

Summary and Reflections of Chief of Medical Services on OMS Participation in the RDI Program

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In the immediate wake of 9/11 OTS again returned to the subject of interrogation and that September contracted with recently retired Air Force SERE psychologist Jim Mitchell to produce a paper on al-Qa'ida resistance-to-interrogation techniques. Mitchell collaborated with another Air Force SERE psychologist, Bruce Jessen, and eventually produced "Recognizing and Developing Countermeasures to Al-Qa'ida Resistance to Interrogation Techniques: A Resistance Training Perspective."²¹ Following AZ's capture, Mitchell was sent to [redacted] to serve as a behind-the-scenes consultant to interrogators and the on-site OTS staff psychologist (who was there to evaluate AZ psychologically, and explore possible approaches to interrogation and debriefing.)

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Under most circumstances, interrogators seek to exploit the initial shock of capture, which in AZ's case was long since past. In lieu of this they chose to take advantage of the "shock" of his return to detainee prisoner status, in the austerity of a [redacted] cell. One day after his return from the comfortable hospital setting, a three day period of interrogation was begun, employing all the previously approved measures. The on-site OMS physician monitored this closely, and found that neither the initial three-day period of sleep deprivation nor shorter periods repeated several days later that week impacted his continuing recovery. These measures also failed to garner any

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²¹ Mitchell had 13 years of experience in the Air Force SERE program, and Jessen 19 years. Additionally, Jessen had worked with released U.S. military detainees in the Nineties.

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drainatic new intelligence. A one day repetition the following week was similarly ineffectual. As the on-site personnel assessed the situation, "there is unlikely to be a 'Perry Mason' moment where the subject ultimately gives up but rather will likely yield information slowly over the course of the interrogations. The subject currently is taking a highly sophisticated counter-interrogation resistance posture where his primary position is to avoid giving details."²²

The next contemplated step—which was approved for use at the end of AZ's first week of interrogation—would have been more punitive: placing him in a "confinement" box akin to that previously used in the Agency's own training program. As OMS was advised, confinement boxes had been introduced []

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The proposed Agency box was to be 30" x 20" x 85", which was more spacious than both the "prototype" [] and the one once used in Agency training. The plan was to confine AZ in a reclining box for a trial period of 1-2 hours, repeated no more than 3 times a day []

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[] believed that it would "achieve the desired effect."

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Given the lack of success with AZ, SERE psychologists Mitchell and Jessen (the latter having retired from the Air Force in May and became an OTS IC) were tasked with devising a more aggressive approach to interrogation. Their solution was to employ the full range of SERE techniques. They, together with other OTS psychologists, researched these techniques, soliciting information on effectiveness and harmful after effects from various psychologists, psychiatrists, academics, and the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA), which oversaw military SERE programs.

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By early July a specific plan for the aggressive phase of AZ's interrogation had been worked out. The goal was to jarringly "dislocate" his expectations of treatment, and thereby motivate him to cooperate. (At the time AZ was believed to be author of the al-Qa'ida manual on interrogation resistance; he still seemed to think if he could hold out longer, he would be transferred into the benign U.S. judicial system.) The interrogations would be handled exclusively by the two contract SERE psychologists,²⁴ who would escalate quickly through a "menu" of pre-approved techniques.

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—i.e., a senior OMS PA, who had worked in the previous Agency program—was to be present throughout and, when warranted, an OMS physician. The OMS medical officers' exclusive role was to assure AZ's safety during interrogation.

As a practical matter, and with OMS concurrence, there were to be two sizes of confinement boxes. Confinement in the previously described larger box would be limited to 8 hours (and no more than 18 hours total in a 24 hour period). A much smaller box also would be built, measuring 30" high x 21" x 30". Confinement in this box would be

²⁴ CTC described Jessen as a "SERE interrogation specialist" experienced "in the techniques of confrontational interrogations."

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limited to two hours.²⁶ Care was to be taken not to force AZ's legs into a position that would compromise wound healing. In actual practice, the larger box was used in an upright position, through its dimensions were such that AZ (who was quite flexible), could sit down if he chose, albeit in a cramped position; even the small box accommodated a squatting position sometimes adopted by AZ on his own volition. At the planned point of peak interrogational intensity, waterboard applications would be alternated with use of the confinement boxes (in which he would "contemplate his situation") until, it was hoped, "fear and despair" led to cooperation.²⁷

OTS psychologists prepared briefing papers to accompany an Agency request to DoJ seeking an opinion on whether the SERE-techniques could legally be used in an actual interrogation. Of the possible measures, only the waterboard and mock burial were believed by the Agency's Office of General Counsel (OGC) to require prior Department of Justice (DoJ) approval. However, ten "Enhanced Interrogation Techniques" (EITs) initially were proposed: attention grasp, walling technique, facial hold, facial or insult slap, cramped confinement boxes, wall standing, stress positions, sleep deprivation, waterboard

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and mock burials. To these was added the placement of harmless insects in the confinement box (based on AZ's apparent discomfort with insects). After preliminary discussion with the Department of Justice, mock burial had been eliminated from consideration. Of specific interest was whether any of these measures were barred by the most relevant Federal torture statute which prohibited the intentional infliction of severe physical or mental pain or suffering.²⁸

Among the items forwarded to DoJ along with the request was a 24 July 2002 OTS paper on "Psychological Terms Employed in the Statutory Prohibition on Torture." a memorandum from the

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and an OTS-prepared AZ psychological assessment. According to (b)(6) almost 27,000 students had undergone Air Force SERE training between 1992 and 2001, of which only 0.14% had been pulled for psychological reasons (and of which none were known to have had "any long-term psychological impact"). The OTS paper assessed the relative risk of the various techniques, and concluded that while they had been administered to volunteers "in a harmless way, with no measurable impact on the psyche of the volunteer, we do not believe we can assure the same for a man...forced through these processes.... The

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intent...is to make the subject very disturbed, but with the presumption that he will recover." "The plan is to rapidly overwhelm the subject, while still allowing him the option to choose to cooperate at any stage as the pressure is being ratcheted up. The plan hinges on the use of an absolutely convincing technique. The water board meets this need. Without the water board, the remaining pressures would constitute a 50 percent solution and their effectiveness would dissipate progressively over time, as the subject figures out that he will not be physically beaten and as he adapts to cramped confinement." ²⁹

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OTS (and the contract psychologist/interrogators) provided the psychological services to (b)(1) from the time it opened in December 2002.

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OMS assumed more responsibility, OMS psychologists and psychiatrists began to attend (as observers) a new Agency High Value Target Interrogation training class.⁶⁰ Some visited SERE programs and consulted with SERE psychologists.

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May 2004 the first Inspector General report on the interrogation and detention program reviewed this history, noted the continuing OMS concerns and formally recommended a policy that "individuals assessing the medical/psychological effects of EITs may not also be involved in the application of those techniques."⁶¹ The notion of "psychologist/interrogators" then disappeared, and the SERE contractors worked solely on the interrogation side.

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also had no written interrogation guidelines, though early on was granted permission to employ sleep deprivation, solitar confinement, noise, and

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(b)(1) event ally standing sleep deprivation, nakedness and cold showers. As these were not
 (b)(3) NatSecAct "enhanced" techniques, no medical monitoring function was specified, nor was OMS
 advised of interrogations. When [] detainees needed medical care, the PA
 (b)(1) assigned TDY [] was called. This happened every week or two, largely for
 (b)(3) NatSecAct entirely routine complaints.⁶⁵ Interrogator at [] left to their own devices,
 sometimes improvised. These improvisations varied from unauthorized SERE techniques
 (b)(1) such as smoke blown into the face, a stabilizing stick behind the knees of a kneeling
 (b)(3) NatSecAct detainee, and cold showers, to undisciplined, physically aggressive "hard takedowns" and
 staged "executions" (though the latter proved too transparent a ruse).

(b)(1) The only death tied directly to the detainee program took place in this context at
 (b)(3) NatSecAct [] It came about as the result of [] staff being left without
 clear guidance, or any monitoring requirement, at a time of dramatic temperature change.

(b)(1) []
 (b)(3) NatSecAct [] October 2002, a suspected Afghan extremist named Gul Rahman
 was captured in Pakistan, and on November [] rendered to [] His principle
 (b)(1) interrogator was psychologist/interrogator Bruce Jessen, on site to conduct in-depth
 (b)(3) NatSecAct interrogations of several recently detained al-Qa'ida operatives. For a week, Rahman
 steadfastly refused to cooperate despite being kept naked and subjected to cold showers
 and sleep deprivation. Jessen was joined by psychologist/interrogator Mitchell on
 (b)(1) November []
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(b)(1) [] At this time the [] PA visited [] and found no
 pressing medical problems,⁶⁶ but in view of a recent temperature drop recommended that
 the detainees be provided with warmer clothing (between November [] and [] the
 (b)(1) [] low had fallen eleven degrees to about 31°F). []
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(b)(1) [] the psychologist/interrogators performed a final mental status exam on
 Rahman and recommended "continual environmental deprivations." They, and the [] (b)(1)
 PA, then departed [] the evening of November [] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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 (b)(3) NatSecAct [] Over the next few days, temperatures [] improved (highs up fifteen degrees
 (b)(1) [] lows up nine degrees, [] but Rahman's demeanor and level of
 (b)(3) NatSecAct cooperation did not. When his food was delivered on the [] he threw it, his water
 bottle and his defecation bucket at the [] guards, saying he knew their faces and
 (b)(1) would kill them when he was released. On learning this, the Site Manager directed that
 (b)(3) NatSecAct Rahman, who wore only a sweatshirt, be shackled hands and feet, with the shackles
 connected by a short chain. As such, he was nearly immobilized sitting on the concrete
 floor of his cell. The temperature had again dropped [] the preceding evening, and
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the night Rahman was short-chained reached a low of 31°F. Although Rahman allegedly looked okay to the guards during the night, he was dead the following morning.

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(b)(3) NatSecAct An autopsy performed by a (b)(6) pathologist (b)(6) and assisted by the [] PA [] to [] found no trauma, toxicology, or other pathology to explain the death. On a clinical basis, the pathologist attributed cause of death to hypothermia, consistent with the absence of specific findings. Rahman lost body heat from his bare skin directly to the concrete floor and was too immobilized to generate sufficient muscle activity to keep himself alive.⁶⁸

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(b)(6) Gul Rahman's death triggered several internal actions, including the generation of formal DCI guidelines on the handling and interrogation of detainees (which basically codified existing RG practice), and the requirement that all those participating in the program document that they had read and understood these requirements.⁶⁹ The "Guidelines on Confinement Conditions for CIA Detainees" (28 January 2003) required, among other things: documented periodic medical (and when appropriate, psychological) evaluations; that detainee food and drink, nutrition and sanitary standards not fall below a minimally acceptable level; that clothing and/or the physical environment be sufficient to meet basic health needs; that there be sanitary facilities (which could be a bucket); and that there be time for exercise. The "Guidelines on Interrogations Conducted Pursuant to the Presidential Memorandum of Notification of 17 September 2001" specified that EITs could not be used without prior Headquarters approval, must be preceded by a physical and psychological exam, and must be monitored by medical personnel. Even standard techniques (those deemed not to incorporate significant physical or psychological pressure) required prior approval, "whenever feasible." These standard techniques were described as including sleep deprivation (up to 72 hours, reduced to 48 hours in Dec 2003), diapering (generally not to exceed 72 hours), reduced caloric intake (still adequate to maintain general health), isolation, loud music or white noise, and denial of reading material.

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(b)(3) NatSecAct Renditions and Detainees Group (RDG, the renamed RG) in December was given responsibility for oversight of [] Coincident with this, OMS took over psychologist coverage there, which began with the assessment of some [] detainees then on site. The (b)(1) PA also began monthly cable summaries of detainee physical health.

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In practice, however, AZ's cooperation did not correlate that well with his waterboard sessions. Only when questioning changed to subjects on which he had information (toward the end of waterboard usage) was he forthcoming. A psychologist/interrogator later said that waterboard use had established that AZ had no further information on imminent threats—a creative but circular justification. In retrospect OMS thought AZ probably reached the point of cooperation even prior to the August institution of "enhanced" measures—a development missed because of the narrow focus of questioning. In any event, there was no evidence that the waterboard produced time-perishable information which otherwise would have been unobtainable.⁸²

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In part to undermine the notion that individual interrogation techniques could be studied, psychologist/interrogators Jessen and Mitchell provided an instructive overview of "interrogation and coercive physical pressures."⁹⁴ Refusal to provide intelligence, they wrote, "is not overcome through the use of *this physical technique* to obtain *that effect*...independent of the other forces at work. Such thinking led some people not involved in the actual process of interrogation to believe that the relative contribution of individual interrogation techniques can be teased out and quantified...." [emphasis in original] Their work as interrogators was said to be far more complicated:

"...the choice of which physical techniques, if any, to use is driven by an individually tailored interrogation plan and by a real-time assessment of the detainee's strengths, weaknesses and reactions to what is happening. In this process, a single physical interrogation technique is almost never employed in isolation from other techniques and influence strategies, many of which are not coercive. Rather, multiple techniques are deliberately orchestrated and sequenced as a means for inducing an unwilling detainee to actively seek a solution to his current predicament, and thus work with the interrogator who has been responding in a firm, but fair and predictable way."⁹⁵

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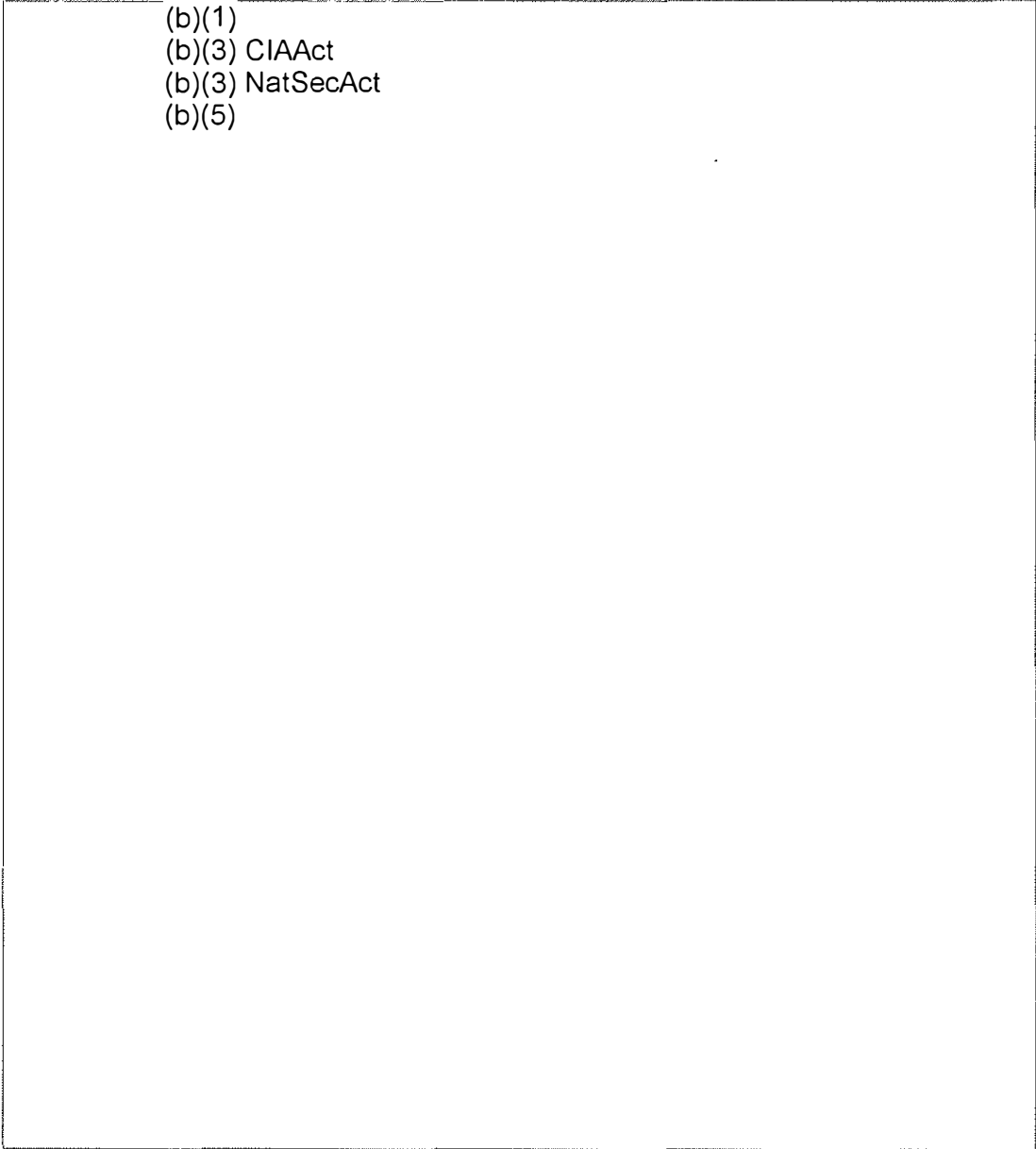
⁹⁴ James E. Mitchell, Ph.D. and John B. Jessen, Ph.D., "Interrogation and Coercive Physical Pressures: A Quick Overview," February 2005. This apparently is a derivative of a paper prepared at the time of the June 2004 DO review, "Using Coercive Pressure in Interrogation of High Value Targets."

⁹⁵ They continue: "As in all cases of exploitation, the interrogator seeks to induce an exploitable mental state and then take advantage of the opening to further manipulate the detainee. In many cases, coercive

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Missing from this perspective was any question about just how many elements were necessary for a successful "orchestration." The assumption was that a gifted interrogator would know best; and the implicit message was that this art form could not be objectively analyzed. Indeed, by this time their methodology was more nuanced, in stark contrast to the rapid escalation and indiscriminate repetitions of early interrogations. Still, there remained a need to look more objectively for the least intrusive way to gain cooperation.



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