

CIA Debunks Its Own Claims About Torture

High-Level U.S. Officials Debunk CIA Claims About Bin Laden

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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The soon-to-be-released Senate Intelligence committee report says that [torture didn't lead to the capture of Bin Laden](#). The CIA claims that the Senate report is wrong, and pushes its message out through news interviews, pro-torture propaganda tv shows such as [24](#), pro-torture movies like [Zero Dark Thirty](#) and [video games](#). But former CIA director Leon Panetta said that [torture did not help get Bin Laden](#).

In 2011, John Brennan [agreed](#):

White House deputy national security advisor John Brennan Tuesday knocked down the myth that waterboarding provided crucial intelligence that led to the location of Osama bin Laden. "So we've been talking about the different details and methods that lead up to this moment, and obviously there is word out today that waterboarding played a very big role or role in actually getting the information," MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski told Brennan. "Is that the case?" "Not to my knowledge," Brennan explained.

Brennan is now the *current* director of the CIA. Likewise, former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld – who had a [big hand in the torture program](#) – [stated](#):

"The United States Department of Defense did not do waterboarding for interrogation purposes to anyone. It is true that some information that came from normal interrogation approaches at Guantanamo did lead to information that was beneficial in this instance. But it was not harsh treatment and it was not waterboarding."

Senator Lindsey Graham – a vocal [proponent of waterboarding](#) – [said](#):

This idea we caught bin Laden because of waterboarding I think is a misstatement. This whole concept of how we caught bin Laden is a lot of work over time by different people and putting the puzzle together. I do not believe this is a time to celebrate waterboarding, I believe this is a time to celebrate hard work.

The New York Times [noted](#):

"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," said Tommy Vietor, spokesman for the National Security Council. "It took years

of collection and analysis from many different sources to develop the case that enabled us to identify this compound, and reach a judgment that Bin Laden was likely to be living there.”

Huffington Post [reported](#):

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, produced a 263-page report in 2009 on the treatment of detainees in U.S. custody in the years following 9/11. He too dismissed the idea that the interrogation techniques used at that time were efficacious. “If they had any information under the Bush administration that could have led to bin Laden it would have been terribly neglectful for them not to use it,” Levin noted in an interview on the “Bill Press Show.” The confirmation of the courier’s significance appears to have come in 2004, from an al Qaeda operative who was not waterboarded: Hassan Ghul.

Dan Froomkin [argued](#) that – rather than helping catch Bin Laden – torture actually delayed by years more effective intelligence-gathering methods which would have resulted in finding Bin Laden:

Defenders of the Bush administration’s interrogation policies have claimed vindication from reports that bin Laden was tracked down in small part due to information received from brutalized detainees some six to eight years ago. But that sequence of events — even if true — doesn’t demonstrate the effectiveness of torture, these experts say. Rather, it indicates bin Laden could have been caught much earlier had those detainees been interrogated properly. “I think that without a doubt, torture and enhanced interrogation techniques slowed down the hunt for bin Laden,” said an Air Force interrogator who goes by the pseudonym Matthew Alexander and located Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, in 2006. It now appears likely that several detainees had information about a key al Qaeda courier — information that might have led authorities directly to bin Laden years ago. But subjected to physical and psychological brutality, “they gave us the bare minimum amount of information they could get away with to get the pain to stop, or to mislead us,” Alexander told The Huffington Post. “We know that they didn’t give us everything, because they didn’t provide the real name, or the location, or somebody else who would know that information,” he said.*** “Had we handled some of these sources from the beginning, I would like to think that there’s a good chance that we would have gotten this information or other information,” said Steven Kleinman, a longtime military intelligence officer who has extensively researched, practiced and taught interrogation techniques. “By making a detainee less likely to provide information, and making the information he does provide harder to evaluate, they hindered what we needed to accomplish,” said Glenn L. Carle, a retired CIA officer who oversaw the interrogation of a high-level detainee in 2002.*** For Alexander, Kleinman and others, the key takeaway is not just that the torture didn’t work, but that it was actually counterproductive. “The question is: What else did KSM have?” Alexander asked. And he’s pretty sure he knows the answer: KSM knew the courier’s real name, “or he knew who else knew his real name, or he knew how to find him — and he didn’t give any of that information,” Alexander said. Alexander’s book, “Kill or Capture,” chronicles how the non-coercive interrogation of a dedicated al Qaeda member led to Zarqawi’s capture. “I’m 100 percent confident that a good interrogator would have gotten additional leads” from KSM, Alexander said.*** This new scenario hardly supports a defense of torture on the grounds that it’s appropriate in “ticking time bomb” scenarios, Alexander said. “Show me an interrogator who says that eight years

is a good result.”

The ACLU [noted](#):

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s torture proves McCain’s point. Proponents claim his torture led to the identity of Osama bin Laden’s courier.... The contention is astonishing because the [apparent proof](#) that torture worked is that Mohammed “repeatedly misled [his] interrogators about the courier’s identity,” and that these liessomehow showed that Mohammed was protecting important information. This false logic is as disturbing as it is dangerous, and it exemplifies the self-fulfilling nature of the torturer’s claims.

[In reality](#):

Cheney and Rumsfeld were [never very interested in capturing Bin Laden](#). Their focus was elsewhere. So their revisionist statements about the usefulness of torture for intelligence purposes must be taken with a grain of salt. In reality, their torture program was [crafted to justify the Iraq war](#), not to catch Bin Laden.

The West [could easily have killed Bin Laden in 2001](#). (But he was [too useful a prop](#) in the [phony war on terror](#).) In any event, the question isn’t whether someone is [too “emotional” to discuss torture objectively](#). It is [universally known by top interrogation experts](#) that torture *interferes* with the ability to extract actionable intelligence from the detainee and *decreases* national security. It is the pro-torture crowd who tries to whip up irrational fears in order to justify their counter-productive actions. The real questions are (1) whether we [we’re still human enough to be outraged](#) and (2) [whether we’re going to stand up for American values and the rule of law ... or let war criminals get away with murder](#).

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