

**EXCERPTS FROM "AT THE CENTER OF THE STORM - My Years at the CIA"
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Abu Zubaydah's capture altered that equation. Now that we had an undoubted resource in our hands—the highest-ranking al-Qa'ida official captured to date—we opened discussions within the National Security Council as to how to handle him, since holding and interrogating large numbers of al-Qa'ida operatives had never been part of our plan. But Zubaydah and a small number of other extremely highly placed terrorists potentially had information that might save thousands of lives. We wondered what we could legitimately do to get that information. Despite what Hollywood might have you believe, in situations like this you don't call in the tough guys; you call in the lawyers. It took until August to get clear guidance on what Agency officers could legally do.

Without such legal determinations from the Department of Justice, our officers would have been at risk for future second guessing. We knew that, like almost everything else in Washington, the program would eventually be leaked and our Agency and its people would be inaccurately portrayed in the worst possible light. Out of those conversations came a decision that CIA would hold and interrogate a small number of HVDs.

CIA officers came up with a series of interrogation techniques that would be carefully monitored at all times to ensure the safety of the prisoner. The administration and the Department of Justice were fully briefed and approved the use of these tactics. After we received written Department of Justice guidance on the interrogation issue, we briefed the chairmen and ranking members of our oversight committees. While they were not asked to formally approve the program, as it was conducted under the president's unilateral authorities, I can recall no objections being raised.

The most aggressive interrogation techniques conducted by CIA personnel were applied to only a handful of the worst terrorists on the planet, including people who had planned the 9/11 attacks and who, among other things, were responsible for journalist Daniel Pearl's death.

The interrogation of these few individuals was conducted in a precisely monitored, measured way intended to try to prevent what we believed to be an imminent follow-on attack. Information from these interrogations helped disrupt plots aimed at locations in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia.

The president confirmed the existence of the interrogation program on September 6, 2006, when he announced that fourteen HVDs who had been held under CIA control would be transferred to Guantánamo Bay.

Like many of the al-Qa'ida detainees, Abu Zubaydah originally thought that he could outsmart his questioners. He would offer up bits and pieces of information that he

thought would give the impression of his providing useful material, without really compromising operational security.

But Abu Zubaydah ultimately provided a motherlode of information, and not just from his interrogation. We were able to exploit data found on his cell phone, computer, and documents in his possession that greatly added to our understanding of his contacts and involvement in terrorism plotting.

Interrogating Abu Zubaydah led us to Ramzi bin al-Shibh. A Yemeni by birth, Bin al-Shibh had studied in Germany with three of the eventual 9/11 hijackers. He had intended to be one of them and was deterred only after four attempts to obtain a U.S. visa failed. Instead, he served as the primary communication link between the hijackers and al-Qa'ida central, meeting with the plot's ringleader, Mohammed Atta, in Germany and Spain, and staying in touch with the terrorists via phone and e-mail. With Zubaydah's unintentional help, Bin al-Shibh was captured by Pakistani authorities on the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, after a gun battle in Karachi.

But no success story lasts long in Washington before someone tries to minimize it. A published report in 2006 contended that Abu Zubaydah was mentally unstable and that the administration had overstated his importance. Baloney. Abu Zubaydah had been at the crossroads of many al-Qa'ida operations and was in position to—and did—share critical information with his interrogators. Apparently, the source of the rumor that Abu Zubaydah was unbalanced was his personal diary, in which he adopted various personas. From that shaky perch, some junior Freudians leapt to the conclusion that Zubaydah had multiple personalities. In fact, Agency psychiatrists eventually determined that in his diary he was using a sophisticated literary device to express himself. And, boy, did he express himself.

Abu Zubaydah's diary was hundreds of pages long. Agency linguists translated enough of it to determine there was nothing of operational use in it, yet some Pentagon officials, including Paul Wolfowitz, seemed fascinated with the subject and kept bugging us to translate the whole document. We kept resisting. One day Wolfowitz hounded his CIA briefer. "Why wouldn't we devote the resources to convert the book to English?" he demanded. "We know enough about the diary," the briefer explained, "to know that it simply contains a young man's thoughts about life—and especially about what he wanted to do with women." "Well, what have you learned from that?" Wolfowitz asked. Without missing a beat, the briefer responded, "That men are pigs!" Wolfowitz's military assistant laughed so hard he fell off his chair.

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In interrogation, KSM told us that Majid Khan had recently provided fifty thousand dollars to operatives working for a major al-Qa'ida figure in Southeast Asia known as "Hambali." When confronted with this allegation, Khan confirmed it and said he gave the money to someone named Zubair, and he provided the man's phone number. Before long, Zubair was

in custody and provided fragmentary information that led us to capture another senior Hambali associate named Bashir bin Lap, aka “Lilie.” That person provided information that led to the capture of Hambali, in Thailand.

The importance of Hambali’s capture cannot be overestimated. He was the leader of the Jemaah Islamiya, a Sunni extremist organization that has established an operational infrastructure in Southeast Asia. Hambali swore allegiance to Bin Ladin in the late 1990s, offering him a critical operational advantage: a non-Arab face to attack the United States and our allies. While moderate Islam thrives in Southeast Asia, its geographic expanse offers the opportunity to create dispersed sanctuaries throughout the continent. What Hambali’s arrest demonstrated is that our campaign was targeted not just against al-Qa’ida but also against Sunni extremism around the world. What we are fighting today is bigger than the al-Qa’ida central management structure and more diverse than Arab males between the ages of eighteen and forty. What we have to contend with has an Arab, Asian, European, African, and perhaps even a homegrown American face.

After Hambali was arrested, we went back to KSM and asked him to speculate on who might fill Hambali’s shoes. KSM suggested that the likely candidate would be Hambali’s brother, Rusman “Gun Gun” Gunawan. So we went back to Hambali, and while being debriefed, he inadvertently provided information that led to the detention of his brother, in Karachi, in September 2003.

In custody, “Gun Gun” identified a cell of Jemaah Islamiya members hidden in Karachi that his brother planned to use for future al-Qa’ida operations. Hambali confirmed that the non-Arab men were being groomed for future attacks in the United States, at the behest of KSM, and were probably intended to conduct a future airborne attack on America’s West Coast.

I believe none of these successes would have happened if we had had to treat KSM like a white-collar criminal—read him his Miranda rights and get him a lawyer who surely would have insisted that his client simply shut up. In his initial interrogation by CIA officers, KSM was defiant. “I’ll talk to you guys,” he said, “after I get to New York and see my lawyer.” Apparently he thought he would be immediately shipped to the United States and indicted in the Southern District of New York. Had that happened, I am confident that we would have obtained none of the information he had in his head about imminent threats against the American people.

From our interrogation of KSM and other senior al-Qa’ida members, and our examination of documents found on them, we learned many things—not just tactical information leading to the next capture. For example, more than twenty plots had been put in motion by al-Qa’ida against U.S. infrastructure targets, including communications nodes, nuclear power plants, dams, bridges, and tunnels. All these plots were in various stages of planning when we captured or killed the pre-9/11 al-Qa’ida leaders behind them.

In my view, it wasn’t one single thing that hindered major follow-on attack, but rather a combination of three things. We were successful with information gained from NSA’s terrorist surveillance program, CIA’s interrogation of a handful of high value detainees, and leads provided by another highly classified program that tracked terrorist financial transactions. Each of these programs informed and enabled the others. And each

was carefully monitored to ensure that it was appropriately conducted.

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As for the treatment of detainees, the senior leadership at CIA understood clearly that the capture, detention, and interrogation of senior al-Qa'ida members was new ground—morally and legally. We understood the tension between protecting Americans and how we might be perceived years after the trauma of 9/11 had faded from the nation's memory. History had taught us that decisions made to protect the public from another more devastating al-Qa'ida attack might be viewed later as our sanctioning torture or abuse, thus jeopardizing the CIA and public trust in it. None of this was taken lightly. The risks were understood. By speaking out about the use of certain interrogation techniques, Senator John McCain engaged the country in an important moral debate about who we are as a people and what we should stand for, even when up against an enemy so full of hate they would murder thousands of our children without a thought. We at CIA engaged in such a debate from the beginning, struggling to determine what was required to protect a just society at so much risk. But from where we sat, in the late summer of 2003, preventing the death of American citizens was paramount. It is easy to second-guess us today, but difficult to understand the intensity of our concerns when we made certain decisions and the urgency we felt to protect the country.

Leaders of our country must find a way to build a broad political consensus on the lengths American citizens will expect intelligence, law enforcement, and military personnel to go to protect the United States. To find such consensus, there must be a sound foundation of consultation and understanding. After 9/11, gripped by the same emotion and fears, Congress exhorted the intelligence community to take more risks to protect the country. But if the elected representatives of the American people do not want an NSA surveillance program, no matter how rigorous the oversight, then the program should be shut down. If they believe that certain actions taken during an interrogation process put us in a difficult place morally—even if we believe those actions to be disciplined and focused, in compliance with the law, and invaluable for saving American and foreign lives—then we should not employ those actions. Our role as intelligence professionals is to inform policy makers of both the hazards and the value of such programs. We should say what we think but the final decision belongs to the political leadership of the country. It is they who must engage the American people.

In all these programs, we believed we were doing what was right for the country; we calibrated the risks and discussed the tensions. But the debate must be broadened, the guidance made clear, and the consequences of either taking or not taking an action clearly understood.

But I ask that we all remember those decisions when the next terrorist attack occurs. We must understand collectively that if we decide not to empower our intelligence- collection activities, we have to be willing to take the risk and pay the price. If we do not have that debate now, the pendulum will swing much more dramatically after the next major attack.