

The High Value Terrorist Detainee Program

Since 9/11, we have been engaged in a struggle against an elusive enemy; terrorists work in the shadows, relying on secrecy and the element of surprise to maximize the impact of their attacks. Timely and accurate intelligence is crucial to success in the War on Terrorism. One of the key tools in this war has been the information we have gleaned from the terrorists themselves. Detainees who have been in the inner circle of al-Qa'ida hold information that simply cannot be obtained from any other source. These are hardened terrorists, dedicated to their cause, trained to resist, knowing the most valuable information we need to know to detect and prevent attacks. These are unwilling sources deliberately and actively attempting to withhold or distort information. Because of who they are and what they know, CIA needs to have direct, timely, and thorough access to them.

- In the last five years, reporting from terrorist detainees has become a crucial pillar of US counterterrorism efforts, representing the single largest source of insight into al-Qa'ida for the US and its CT partners.***
- Detainee reporting will remain a critical tool if we and our allies are to continue to protect ourselves against these terrorists.***

In March 2002, the CIA and our Coalition partners captured Abu Zubaydah—a well-known terrorist leader and a key associate of Usama Bin Ladin. A dedicated terrorist, Abu Zubaydah was wounded in the capture operation and likely would have died had it not been for the medical attention arranged by the CIA. During initial interrogation, Abu Zubaydah gave some information that he probably viewed as nominal. **It was clear to his interrogators that Abu Zubaydah possessed a great deal of information about al-Qa'ida; however, he soon stopped all cooperation. Over the ensuing months, the CIA designed a new interrogation program that would be safe, effective, and legal.**

- Prior to using these new procedures, the CIA sought and obtained legal guidance from the Department of Justice that none of the new procedures violated the US statute prohibiting torture. It was also determined that US obligations under the Convention Against Torture article prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, by its own terms, did not apply. Policymakers were also briefed and approved the use of the procedures.**
- The procedures proved highly effective. Abu Zubaydah soon began providing accurate and timely actionable intelligence,**

including information that led to the capture of 9/11 plotter Ramzi bin al-Shibh.

- Whenever there were changes to relevant US law, CIA reviewed its procedures, adjusted them if appropriate, and sought new legal guidance from the Department of Justice.

CIA's interrogation program is designed to ensure that intelligence is collected in a manner that does not violate the US Constitution, any US statute, or US treaty obligations.

- While in CIA custody, all detainees have been afforded high quality medical, psychological, and dental care. CIA also ensured that detainees were well-fed, clothed, sheltered, and afforded opportunities for daily exercise.

Multiple safeguards have been built into the program to assure its professionalism. All those involved in the questioning of detainees are carefully chosen and screened for demonstrated professional judgment and maturity; the average age of officers interrogating detainees is 43. Once selected, they must complete more than 250 hours of specialized training before they are allowed to come face-to-face with a terrorist. Additional fieldwork under the direct supervision of an experienced officer is required before they can direct an interrogation.

- Specific senior CIA officers must approve—prior to use—each and every one of the lawful interrogation procedures to be used. No deviation from the approved procedures and methods is permitted.
- All interrogation sessions in which one of these lawful procedures is authorized for use must be observed by non-participants to ensure the procedures are applied appropriately and safely. These observers are authorized to terminate an interrogation immediately should they believe anything unauthorized is occurring.
- Any deviations from approved program procedures and practices are to be immediately reported and immediate corrective action taken, including referral to CIA's Office of the Inspector General and the Department of Justice, as appropriate.

Some believe that physical pressures or specially authorized procedures constitute the whole or major part of the interrogation process and that

there is some kind of direct correlation between harshness and the amount of information obtained. This is simply not true.

- **In addition to interrogators, detainees are questioned by subject matter experts with years of experience studying and tracking al-Qa'ida members and plots whose expertise contributed to the capture of the detainees. These debriefers are also carefully selected and trained before being permitted to come face-to-face with a detainee.**

In the days and weeks after 9/11, the President of the United States directed our government's national security officers to do everything in our power—and within our laws—to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again, to America or any other nation. The detention program has played an invaluable role in our success to date in carrying out that mission.

- **Detainees have provided lead information that has aided the US and its allies in capturing al-Qa'ida operatives who pose a serious threat, including individuals who were planning attacks overseas and against the US Homeland.**