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# says report. Does torture work?

A new report detailing how the APA helped authorize 'enhanced interrogations' has prompted renewed questions about torture's effectiveness in intelligence-gathering.

By Sanya Mansoor, Staff Writer | JULY 11, 2015



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A 542-page report released today found that the American Psychological Association collaborated with the Department of Defense by establishing an ethics policy that enabled torture.

APA officials "had strong reasons to suspect abusive interrogations occurred,"

says [the report](#), but they "intentionally and strategically avoided taking steps to learn information to confirm those suspicions ... effectively hiding its head in the sand."

The report also noted that APA Board member Diane Halpern urged that "we add data showing that torture is ineffective in obtaining good information," but her recommendation was ignored.

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The psychological association adopted new, DOD-friendly ethical guidelines as official policy in June 2005, only a week after the Presidential Task Force on Ethics and National Security published them, according to the [seven-month investigation](#) by law firm Sidley Austin, produced at the request of the APA board.

APA was determined to "curry good favor" with the Defense Department, say investigators, and was influenced by personal relationships between staff, which resulted in a conflict of interest.

The US Justice Department wrote memos to the CIA in 2002 that narrowly defined physical torture as acts resulting in pain equivalent to organ failure or death, and said that psychological harm only reached the level of torture if effects lasted "for months or even years."



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In addition, they said that interrogation – no matter the abuse suffered – could not be considered torture if the interrogator could show they "did not intend to cause severe mental pain."

These added up to essentially blanket authorization.

As Stephen Soldz, co-founder of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology and vocal critic of the American government's use of psychological torture in the War on Terror, [told VICE](#):

The myth was, you'll have these health professionals to be there to tell you if things are safe or not, but what they really did was get health professionals to say that [the tactics] wouldn't cause "severe, long lasting harm," which is how the torture memos defined torture. Then if it did cause severe, long lasting harm, [the CIA] could say, "We didn't intend to do that" because a health professional had told them it wouldn't. So it wasn't about protecting [detainees], it was about legal protection for the torturer. It was a get-out-of-jail free card.

Soldz contrasted these techniques with how intelligence officers in World War II got Nazi generals to talk: "by playing chess and building a relationship during which they spoke freely and let things slip."

More recently, a former US army interrogator told Public Radio International he made an Iraqi insurgent recant false information and deliver accurate intel after they connected over a [shared love of the TV show "24."](#)



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Building rapport is both effective and commonly used by intelligence gathering organizations around the world, according to a 2014 study.

After interviews with 34 interrogators from Australia, Indonesia, and Norway who had handled 30 international terrorism suspects, Jane Goodman-Delahunty, a psychologist and lawyer with Charles Stuart University, found that [confessions are four times more likely](#) when interrogators adopt a respectful stance toward detainees and build rapport, instead of torturing.

In addition, disclosure would be 14 times more likely to occur early in an interrogation, it noted.

Dr. Goodman-Delahunty acknowledged that interrogators were still more likely to use hardball strategies with high-value detainees – possibly because their crimes were considered too heinous for "buddy-buddy interviewing," reports [the Atlantic](#).

Other academic studies have questioned the efficacy of torture.

Research by Metsin Basoglu, former head of trauma studies at King's College London, divided torture into four components: the perpetrator's intent, the perpetrator's purpose, the selection of stressors to cause pain, and an enhancement of the victim's lack of control.

Psychology Today reported on his study and suggested "torture is best at breaking the innocent and uninvolved civilians caught in the system by mistake – and may fail to work against its real targets. It's also counterproductively good at radicalizing victims, thereby storing up future problems for the torturing regime."

Interrogation techniques can also succeed or fail depending on the detainees' motivations, says Arie W. Kruglanski, founding member of the National Center for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism.

Interrogators should not assume "humans are driven by the pursuit of pleasure and eschewal of pain," he wrote in [National Interest](#), "because recent research suggests alternative motives – the quest for truth, for personal significance, for control, autonomy and relatedness – can often trump hedonic pleasure and pain concerns."

Mr. Kruglanski also pointed out that repeated stress and the deprivation of control may damage cognitive abilities, even as far as creating false memories.

Academic research may propose alternatives, but enhanced interrogation's effectiveness is "[unknowable](#)," according to CIA Director John Brennan.

The CIA maintains that its interrogations have produced "[valuable and unique intelligence](#) that helped thwart attack plans, capture terrorists, and save lives."

Director Brennan defended the use of such methods despite the damning 2014 Senate Intelligence Committee report, which documented instances of [wrongful detainment and brutal torture methods](#), including rectal feeding and being hosed down with cold water while naked. ■