

TORTURE, TRYING TO DEFEND THE INDEFENSIBLE; Torture Cheerleaders Back In the News

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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10 Torture Myths Debunked

The so-called “debate” about whether torture helped to keep us safe is reemerging, as the former chief of CIA clandestine operations Jose Rodriguez is about to [publish a book](#) claiming that the use of “enhanced interrogation” practices including water-boarding saved lives.

“We made some al-Qaeda terrorists with American blood on their hands uncomfortable for a few days,” Rodriguez said in an interview with CBS News’ “60 Minutes” that will air on Sunday, April 29. “I am very secure in what we did and am very confident that what we did saved American lives.”

Torture is also back in the news because Senate Intelligence Committee Democrats are [producing a report](#) stating that torture isn’t effective in producing information.

We will quote the top American military and intelligence interrogation experts to debunk the following 10 common myths about torture:

1. Torture is a partisan issue
2. Waterboarding isn’t torture
3. Torture increases our national security
4. Torture is necessary to break hardened terrorists
5. Torture is necessary in a “ticking time bomb” situation
6. The “enhanced” interrogation techniques were aimed at producing actionable intelligence
7. Torture helped to get Bin Laden
8. Torture provided valuable details regarding 9/11
9. Only bad guys were tortured
10. America doesn’t torture any more

Myth # 1: Torture Is a Partisan Issue

George Washington – the father of our country before there were any parties – [was against torture](#). Torture is not leftwing or rightwing ... it is simply un-American.

And both Democrats and Republicans approved torture. As we [noted](#) in 2009:

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy [told](#) the New York Times:

The temptation to abuse powers in a crisis is bipartisan and the [proposed truth] commission's review should include the role of Democrats in Congress in approving the Bush policies.

As I have previously [written](#), Nancy Pelosi was secretly briefed on [torture](#) many, many years ago, and yet did nothing to stop those unlawful programs. Indeed, she egged the torturers on. Pelosi was also secretly [tipped off about warrantless spying on Americans](#).

And Pelosi [hid from the 9/11 Commission and the American people the fact that the interrogations of 9/11 suspects were videotaped, and that the alleged "confessions" of those held at Gitmo were wholly unreliable](#). She could have stopped the whole farce cold — but chose to go along with it.

Leading democrats [Harman, Rockefeller and others in Congress](#) were also war criminals, accessories after the fact, and co-conspirators.

And as shown below, many conservative military and intelligence officers oppose torture.

Myth # 2: Waterboarding Isn't Torture

Yes, [waterboarding is torture](#):

- [President Obama](#), [Attorney General Eric Holder](#), [Malcolm Nance](#) (an advisor on terrorism to the US departments of Homeland Security, Special Operations and Intelligence), [Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples](#) (the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency) and many other interrogation experts and high-level politicians say that waterboarding is torture
- [The United States has always considered waterboarding to be a crime of torture, including when the Japanese did it in WWII](#) (and see [this](#))
- [Waterboarding is torture, Downing Street confirms](#)
- Everyone claiming waterboarding is not torture has changed their tune as soon as they were exposed to even a small dose of it themselves. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)

(In addition, a lot more than waterboarding was used on detainees. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).)

Myth # 3: Torture Increases Our National Security

Torture apologists say that torture is a necessary evil for protecting our national security. In

fact, torture [reduces our national security](#):

- The head of all U.S. intelligence [said](#):

“The bottom line is these techniques have hurt our image around the world,” [Director of National Intelligence Dennis] Blair said in the statement. “The damage they have done to our interests far outweighed whatever benefit they gave us and they are not essential to our national security.”

- A top counter-terrorism expert [says](#) torture increases the risk of terrorism (and see [this](#)).
- One of the top military interrogators [said](#) that torture by Americans of innocent Iraqis is the main reason that foreign fighters started fighting against Americans in Iraq in the first place (and see [this](#)).
- Former counter-terrorism czar Richard A. Clarke [says](#) that America’s indefinite detention without trial and abuse of prisoners is a leading Al Qaeda recruiting tool
- A former FBI interrogator — who interrogated Al Qaeda suspects — says categorically that [torture actually turns people into terrorists](#)
- A 30-year veteran of CIA’s operations directorate who rose to the most senior managerial ranks, [says](#):

Torture creates more terrorists and fosters more acts of terror than it could possibly neutralize.

- A former [US Air Force interrogator](#) said that torture just creates more terrorists
- A former [U.S. interrogator and counterintelligence agent, and Afghanistan veteran](#) said, “Torture puts our troops in danger, torture makes our troops less safe, torture creates terrorists. It’s used so widely as a propaganda tool now in Afghanistan. All too often, detainees have pamphlets on them, depicting what happened at Guantanamo.”
- The Senate Armed Services Committee [unanimously stated](#):

“The administration’s policies concerning [torture] and the resulting controversies ... strengthened the hand of our enemies.”

- [Two professors of political science](#) have demonstrated that torture increases, rather than decreases, terrorism
- General Petraeus [said](#) that torture hurts our national security

- The [reporter](#) who broke Iran-Contra and other stories [says that](#) torture actually helped Al Qaeda, by giving false leads to the U.S. which diverted its military, intelligence and economic resources into wild goose chases
- Raw Story [says](#) that torture might have resulted in false terror alerts
- Hundreds of other experts have said the same things

Myth # 4: Torture Is Necessary to Break Hardened Terrorists

We've repeatedly noted that [virtually all of the top interrogation experts - both conservatives and liberals](#) (except for those [trying to escape war crimes prosecution](#)) - say that torture doesn't work:

- [Army Field Manual 34-52 Chapter 1](#) says:

“Experience indicates that the use of force is not necessary to gain the cooperation of sources for interrogation. Therefore, the use of force is a poor technique, as it yields unreliable results, may damage subsequent collection efforts, and can induce the source to say whatever he thinks the interrogator wants to hear.”

- The C.I.A.'s 1963 interrogation manual [stated](#):

Intense pain is quite likely to produce false confessions, concocted as a means of escaping from distress. A time-consuming delay results, while investigation is conducted and the admissions are proven untrue. During this respite the interrogatee can pull himself together. He may even use the time to think up new, more complex 'admissions' that take still longer to disprove.

- According to the Washington Post, the CIA's top spy - Michael Sulick, head of the CIA's National Clandestine Service - [said](#) that the spy agency has seen no fall-off in intelligence since waterboarding was banned by the Obama administration. “I don't think we've suffered at all from an intelligence standpoint.”
- The [CIA's own Inspector General](#) wrote that waterboarding was not “efficacious” in producing information
- A 30-year veteran of CIA's operations directorate who rose to the most senior managerial ranks (Milton Bearden) [says](#)(as quoted by senior CIA agent and Presidential briefer Ray McGovern):

It is irresponsible for any administration not to tell a credible story that would convince critics at home and abroad that this torture has served some useful purpose. *** The old hands overwhelmingly believe that torture doesn't work

- A former high-level CIA officer (Philip Giraldi) [states](#):

Many governments that have routinely tortured to obtain information have abandoned the practice when they discovered that other approaches actually worked better for extracting information. Israel prohibited torturing Palestinian terrorist suspects in 1999. Even the German Gestapo stopped torturing French resistance captives when it determined that treating prisoners well actually produced more and better intelligence.

- Another former high-level CIA official (Bob Baer) [says](#):

And torture — I just don't think it really works ... you don't get the truth. What happens when you torture people is, they figure out what you want to hear and they tell you.

- Michael Scheuer, formerly a senior CIA official in the Counter-Terrorism Center, [says](#):

"I personally think that any information gotten through extreme methods of torture would probably be pretty useless because it would be someone telling you what you wanted to hear."

- A retired C.I.A. officer who oversaw the interrogation of a high-level detainee in 2002 (Glenn L. Carle) [says](#):

[Coercive techniques] didn't provide useful, meaningful, trustworthy information...Everyone was deeply concerned and most felt it was un-American and did not work."

- A former top Air Force interrogator who led the team that tracked down Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who has conducted hundreds of interrogations of high ranking Al Qaida members and supervising more than one thousand, and [wrote](#) a book called *How to Break a Terrorist* [writes](#):

As the senior interrogator in Iraq for a task force charged with hunting down Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, the former Al Qaida leader and mass murderer, I listened time and time again to captured foreign fighters cite the torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo as their main reason for coming to Iraq to fight. Consider that 90 percent of the suicide bombers in Iraq are these foreign fighters and you can easily conclude that we have lost hundreds, if not thousands, of American lives because of our policy of torture and abuse. But that's only the past. Somewhere in the world there are other young Muslims who have joined Al Qaida because we tortured and abused prisoners. These men will certainly carry out future attacks against Americans, either in Iraq, Afghanistan, or possibly even here. And that's not to mention numerous other Muslims who support Al Qaida, either financially or in other ways, because they are outraged that the United States tortured and abused Muslim prisoners. In addition, torture and abuse has made us less safe because detainees are less likely to cooperate during interrogations if they don't trust us. I know from having conducted hundreds of interrogations of high ranking Al Qaida members and supervising more than one thousand, that when a captured Al Qaida member sees us live up to our stated principles they are more willing to negotiate and cooperate with us. When we torture or abuse them, it hardens their resolve and reaffirms why they picked up arms.

He also [says](#):

[Torture is] extremely ineffective, and it's counter-productive to what we're trying to accomplish. When we torture somebody, it hardens their resolve ... The information that you get is unreliable. ... And even if you do get reliable information, you're able to stop a terrorist attack, al Qaeda's then going to use the fact that we torture people to recruit new members.

And he [repeats](#):

I learned in Iraq that the No. 1 reason foreign fighters flocked there to fight were the abuses carried out at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

He [said](#) last week:

They don't want to talk about the long term consequences that cost the lives of Americans.... The way the U.S. treated its prisoners "was al-Qaeda's number-one recruiting tool and brought in thousands of foreign fighters who killed American soldiers.

- The [FBI interrogators](#) who actually interviewed some of the 9/11 suspects say torture didn't work
- Another FBI interrogator of 9/11 suspects [said](#):

I was in the middle of this, and it's not true that these [aggressive] techniques were effective

- A third former FBI interrogator — who interrogated Al Qaeda suspects — says categorically that [torture does not help collect intelligence. On the other hand he says that torture actually turns people into terrorists](#)
- A declassified FBI e-mail dated May 10, 2004, regarding interrogation at Guantanamo states "[\[we\] explained to \[the Department of Defense\], FBI has been successful for many years obtaining confessions via non-confrontational interviewing techniques.](#)" (see also [this](#))
- The FBI [warned](#) military interrogators in 2003 that enhanced interrogation techniques are "of questionable effectiveness" and cited a "lack of evidence of [enhanced techniques'] success.
- "When long-time FBI director Mueller was asked whether any attacks on America been disrupted thanks to intelligence obtained through "enhanced techniques", he responded "[I don't believe that has been the case.](#)"
- The Senate Armed Services Committee unanimously [found](#) that torture doesn't work, [stating](#):

The administration's policies concerning [torture] and the resulting

controversies damaged our ability to collect accurate intelligence that could save lives, strengthened the hand of our enemies, and compromised our moral authority.

- [The military agency which actually provided advice on harsh interrogation techniques for use against terrorism suspects](#) warned the Pentagon in 2002 that those techniques would produce “unreliable information.”
- General Petraeus [says](#) that torture is unnecessary
- Retired 4-star General Barry McCaffrey – who Schwarzkopf called the hero of Desert Storm – [agrees](#)
- The [number 2 terrorism expert](#) for the State Department says torture doesn’t work, and just creates more terrorists.
- Former Navy Judge Advocate General Admiral John Hutson [says](#):

Fundamentally, those kinds of techniques are ineffective. If the goal is to gain actionable intelligence, and it is, and if that’s important, and it is, then we have to use the techniques that are most effective. Torture is the technique of choice of the lazy, stupid and pseudo-tough.

He also [says](#):

Another objection is that torture doesn’t work. All the literature and experts say that if we really want usable information, we should go exactly the opposite way and try to gain the trust and confidence of the prisoners.

- Army Colonel Stuart Herrington – a military intelligence specialist who interrogated generals under the command of Saddam Hussein and evaluated US detention operations at Guantánamo – [notes](#) that the process of obtaining information is hampered, not helped, by practices such as “slapping someone in the face and stripping them naked”. Herrington and other former US military interrogators [say](#):

We know from experience that it is very difficult to elicit information from a detainee who has been abused. The abuse often only strengthens their resolve and makes it that much harder for an interrogator to find a way to elicit useful information.

- Major General Thomas Romig, former Army JAG, [said](#):

If you torture somebody, they’ll tell you anything. I don’t know anybody that is good at interrogation, has done it a lot, that will say that that’s an effective means of getting information. ... So I don’t think it’s effective.

- Brigadier General David R. Irvine, retired [Army Reserve strategic intelligence officer who taught prisoner interrogation and military law for 18 years with the Sixth Army Intelligence School](#), says torture doesn't work
- Former counter-terrorism czar Richard A. Clarke [says](#) that America's indefinite detention without trial and abuse of prisoners is a leading Al Qaeda recruiting tool.
 - A former [U.S. interrogator and counterintelligence agent, and Afghanistan veteran](#) said,

Torture puts our troops in danger, torture makes our troops less safe, torture creates terrorists. It's used so widely as a propaganda tool now in Afghanistan. All too often, detainees have pamphlets on them, depicting what happened at Guantanamo.
- The first head of the Department of Homeland Security - Tom Ridge - [says](#) we were wrong to torture. The former British intelligence chairman [says](#) that waterboarding didn't stop terror plots.
- A spokesman for the National Security Council (Tommy Vietor) [says](#):

The bottom line is this: If we had some kind of smoking-gun intelligence from waterboarding in 2003, we would have taken out Osama bin Laden in 2003.
- The Marines [weren't keen on torture](#), either
- As Vanity Fair [reports](#):

In researching this article, I spoke to numerous counterterrorist officials from agencies on both sides of the Atlantic. Their conclusion is unanimous: not only have coercive methods failed to generate significant and actionable intelligence, they have also caused the squandering of resources on a massive scale through false leads, chimerical plots, and unnecessary safety alerts...Here, they say, far from exposing a deadly plot, all torture did was lead to more torture of his supposed accomplices while also providing some misleading "information" that boosted the administration's argument for invading Iraq.

- Neuroscientists have [found](#) that torture physically and chemically interferes with the prisoner's ability to tell the truth
- An Army psychologist - Major Paul Burney, Army's Behavior Science Consulting Team psychologist - [said](#) (page 78 & 83):

was stressed to me time and time again that psychological investigations have proven that harsh interrogations do not work. At best it will get you information that a prisoner thinks you want to hear to make the interrogation stop, but that

information is strongly likely to be false.*** Interrogation techniques that rely on physical or adverse consequences are likely to garner inaccurate information and create an increased level of resistance...There is no evidence that the level of fear or discomfort evoked by a given technique has any consistent correlation to the volume or quality of information obtained.

- An expert on resisting torture – Terrence Russell, JPRA’s manager for research and development and a SERE specialist – [said](#) (page 209):

History has shown us that physical pressures are not effective for compelling an individual to give information or to do something’ and are not effective for gaining accurate, actionable intelligence.

Indeed, it has been known for hundreds of years that torture doesn’t work:

- In the ancient Far East, torture was used as a way to [intimidate the population into obedience](#) (rather than a method for gaining information)
- As a former CIA analyst [notes](#):

During the Inquisition there were many confessed witches, and many others were named by those tortured as other witches. Unsurprisingly, when these new claimed witches were tortured, they also confessed. Confirmation of some statement made under torture, when that confirmation is extracted by another case of torture, is invalid information and cannot be trusted.

- Top American World War 2 interrogators [got more information using chess or Ping-Pong instead of torture than those who use torture are getting today](#)
- The head of Britain’s wartime interrogation center in London [said](#):

“Violence is taboo. Not only does it produce answers to please, but it lowers the standard of information.”

- The national security adviser to Vice President George H.W. Bush (Donald P. Gregg) [wrote](#):

During wartime service with the CIA in Vietnam from 1970 to 1972, I was in charge of intelligence operations in the 10 provinces surrounding Saigon. One of my tasks was to prevent rocket attacks on Saigon’s port. Keeping Saigon safe required human intelligence, most often from captured prisoners. I had a running debate about how North Vietnamese prisoners should be treated with the South Vietnamese colonel who conducted interrogations. This colonel routinely tortured prisoners, producing a flood of information, much of it totally false. I argued for better treatment and pressed for key prisoners to be turned over to the CIA, where humane interrogation methods were the rule – and more accurate intelligence was the result. The colonel finally relented and turned over a battered prisoner to me, saying, “This man knows a lot, but he will not talk to me.” We treated the prisoner’s wounds, reunited him with his family, and allowed him to make his first visit to Saigon. Surprised by the city’s affluence, he said he would tell us anything we asked. The result was a flood of

actionable intelligence that allowed us to disrupt planned operations, including rocket attacks against Saigon. Admittedly, it would be hard to make a story from nearly 40 years ago into a definitive case study. But there is a useful reminder here. The key to successful interrogation is for the interrogator – even as he controls the situation – to recognize a prisoner’s humanity, to understand his culture, background and language. Torture makes this impossible. There’s a sad twist here. Cheney forgets that the Bush administration followed this approach with some success. A high-value prisoner subjected to patient interrogation by an Arabic-speaking FBI agent yielded highly useful information, including the final word on Iraq’s weapons programs. His name was Saddam Hussein.

- Top interrogators got information from a high-level Al Qaeda suspects through building rapport, even if they hated the person they were interrogating by [treating them as human](#)

Senator John McCain [explains](#), based upon his own years of torture:

I know from personal experience that the abuse of prisoners sometimes produces good intelligence but often produces bad intelligence because under torture a person will say anything he thinks his captors want to hear — true or false — if he believes it will relieve his suffering. Often, information provided to stop the torture is deliberately misleading.

Myth # 5: Torture Is Necessary In a “Ticking Time Bomb” Situation

According to the experts, torture is unnecessary even to prevent “ticking time bombs” from exploding (see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)).

Indeed, a top expert says that [torture would fail in a real ‘ticking time-bomb’ situation](#)

Myth # 6: The “Enhanced” Techniques Were At Least Aimed at Producing Actionable Intelligence

The torture techniques used were [Communist techniques specifically designed to produce false confessions](#):

As I [noted](#) in 2009:

Senator Levin, in [commenting](#) on the Senate Armed Services Committee report on torture declassified today, drops the following bombshell:

With last week’s release of the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) opinions, it is now widely known that Bush administration officials distorted Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape “SERE” training – a legitimate program used by the military to train our troops to resist abusive enemy interrogations – by authorizing abusive techniques from SERE for use in detainee interrogations. Those decisions conveyed the message that abusive treatment was appropriate for detainees in U.S. custody. They were also an affront to the values

articulated by General Petraeus. In SERE training, U.S. troops are briefly exposed, in a highly controlled setting, to abusive interrogation techniques used by enemies that refuse to follow the Geneva Conventions. The techniques are based on tactics used by Chinese Communists against American soldiers during the Korean War for the purpose of eliciting false confessions for propaganda purposes. Techniques used in SERE training include stripping trainees of their clothing, placing them in stress positions, putting hoods over their heads, subjecting them to face and body slaps, depriving them of sleep, throwing them up against a wall, confining them in a small box, treating them like animals, subjecting them to loud music and flashing lights, and exposing them to extreme temperatures. Until recently, the Navy SERE school also used waterboarding. The purpose of the SERE program is to provide U.S. troops who might be captured a taste of the treatment they might face so that they might have a better chance of surviving captivity and resisting abusive and coercive interrogations.

Senator Levin then documents that SERE techniques were deployed as part of an official policy on detainees, and that SERE instructors helped to implement the interrogation programs. The senior Army SERE psychologist warned in 2002 against using SERE training techniques during interrogations in an email to personnel at Guantanamo Bay, because:

[T]he use of physical pressures brings with it a large number of potential negative side effects... When individuals are gradually exposed to increasing levels of discomfort, it is more common for them to resist harder... If individuals are put under enough discomfort, i.e. pain, they will eventually do whatever it takes to stop the pain. This will increase the amount of information they tell the interrogator, but it does not mean the information is accurate. In fact, it usually decreases the reliability of the information because the person will say whatever he believes will stop the pain... Bottom line: the likelihood that the use of physical pressures will increase the delivery of accurate information from a detainee is very low. The likelihood that the use of physical pressures will increase the level of resistance in a detainee is very high... (p. 53).

I also [pointed out](#):

McClatchy [fills in](#) some of the details:

Former senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the interrogation issue said that Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld

demanded that the interrogators find evidence of al Qaida-Iraq collaboration... For most of 2002 and into 2003, Cheney and Rumsfeld, especially, were also demanding proof of the links between al Qaida and Iraq that (former Iraqi exile leader Ahmed) Chalabi and others had told them were there." It was during this period that CIA interrogators waterboarded two alleged top al Qaida detainees repeatedly — Abu Zubaydah at least 83 times in August 2002 and Khalid Sheik Muhammed 183 times in March 2003 — according to a newly released Justice Department document... When people kept coming up empty, they were told by Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people to push harder," he continued."Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people were told repeatedly, by CIA . . . and by others, that there wasn't any reliable intelligence that pointed to operational ties between bin Laden and Saddam A former U.S. Army psychiatrist, Maj. Charles Burney, told Army investigators in 2006 that interrogators at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention facility were under "pressure" to produce evidence of ties between al Qaida and Iraq. "While we were there a large part of the time we were focused on trying to establish a link between al Qaida and Iraq and we were not successful in establishing a link between al Qaida and Iraq," Burney told staff of the Army Inspector General. "The more frustrated people got in not being able to establish that link . . . there was more and more pressure to resort to measures that might produce more immediate results." "I think it's obvious that the administration was scrambling then to try to find a connection, a link (between al Qaida and Iraq)," [Senator] Levin said in a conference call with reporters. "They made out links where they didn't exist." Levin recalled Cheney's assertions that a senior Iraqi intelligence officer had met Mohammad Atta, the leader of the 9/11 hijackers, in the Czech Republic capital of Prague just months before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The FBI and CIA found that no such meeting occurred.

In other words, top Bush administration officials not only knowingly lied about a non-existent connection between Al Qaida

and Iraq, but they pushed and insisted that interrogators use special torture methods aimed at extracting false confessions to attempt to create such a false linkage.

Writing about this today, Paul Krugman [says](#):

Let's say this slowly: the Bush administration wanted to use 9/11 as a pretext to invade Iraq, even though Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11. So it tortured people to make them confess to the nonexistent link. There's a word for this: it's evil.

The Washington Post [reported](#) the same year:

Despite what you've seen on TV, torture is really only good at one thing: eliciting false confessions. Indeed, Bush-era torture techniques, we now know, were cold-bloodedly modeled after methods used by Chinese Communists to extract confessions from captured U.S. servicemen that they could then use for propaganda during the Korean War. So as shocking as the latest revelation in a new Senate Armed Services Committee report may be, it actually makes sense — in a nauseating way. The White House started pushing the use of torture not when faced with a “ticking time bomb” scenario from terrorists, but when officials in 2002 were desperately casting about for ways to tie Iraq to the 9/11 attacks — in order to strengthen their public case for invading a country that had nothing to do with 9/11 at all.

Gordon Trowbridge writes for the Detroit News: “Senior Bush administration officials pushed for the use of abusive interrogations of terrorism detainees in part to seek evidence to justify the invasion of Iraq, according to newly declassified information discovered in a congressional probe.

I [wrote](#) last month:

One of the two senior instructors from the Air Force team which taught U.S. servicemen how to resist torture by foreign governments when used to extract false confessions has blown the whistle on the true purpose behind the U.S. torture program.

Truth Out [reported](#) yesterday:

Jessen's notes were provided to Truthout by retired Air Force Capt. Michael Kearns, a “master” SERE instructor and [decorated](#) veteran who has previously held high-ranking positions within the Air Force

Headquarters Staff and Department of Defense (DoD). Kearns and his boss, Roger Aldrich, the head of the Air Force Intelligence's Special Survival Training Program (SSTP), based out of Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington, hired Jessen in May 1989. Kearns, who was head of operations at SSTP and trained thousands of service members, said Jessen was brought into the program due to an increase in the number of new SERE courses being taught and "the fact that it required psychological expertise on hand in a full-time basis." Jessen, then the chief of Psychology Service at the US Air Force Survival School, immediately started to work directly with Kearns on "a new course for special mission units (SMUs), which had as its goal individual resistance to terrorist exploitation." The course, known as SV-91, was developed for the Survival Evasion Resistance Escape (SERE) branch of the US Air Force Intelligence Agency, which acted as the Executive Agent Action Office for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Jessen's notes formed the basis for one part of SV-91, "Psychological Aspects of Detention." *** Kearns was one of only two officers within DoD qualified to teach all three SERE-related courses within SSTP on a worldwide basis, according to a copy of a 1989 letter written Aldrich, who [nominated him](#) officer of the year.

The Jessen notes clearly state the totality of what was being reverse-engineered - not just 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' but an entire program of exploitation of prisoners using torture as a central pillar," he said. "What I think is important to note, as an ex-SERE Resistance to Interrogation instructor, is the focus of Jessen's instruction. It is exploitation, not specifically interrogation. And this is not a picayune issue, because if one were to 'reverse-engineer' a course on resistance to exploitation then what one would get is a plan to exploit prisoners, not interrogate them. The CIA/DoD torture program appears to have the same goals as the terrorist organizations or enemy governments for which SV-91 and other SERE courses were created to defend against: the full exploitation of the prisoner in his intelligence, propaganda, or other needs held by the detaining power, such as the recruitment of informers and double agents. Those aspects of the US detainee program have not generally been discussed as part of the torture story in the American press." *** Jessen wrote that cooperation is the "end goal" of the detainer, who wants the detainee "to see that [the detainer] has 'total' control of you because you are completely dependent on him, and thus you must comply with his wishes. Therefore, it is absolutely inevitable that you must cooperate with him in some way (propaganda, special favors, confession, etc.)." *** Kearns said, based on what he has read in declassified government documents and news

reports about the role SERE played in the Bush administration's torture program, Jessen clearly "reverse-engineered" his lesson plan and used resistance methods to abuse "war on terror" detainees.

So we have the two main Air Force insiders concerning the genesis of the torture program confirming - with original notes - that the whole purpose of the torture program was to extract false confessions.

Myth # 7: Torture Helped to Get Bin Laden

CIA director Leon Panetta said that [torture did not help get Bin Laden](#). We [noted](#) in May:

White House deputy national security advisor John Brennan [says](#) that waterboarding did not lead to the death of Bin Laden.

Former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld - who had a [big hand in the torture program](#) - [agrees](#):

"The United States Department of Defense did not do waterboarding for interrogation purposes to anyone. It is true that some information that came from normal interrogation approaches at Guantanamo did lead to information that was beneficial in this instance. But it was not harsh treatment and it was not waterboarding."

As does Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein:

Nothing has been found to indicate this came out of Guantanamo. And people were questioned, but there were no positive answers as to the identity of this number one courier.

[Asked whether she considers the Bin Laden killing any kind of "vindication" of torture, Feinstein replied] Absolutely not. I do not. I happen to know a good deal about how those interrogations were conducted, and in my view, nothing justifies the kind of procedures that were used.

[Senator] [Lindsey Graham](#) - a vocal [proponent of waterboarding](#)- said:

This idea we caught bin Laden because of waterboarding I think is a misstatement. This whole concept of how we caught bin Laden is a lot of work over time by different people and putting the puzzle together. I do not believe this is a time to celebrate waterboarding, I believe this is a time to celebrate hard work.

[T]he New York Times [notes](#):

Glenn L. Carle, a retired C.I.A. officer who oversaw the interrogation of a high-level detainee in 2002, said in a phone

interview Tuesday, that coercive techniques “didn’t provide useful, meaningful, trustworthy information.” He said that while some of his colleagues defended the measures, “everyone was deeply concerned and most felt it was un-American and did not work.”

“The bottom line is this: If we had some kind of smoking-gun intelligence from waterboarding in 2003, we would have taken out Osama bin Laden in 2003,” said Tommy Vietor, spokesman for the National Security Council. “It took years of collection and analysis from many different sources to develop the case that enabled us to identify this compound, and reach a judgment that Bin Laden was likely to be living there.”

And Huffington Post [reports](#):

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, produced a 263-page report in 2009 on the treatment of detainees in U.S. custody in the years following 9/11. He too dismissed the idea that the interrogation techniques used at that time were efficacious. “If they had any information under the Bush administration that could have led to bin Laden it would have been terribly neglectful for them not to use it,” Levin noted in an interview on the “Bill Press Show.” The confirmation of the courier’s significance appears to have come in 2004, from an al Qaeda operative who was not waterboarded: Hassan Ghul.

Dan Froomkin [noted](#) that torture actually delayed by years more effective intelligence-gathering methods which would have resulted in finding Bin Laden:

Defenders of the Bush administration’s interrogation policies have claimed vindication from reports that bin Laden was tracked down in small part due to information received from brutalized detainees some six to eight years ago. But that sequence of events — even if true — doesn’t demonstrate the effectiveness of torture, these experts say. Rather, it indicates bin Laden could have been caught much earlier had those detainees been interrogated properly. “I think that without a doubt, torture and enhanced interrogation techniques slowed down the hunt for bin Laden,” said an Air Force interrogator who goes by the pseudonym Matthew Alexander and located Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, in 2006. It now appears likely that several detainees had information about a key al Qaeda courier — information that might have led authorities directly to bin Laden years ago. But subjected to physical and psychological brutality, “they gave us the bare minimum amount of information they could get away with to get the pain to stop, or to mislead us,” Alexander told The Huffington Post. “We know that they didn’t give us everything, because they didn’t provide the real name, or the location, or somebody else who would know that information,” he said. In a 2006 [study by the National Defense Intelligence College](#), trained interrogators found that traditional, rapport-based interviewing approaches are extremely effective with even the most hardened detainees, whereas

coercion consistently builds resistance and resentment. “Had we handled some of these sources from the beginning, I would like to think that there’s a good chance that we would have gotten this information or other information,” said Steven Kleinman, a longtime military intelligence officer who has extensively researched, practiced and taught interrogation techniques. “By making a detainee less likely to provide information, and making the information he does provide harder to evaluate, they hindered what we needed to accomplish,” said Glenn L. Carle, a retired CIA officer who oversaw the interrogation of a high-level detainee in 2002. *** For Alexander, Kleinman and others, the key takeaway is not just that the torture didn’t work, but that it was actually counterproductive. “The question is: What else did KSM have?” Alexander asked. And he’s pretty sure he knows the answer: KSM knew the courier’s real name, “or he knew who else knew his real name, or he knew how to find him — and he didn’t give any of that information,” Alexander said. Alexander’s book, “Kill or Capture,” chronicles how the non-coercive interrogation of a dedicated al Qaeda member led to Zarqawi’s capture. “I’m 100 percent confident that a good interrogator would have gotten additional leads” from KSM, Alexander said.

This new scenario hardly supports a defense of torture on the grounds that it’s appropriate in “ticking time bomb” scenarios, Alexander said. “Show me an interrogator who says that eight years is a good result.”

The ACLU [noted](#) Wednesday:

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s torture proves McCain’s point. Proponents claim his torture led to the identity of Osama bin Laden’s courier.... The contention is astonishing because the [apparent proof](#) that torture worked is that Mohammed “repeatedly misled [his] interrogators about the courier’s identity,” and that these lies somehow showed that Mohammed was protecting important information. This false logic is as disturbing as it is dangerous, and it exemplifies the self-fulfilling nature of the torturer’s claims. In the end, [not even Leon Panetta](#), the former director of the CIA, believes that torture was responsible for the location of bin Laden.

As we [noted](#) last May:

Cheney and Rumsfeld were [never very interested in capturing Bin Laden](#). Their focus was elsewhere. So their revisionist statements about the usefulness of torture for intelligence purposes must be taken with a grain of salt. In reality, their torture program was [crafted to justify the Iraq war](#), not to catch Bin Laden (and see [this](#).)

Myth # 8: Torture Provided Valuable Details of 9/11

Only those who have actually read the 9/11 Commission Report would know that most of the Commission’s information about 9/11 came from suspects who were tortured. Specifically, [most of the 9/11 Commission Report was based on 3rd hand reports of what people said while being tortured](#).

But wasn't the information at least accurate? We don't know.

But remember that communist torture techniques specifically crafted to produce false confessions were used. Remember also:

- The [FBI interrogators](#) who actually interviewed some of the 9/11 suspects say torture didn't work
- Another FBI interrogator of 9/11 suspects [said](#):

I was in the middle of this, and it's not true that these [aggressive] techniques were effective

- [One of the Main Sources for the 9/11 Commission Report was Tortured Until He Agreed to Sign a Confession that He Was NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO READ](#)
- [9/11 Mastermind: "During ... My Interrogation I Gave A Lot Of False Information In Order To Satisfy What I Believed The Interrogators Wished To Hear"](#)
- [Self-Confessed 9/11 "Mastermind" Also Falsely Confessed to Crimes He Didn't Commit](#)
- The Senior Counsel to the 9/11 Commission (John Farmer) - who led the 9/11 staff's inquiry - recently said: "[The CIA tapes of the interrogations were destroyed. The story of 9/11 itself, to put it mildly, was distorted and was completely different from the way things happened](#)"
- [Humanitarian Aid Worker: Torture Only Stopped When I Pretended I Was In Al Qaeda](#)
- [Under torture, Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi claimed there was a link between Saddam Hussein, al-Qaida and WMD](#)

Myth # 9: Only Bad Guys Were Tortured



Torture apologists pretend that only the baddest of the bad were tortured. But the [truth is different](#).

As I [noted](#) in 2009:

One of the main excuses used to justify torture is that the people being tortured were bloodthirsty terrorists, who would do far worse to us if we didn't stop them. Is that true? Judge for yourself:

- The number two man at the State Department under Colin Powell, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, says that [many of those being held at Guantanamo Bay were innocent, and that top Bush administration officials knew that they were innocent](#). Moreover, he said:

“This philosophy held that it did not matter if a detainee were innocent. Indeed, because he lived in Afghanistan and was captured on or near the battle area, he must know something of importance (this general philosophy, in an even cruder form, prevailed in Iraq as well, helping to produce the nightmare at Abu Ghraib). All that was necessary was to extract everything possible from him and others like him, assemble it all in a computer program, and then look for cross-connections and serendipitous incidentals—in short, to have sufficient information about a village, a region, or a group of individuals, that dots could be connected and terrorists or their plots could be identified. Thus, as many people

as possible had to be kept in detention for as long as possible to allow this philosophy of intelligence gathering to work. The detainees' innocence was inconsequential. After all, they were ignorant peasants for the most part and mostly Muslim to boot."

(see [this](#) and [this](#)). Indeed, Wilkerson signed a [declaration](#) under penalty of perjury stating that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld covered up the fact that hundreds of innocent men were sent to Guantanamo because they feared that releasing them would harm the push for the war in Iraq and the broader war on terror.

- Many others also state that those tortured were mainly [innocent farmers, villagers, or those against whom neighbors held a grudge. Indeed, people received a nice cash reward from the U.S. government for turning people in as "suspected terrorists"](#) (and see [this movie](#))
- The commander of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Janis Karpinski, estimates that [90% of detainees in the prison were innocent](#)

This has been confirmed by the recent release of U.S. military files. As the Guardian [reported](#) yesterday:

The US military dossiers, obtained by the New York Times and the Guardian, reveal how ... many prisoners were flown to the Guantánamo cages and held captive for years on the flimsiest grounds, or on the basis of lurid confessions extracted by maltreatment. The files depict a system often focused less on containing dangerous terrorists or enemy fighters, than on extracting intelligence. Among inmates who proved harmless were an [89-year-old Afghan villager, suffering from senile dementia, and a 14-year-old boy who had been an innocent kidnap victim](#). Anyone who was affiliated with Pakistan's national intelligence service, or that had been held as a prisoner in a Taliban jail, or that wore a certain type of watch, was considered a terrorist: US authorities listed the main Pakistani intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), as a terrorist organisation alongside groups such as al-Qaida, Hamas, Hezbollah and Iranian intelligence. Interrogators were told to regard links to any of these as an indication of terrorist or insurgent activity. *** A number of British nationals and residents were held for years even though US authorities knew they were not Taliban or al-Qaida members. One Briton ... was rendered to Guantánamo simply because he had been held in a Taliban prison and was thought to have knowledge of their interrogation techniques. *** Another 17-page file, titled "GTMO matrix of threat indicators for enemy combatants", advises interrogators to look out for signs of terrorist activity ranging from links to a number of mosques around the world, including two in London, to ownership of a particular model of Casio watch. "The Casio was

known to be given to the students at al-Qaida bombmaking training courses in Afghanistan,” it states. Others were held because they led religious services or drove cabs in certain geographic regions, or because they were Al Jazeera reporters: One man was transferred to the facility “because he was a mullah, who led prayers at Manu mosque in Kandahar province, Afghanistan ... which placed him in a position to have special knowledge of the Taliban”.

Another prisoner was shipped to the base “because of his general knowledge of activities in the areas of Khowst and Kabul based as a result of his frequent travels through the region as a taxi driver”. The files also reveal that an al-Jazeera journalist was held at Guantánamo for six years, partly in order to be interrogated about the Arabic news network. His dossier states that one of the reasons was “to provide information on ... the al-Jazeera news network’s training programme, telecommunications equipment, and newsgathering operations in Chechnya, Kosovo and Afghanistan, including the network’s acquisition of a video of UBL [Osama bin Laden] and a subsequent interview with UBL”.

In addition:

- [Congratulations, America ... Children are Being Tortured in Your Name](#)
- [Sick To My Stomach, I Have A Duty To Report On the Torture of Children](#)

Myth # 10: America Doesn’t Torture Any More

We noted last November that [Congress is considering repealing the ban on torture](#):

The same Senate which today passed a bill [allowing indefinite detention of American citizens on American soil for suspicion of being terrorists](#) is now [considering a bill to repeal the prohibitions against torture](#):

The ACLU and over 30 other organizations sent a letter to the Senate asking them to oppose **an effort in Congress that threatens to revive the use of torture and other inhumane interrogation techniques. If passed, an amendment introduced by Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) to the Defense Authorization bill would roll back torture prevention measures** that Congress overwhelmingly approved in the 2005 McCain Anti-Torture Amendment, as well as a 2009 Executive Order on ensuring lawful interrogations. It would also require the administration to create a secret list of approved interrogation techniques in a classified annex to the existing interrogation field manual.

In a related development, **republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann renewed her attack on the prohibition of waterboarding and other forms of torture**

We [reported](#) the same month:

Mother Jones notes today that [Congress has explicitly authorized rendition](#),

[allowing American Citizens on U.S. soil to be sent to other countries which do torture:](#)

A defense spending bill that passed both houses of Congress overwhelmingly and is set to be signed by President Barack Obama as early as this week could make it easier for the government to transfer **American** terrorist suspects to foreign regimes and security forces. The National Defense Authorization Act ([PDF](#)) contains a section that says the president has the power to transfer suspected members and supporters of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, or “associated” groups “to the custody or control of the person’s country of origin, any other foreign country, or any other foreign entity.” That means **if the president determines you’re a member or supporter of Al Qaeda or “associated forces,” he could order you to be handed over to the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Yemenis (“any other foreign country”), any of their respective security forces**, or even the United Nations (“any other foreign entity”). (You can read the relevant section of the law in the document viewer at the end of this article; look for the highlighted annotations.)

[Daphne Eviatar, a lawyer with Human Rights First] adds that there are “a whole lot of scenarios” where the government might want to transfer a suspected terrorist—**even a US citizen**—to foreign custody. For example, the administration might not want to go through the political mess of determining whether to send a suspect to Gitmo, try him in a military commission, or use the civilian system. The administration might also want to **avoid the mandatory habeas corpus review that would come if the US held the suspect itself**. In such a case, transferring the suspect to a foreign security force might present an appealing option.

You can read the detention and transfer provisions of the NDAA [here](#) ...

But even in the absence of such legislation, [torture has been continuing](#):

As I [noted](#) in 2009, in a post entitled “Can Nobel Prize Winner Obama At LEAST Stop the Torture?”: You may assume that things have changed after President Obama was sworn in. However, the Obama Department of Justice is trying to protect torture memo writer John Yoo.

As constitutional law expert Jonathan Turley [notes](#):

The president literally has gotten onto a plane this evening to go to Norway to accept the Nobel Prize, while his Justice Department is effectively gutting a major part of Nuremberg. The Obama administration is arguing not only that they shouldn’t be prosecuted, but it’s now saying that you shouldn’t even be able to sue them civilly It’s an international disgrace.

Well, it may be a disgrace, but at least torture isn’t continuing under the Obama administration, right?

In fact, many reporters have said that the Bagram prison facility in Afghanistan is worse than Guantanamo ever was.

Moreover, abuse is apparently still occurring there. As Spiegel [wrote](#) on

September 21, 2009, in an article entitled “Prisoner Abuse Continues at Bagram Prison in Afghanistan”:

US President Barack Obama has spoken out against CIA prisoner abuse and wants to close Guantanamo. But he tolerates the existence of Bagram military prison in Afghanistan, where more than 600 people are being held without charge. The facility makes Guantanamo look like a “nice hotel,” in the words of one military prosecutor... Bagram is “the forgotten second Guantanamo,” says American military law expert Eugene Fidell, a professor at Yale Law School. “But apparently there is a continuing need for this sort of place even under the Obama administration. “From the beginning, “Bagram was worse than Guantanamo,” says New York-based attorney Tina Foster, who has argued several cases on behalf of detainee rights in US courts. “Bagram has always been a torture chamber.” And what does Obama say? Nothing. He never so much as mentions Bagram in any of his speeches. When discussing America’s mistreatment of detainees, he only refers to Guantanamo.

Obama still [never mentions](#) Bagram.

Spiegel continues:

From the beginning, Bagram was notorious for the brutal forms of torture employed there. Former inmates report incidents of sleep deprivation, beatings and various forms of sexual humiliation [and rape with sticks]... At least two men died during imprisonment. One of them, a 22-year-old taxi driver named Dilawar, was suspended by his hands from the ceiling for four days, during which US military personnel repeatedly beat his legs. Dilawar died on Dec. 10, 2002. In the autopsy report, a military doctor wrote that the tissue on his legs had basically been “pulpified.” As it happens, his interrogators had already known — and later testified — that there was no evidence against Dilawar... However attorney Tina Foster feels that the new initiative is just a cosmetic measure. “There is absolutely no difference between the Bush administration and the Obama administration’s position with respect to Bagram detainees’ rights,” she says during an interview with SPIEGEL in her office in the New York borough of Queens.

And see [this](#).

Moreover, Obama is still apparently [allowing](#) “rendition flights” - where prisoners are flown to countries which freely torture - to continue. This itself violates the Geneva Convention and the War Crimes Act of 1996. Specifically, to the extent that the U.S. is sending prisoners to other countries for the express purpose of being tortured are true, violation of the war crimes act by the highest officials of our country would be probable. For who else but Obama, Gates and other top officials would have the ability to authorize such flights? How could such a program be undertaken without their knowledge? And how could such a program be anything but the intentional “ordering” of torture, or at least “knowing about it” and “failing to take steps to stop it”?

Finally, Jeremy Scahill - the reporter who broke most of the stories on Blackwater - [says](#) that some forms of torture at Guantanamo have continued

under Obama, and may even have gotten worse. For example, Scahill points out that:

The Center for Constitutional Rights released a report titled "Conditions of Confinement at Guantánamo: Still In Violation of the Law," which found that abuses continued. In fact, one Guantanamo lawyer, Ahmed Ghappour, said that his clients were reporting "a ramping up in abuse" since Obama was elected.

As Marjorie Cohen - professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, past president of the National Lawyers Guild - [writes](#) at the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy:

Army Pfc. Bradley Manning, who is facing court-martial for leaking military reports and diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks, is being held in solitary confinement in Quantico brig in Virginia. Each night, he is forced to strip naked and sleep in a gown made of coarse material. He has been made to stand naked in the morning as other inmates walked by and looked. As journalist Lance Tapley documents in his chapter on torture in the supermax prisons in The United States and Torture, solitary confinement can lead to hallucinations and suicide; it is considered to be torture. Manning's forced nudity amounts to humiliating and degrading treatment, in violation of U.S. and international law. Nevertheless, President Barack Obama defended Manning's treatment, saying, "I've actually asked the Pentagon whether or not the procedures . . . are appropriate. They assured me they are." Obama's deference is reminiscent of President George W. Bush, who asked "the most senior legal officers in the U.S. government" to review the interrogation techniques. "They assured me they did not constitute torture," Bush said.

After State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley criticized Manning's conditions of confinement, the White House forced him to resign. Crowley had said the restrictions were "ridiculous, counterproductive and stupid." It appears that Washington is more intent on sending a message to would-be whistleblowers than on upholding the laws that prohibit torture and abuse.

Torture is commonplace in countries strongly allied with the United States. Vice President Omar Suleiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, was the lynchpin for Egyptian torture when the CIA sent prisoners to Egypt in its extraordinary rendition program. A former CIA agent observed, "If you want a serious interrogation, you send a prisoner to Jordan. If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear - never to see them again - you send them to Egypt."

In her chapter in The United States and Torture, New Yorker journalist Jane Mayer cites Egypt as the most common destination for suspects rendered by the United States.

And see [this](#), [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).



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