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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

## What Torture Never Told Us

By ALI H. SOUFAN

PUBLIC bravado aside, the defenders of the so-called enhanced interrogation techniques are fast running out of classified documents to hide behind. The three that were released recently by the C.I.A. — the [2004 report by the inspector general](#) and two [memos from 2004](#) and [2005](#) on intelligence gained from detainees — fail to show that the techniques stopped even a single imminent threat of terrorism.

The inspector general's report distinguishes between intelligence gained from regular interrogation and from the harsher methods, which culminate in waterboarding. While the former produces useful intelligence, according to the report, the latter "is a more subjective process and not without concern." And the information in the two memos reinforces this differentiation.

They show that substantial intelligence was gained from pocket litter (materials found on detainees when they were captured), from playing detainees against one another and from detainees freely giving up information that they assumed their questioners already knew. A computer seized in March 2003 from a Qaeda operative for example, listed names of Qaeda members and money they were to receive.

Soon after Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the chief planner of the 9/11 attacks, was captured in 2003, according to the 2005 memo, he "elaborated on his plan to crash commercial airlines into Heathrow Airport." The memo speculates that he may have assumed that Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a fellow member of Al Qaeda who had been captured in 2002, had already divulged the plan. The same motivation — the assumption that another detainee had already talked — is offered to explain why Mr. Mohammed provided details about the Hambali-Southeast Asia Qaeda network.

Mr. Mohammed must have likewise assumed that his interrogators already had the details about Al Qaeda's organizational structure that he gave them. When I testified in the trial of Salim Hamdan, who had been Osama bin Laden's personal driver, I provided many unclassified details about Al Qaeda's structure and operations, none of which came from Mr. Mohammed.

Some of the information that is cited in the memos — the revelation that Mr. Mohammed had been the mastermind of 9/11, for example, and the uncovering of Jose Padilla, the so-called dirty bomber — was gained from another terrorism suspect, Abu Zubaydah, by "informed interrogation," conducted by an F.B.I. colleague and me. The arrest of Walid bin Attash, one of Osama bin Laden's most trusted messengers, which was also cited in the 2005 C.I.A. memo, was thanks to a quick-witted foreign law enforcement officer, and had nothing to do with harsh interrogation of anyone. The examples go on and on.

A third top suspected terrorist who was subjected to enhanced interrogation, in 2002, was Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, the man charged with plotting the 2000 bombing of the Navy destroyer Cole. I was the lead agent on

a team that worked with the Yemenis to thwart a series of plots by Mr. Nashiri's operatives in the Arabian Peninsula — including planned attacks on Western embassies. In 2004, we helped prosecute 15 of these operatives in a Yemeni court. Not a single piece of evidence that helped us apprehend or convict them came from Mr. Nashiri.

It is surprising, as the eighth anniversary of 9/11 approaches, that none of Al Qaeda's top leadership is in our custody. One damaging consequence of the harsh interrogation program was that the expert interrogators whose skills were deemed unnecessary to the new methods were forced out.

Mr. Mohammed knew the location of most, if not all, of the members of Al Qaeda's leadership council, and possibly of every covert cell around the world. One can only imagine who else we could have captured, or what attacks we might have disrupted, if Mr. Mohammed had been questioned by the experts who knew the most about him.

A lack of knowledge perhaps explains why so many false claims have been made about the program's alleged successes. Many officials in Washington reading the reports didn't know enough about Al Qaeda to know what information was already known and whether the detainees were telling all they knew. The inspector general's report states that many operatives thought their superiors were inaccurately judging that detainees were withholding information. Such assessments, the operatives said, were "not always supported by an objective evaluation" but were "too heavily based, instead, on presumptions." I can personally testify to this.

Supporters of the enhanced interrogation techniques have jumped from claim to claim about their usefulness. They have asserted, for example, that harsh treatment led Mr. Mohammed to reveal the plot to attack the Library Tower in Los Angeles. But that plot was thwarted in 2002, and Mr. Mohammed was not arrested until 2003. Recently, interviews with unnamed sources led The Washington Post to report that harsh techniques turned Mr. Mohammed into an intelligence "asset."

This latest claim will come as news to Mr. Mohammed's prosecutors, to his fellow detainees (whom he instructed, at his arraignment, not to cooperate with the United States) and indeed to Mr. Mohammed himself. He told the International Committee of the Red Cross that "I gave a lot of false information in order to satisfy what I believed the interrogators wished to hear."

The inspector general's report was written precisely because many of the C.I.A. operatives complained about what they were being ordered to do. The inspector general then conducted an internal audit of the entire program. In his report, he questions the effectiveness of the harsh techniques that were authorized. And he slams the use of "unauthorized, improvised, inhumane and undocumented detention and interrogation techniques." This is probably why the enhanced interrogation program was shelved in 2005.

Meanwhile, the professionals in the field are relieved that an ineffective, unreliable, unnecessary and destructive program — one that may have given Al Qaeda a second wind and damaged our country's reputation — is finished.

*Ali H. Soufan was an F.B.I. special agent from 1997 to 2005.*

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