

Torture: CIA “Enhanced Interrogations” Have a Long History

By [Joseph Fitsanakis](#)

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The public controversy surrounding the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s summary-report on detentions and interrogations continues to feed media headlines. But, as veteran intelligence correspondent Jeff Stein [notes](#) in his *Newsweek* [column](#), there is one crucial aspect missing from the debate: historical precedent. Stein observes what many commentators have missed, namely a reference in the 500-page document to KUBARK. KUBARK is in fact a coded reference used by the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s and 1960s to refer to itself.

The *KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation* manual was produced by the Agency to train civilian and military intelligence officers in what the CIA called “coercive counterintelligence interrogation of resistant sources”. The document actively promoted the use of aggressive interrogation techniques and went so far as to make references to the use of electric shocks. The manual is believed to have been used by the CIA on several occasions, including in the interrogation of Yuri Nosenko.

A colonel in the Soviet KGB, Nosenko first made contact with the CIA in Vienna in 1962, while he was accompanying a Soviet diplomatic mission to the Austrian capital. In 1964, he asked to be exfiltrated to the United States, at which point he was placed in a ‘grinder’, a CIA safe house, where he was interrogated at length. After failing two polygraph tests administered to him by his CIA handlers, some in the Agency began to believe that he might be a ‘dangle’, a double agent sent deliberately by the Soviets to spread confusion in the CIA’s Soviet desk. He was aggressively interrogated and detained until 1969, when the CIA formally classified him as a genuine defector and released him under the witness protection program.

An updated version of the KUBARK manual resurfaced during the war in Vietnam, when the CIA operated an extensive complex of interrogation centers in South Vietnam. As Stein notes, the detention centers were “chiefly designed to extract information from captured communist guerrillas”. The Agency blamed several known instances of torture of prisoners of war on the US Army or on overzealous South Vietnamese interrogators. In the closing stages of the Cold War, the CIA was also implicated in having authored the *Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual*, which was used to train interrogators in a host of US-supported Latin American military regimes, including most controversially Honduras.

One could go back even further, to Project MKNAOMI/MKULTRA, a joint effort by the CIA and the US military to study the effects of substances such as heroin and LSD on the human brain, for the purposes of —among other things— interrogation. The program was marred by

repeated instances of forced medication of prisoners, mental patients, prostitutes, and others. It resulted in the 1953 death of [Dr. Frank Olson](#), a specialist in biological warfare working for the US Pentagon, who studied the effects of toxic substances on the brain. All that is to say that the public discussion on torture techniques and the CIA has long historical roots and appears to be going in circles —something which does not appear about to change.

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