

U.S. Government: Torture Doesn't Work

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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[63% of Americans](#) believe torture of suspected terrorists is “often” or “sometimes” justified to gather information.

While they assume that beating the crap out of bad guys will get them to spill the beans – and prevent more terrorism – top American interrogation experts say that torture actually DECREASES the amount of information we'll get and INCREASES terrorism.

Torture INTERFERES With Our Ability to Fight Terrorism, Obtain Intelligence Information and Protect Our National Security

For example, the Los Angeles Times [reported](#) Friday:

The U.S. government through the FBI-led High-Value Interrogation Group, a task force of agents, analysts and intelligence community officers who question suspected terrorists and other key detainees ... researching the most effective ways to elicit information from tough-to-crack suspects, injecting science into the art of interrogation ... has verified [that] building a rapport with your subjects and challenging their preconceived notions gets you more reliable information than torture or handling them roughly.

“Take your moral compass and heart out of it, and just look at the results,” said Steven Kleinman, a former military intelligence officer who was a founding member of a committee that advises the interrogation group on its research. “The closer you adhere to the most exacting standards of human rights and treatment of prisoners ... you will be more effective.

Indeed, [virtually all of the top interrogation experts – both conservatives and liberals](#) – say that torture doesn't work:

- 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](#)

- Scores of high-level intelligence officers [say](#): “Based on our lengthy experience in intelligence, we know that torture doesn’t ‘work.’”
- “Neuroscientists have [found](#) that torture physically and chemically interferes with the prisoner’s ability to tell the truth
- [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
- The head of the CIA said that the agency “[has NOT concluded](#) that it was the use of EITs [“Enhanced Interrogation Techniques aka torture] that allowed us to obtain useful information from detainees”.
- 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 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.

[And](#):

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.

- 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
- 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.

- An Army psychologist - Major Paul Burney, Army's Behavior Science Consulting Team psychologist - [said](#)(page 78 & 83):

[It] 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, DOD's Joint Personnel Recovery Agency manager for research and development and a specialist in torture - [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.

- 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.

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](#). (And, no ... it [did NOT](#) help get Bin Laden).

We’ve Known for Over 2,000 Years that Torture Produces FALSE Confessions

In fact, we’ve known [since ancient Rome](#) that torture doesn’t work:

- In [72 BC - 2,086 years ago](#) - Cicero (the well-known Roman philosopher, politician, lawyer, orator, political theorist and consul) [pointed out](#) that torture creates conditions of fear and desperate hope in which “[there is but little room left for truth](#)”, i.e. that torture is an unreliable method of extracting truth.
- Later Roman leaders [agreed](#):

As early as the third century A.D., the great Roman Jurist Ulpian noted that information obtained through torture was not to be trusted because some people are “so susceptible to pain that they will tell any lie rather than suffer it” (Peters, 1996). This warning about the unreliability of information extracted through the use of torture has echoed across the centuries.

- The former Attorney General of the United States (Ramsey Clark) [notes](#) about the Roman emperor Justinian ... who lived in the [6th century](#):

Justinian condemned torture as untrustworthy, perilous, and deceptive.

- Lawrence Davidson - history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania - [points out](#):

In 1764 Cesare Beccaria [an Italian criminologist, jurist, philosopher, and politician who had a profound effect on America’s Founding Fathers] published his groundbreaking work, [On Crimes and Punishments](#). Beccaria had examined all the evidence available at that time and concluded that individuals under torture will tell their interrogators anything they want to hear, true or not, just to get the pain to stop.

- Napoleon Bonaparte [wrote](#) in 1798:

The barbarous custom of having men beaten who are suspected of having important secrets to reveal must be abolished. It has always been recognized that this way of interrogating men, by putting them to torture, produces nothing worthwhile. The poor wretches say anything that comes into their mind and what they think the interrogator wishes to know.

- And in 1836, British police magistrate and lawyer David Jardine [documented](#) that - for thousands of years - torture has led to false confessions.

Torture CREATES Terrorists and REDUCES U.S. National Security

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

- Torture by U.S. personnel [led to the CREATION of ISIS](#)
- 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

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