behavior?” CIA consultant torturers James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen were among those invited to attend, as were several of their superiors. (Stephen Soldz, “A Crisis for the Health Professions: The Involuntary Drugging of U.S. Detainees,” CounterPunch, April 23, 2008)

As Washington’s “bad apples”-wide swathes of the national security apparatus-“took the gloves off” and went to “work the dark side” as vice president Dick Cheney recommended shortly after the September 11 attacks, those with “boots on the ground,” CIA officers, Special Forces operators and [mercenary contractors](#), inevitably complied.

Just as inevitably, new documents-and ever-more revelatory horrors-will emerge, a steady drip, drip, drip from the suppurating wound that is the “post-Constitutional” order created by the rogue Bush regime.

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