



H I V E

# THE PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO TAUGHT THE C.I.A. HOW TO TORTURE (AND CHARGED \$180 MILLION)

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The C.I.A. tortured detainees in ways more brutal, sustained, and gruesome than was previously known, and two medical professionals were integral to its efforts.

The report—which runs 6,700 pages in its entirety and relied on over 6 million internal C.I.A. documents—lays bare a jaw-dropping catalog of brutality: ice baths, rectal “rehydration,” mock burials in coffin-shaped boxes, and threatening detainees with harm to their children. “It is my personal conclusion that, under any common meaning of the term, CIA detainees were tortured,” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence writes in the introduction.

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As the report makes clear, some of the worst corrosion occurred in the ranks of America's psychologists, who, like many medical professionals, are charged with doing no harm. It was two C.I.A. contract psychologists with no experience with real-life interrogations. Instead, as described in the report, they promoted the tactics to the C.I.A., employed them indiscriminately, earned money to do so, and lied about their effectiveness.

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# Stark

I was the first reporter to enumerate the roles of the two key psychologists, James Elmer Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, as architects of the coercive interrogation tactics, *in a 2007 story in [Vanity Fair](#)*. The pair had previously been Air Force trainers in a program called SERE (Survival Evasion Resistance Escape), which subjected military members to mock interrogations—interrogations that ironically had been used by the Communist Chinese against American servicemen during the Korean war in order to produce false confessions.

Historically, the C.I.A. knew the tactics would not be useful. In 1989, the C.I.A. informed Congress that “inhumane physical or psychological techniques are counterproductive because they do not produce intelligence and will probably result in false answers.” In the desperate months after 9/11, the C.I.A. willfully ignored its own findings.

The agency threw in its lot with Mitchell and Jessen, who are identified in the report by the pseudonyms Swigert and Dunbar. As the report notes, “Neither psychologist had any experience as an interrogator, nor did either have specialized knowledge of al-Qa'ida, a background in counterterrorism, or any relevant cultural or linguistic expertise.” Nonetheless, the psychologists played a role in convincing the administration that if they were allowed to reverse engineer the SERE tactics, they could break down detainees, resulting in useful intelligence.

With no previous evidence of success, they were given the greenlight to use the training techniques on actual detainees. The F.B.I. had used rapport-building techniques to extract vital intelligence from Abu Zubaydah, one of the first detainees in our war on terror. From a hospital bed in Thailand, he disclosed to F.B.I. interrogators that Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was actually the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks.

But subsequently, Mitchell showed up in Thailand, and began to oversee the work of breaking down Zubaydah: keeping him in a coffin-shaped box, blasting music at him, locking him in a freezing room. The C.I.A. falsely claimed credit for the intelligence he provided, and, ultimately, the use of the tactics spread like wildfire through C.I.A. and military interrogation sites. In short, Mitchell and Jessen sold the C.I.A. an argument it wanted to hear: namely, that the use of coercive interrogation techniques would produce groundbreaking intelligence and thereby prevent another attack. It was well known within the SERE community that the use of such techniques was better

designed to produce false information. There was seemingly no legitimate argument for its utility.

It was clear to numerous F.B.I. and C.I.A. personnel that the psychologists had jumped lanes, as the Senate report makes clear. Interrogators and other personnel who witnessed some of the interrogations sent alarmed e-mails and reports to superiors and colleagues about what was happening.

The report recounts the interrogation of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who was waterboarded 183 times. After numerous rounds of waterboarding produced little new intelligence, and even led the detainee to fabricate information, the report recounts how the “Deputy Chief of ALEC Station later told the inspector general that it was around this time that contract interrogator DUNBAR stated that ‘he had not seen a ‘resistor’ [sic] like KSM, and was ‘going to go to school on this guy.’” The report continues, stating that, according to C.I.A. records, the interrogators then “devote[d] all measures to pressuring [KSM] on the single issue of the ‘next attack on America,’ including attention grabs, insult slaps, walling, water dousing, and additional waterboard sessions.”

The C.I.A.’s chief of interrogations, after seeing one of the interrogation plans devised by the psychologists, wrote to colleagues: “[t]his is a train wreck [sic] waiting to happen and I intend to get the hell off the train before it happens,” according to the report.

The psychologists were playing so many different roles simultaneously that some C.I.A. and military staff became concerned about the apparent conflict of interest. One such warning, sent in a draft cable to C.I.A. headquarters, noted, “Another area of concern is the use of the psychologist as an interrogator. The role of the ops psychologist is to be a detached observer and serve as a check on the interrogator to prevent the interrogator from any unintentional excess of pressure which might cause permanent psychological harm to the subject.” But as the cable continued, “We note that [the proposed plan] contains a psychological interrogation assessment by psychologist [DUNBAR] which is to be carried out by interrogator [DUNBAR]. We have a problem with him conducting both roles simultaneously.”

However, the conflict even exceeded the multiple roles played by the psychologists. Ultimately, according to the report, the C.I.A.’s Office of Medical Services raised concerns that the conflicts of interest were “nowhere more graphic than in the setting in which the same individuals applied an [enhanced interrogation technique] which only they were approved to employ, judged both its effectiveness and detainee resilience, and implicitly proposed continued use of the technique—at a daily compensation reported to be \$1800/day, or four times that of interrogators who could not use the technique.”

The psychologists were actually designing the torture, overseeing its implementation, assessing its effectiveness, and getting paid handsomely for it. Mitchell and Jessen's consulting business was ultimately awarded \$180 million in contracts by the C.I.A., \$81 million of which was paid by the time the agreement was terminated in 2009, according to the report.

When VF Daily reached their most recent attorney, Henry F. Schuelke III, a partner at Blank Rome LLP, he said of Mitchell and Jessen, "They'd be my current clients if they had a problem requiring my attention." Asked if his clients had any comment about the Senate report, he said, "Nope, nope, nope. There is no current active matter."

The report makes clear that the tactics did not work and there was no reliable evidence to indicate they ever would. And the C.I.A. misled just about everyone—from the White House to the Department of Justice, to Congress and the public—about the tactics' effectiveness.

Though many of the gruesome tactics—such as waterboarding to the point of death—have been disclosed in previous media coverage, the report makes clear that the extreme tactics were used without any discrimination, and by so-called interrogators who had little training. According to the report, interrogators started using the tactics three months before any training took place. They were using brutality on the fly.

The psychologists not only benefited themselves. They gave the C.I.A. and the White House cover. So long as there were medical professionals present in the interrogations, the government could claim the interrogations had been "safe, legal and effective"—in short, not torture at all. And psychologists were the C.I.A.'s last refuge, as the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association determined that it would violate their members' oaths to patients to participate in the interrogations.

In an extensive statement, the C.I.A. pushed back against the report's findings and concluded that its use of enhanced interrogation techniques "did produce valuable and unique intelligence that helped thwart attack plans, capture terrorists and save lives." As well, to defend themselves against the report's findings, former C.I.A. officials launched a Web site, [ciasavedlives.com](http://ciasavedlives.com), which claimed that the Senate report "is marred by errors of facts and interpretation and is completely at odds with the reality that the leaders and officers of the Central Intelligence Agency lived through. It represents the single worst example of Congressional oversight in our many years of government service."

Ultimately, however, the U.S. cannot outrun its staggering descent into barbarity. The Senate

report has blocked the exit ramp. We must live up to what has occurred. As James Risen, a *New York Times* investigative reporter who describes collusion between the American Psychological Association and the C.I.A. in his excellent new book, *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power and Endless War*, writes, “The United States is now relearning an ancient lesson, dating back to the Roman empire. Brutalizing an enemy only serves to brutalize the army ordered to do it. Torture corrodes the mind of the torturer.”

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