

Actionable Intelligence to Achieve Mission Success
Through Alternative Methods of Interrogation

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Abstract -

With the struggle in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the ongoing threat of terrorism throughout the world, it is important to continually strive to gain timely, actionable intelligence. We must continue to defend the interests of our nation and protect the people that defend it. One method of gaining actionable intelligence is through interrogations of those captured conducting terrorist acts or facilitating those who do. It is through these interrogations that we gain the information necessary to make intelligence actionable. In a lot of cases, when information is time sensitive, alternative interrogation techniques must be utilized to stop an impending attack, capture a high level terrorist operative, or disrupt a terrorist network to impede future attacks. This paper will focus on the potential uses of alternative interrogation techniques to obtain usable and reliable information to meet the intelligence requirements of any command.

Interrogations have been used for centuries to extract actionable intelligence against a known or perceived threat to a government and its people. For many, the word interrogation goes hand in hand with the word torture. Not too long ago, torture was used as an acceptable interrogation method. Alternative interrogation methods are controversial, but at times have been deemed necessary in order to gain the information required to prevent an impending attack against United States interests and the forces that protect them.

Throughout history, torture has been used to justify human interests. Torture started because people thought legal codes should be tougher. Reasons for this were simple, people thought that criminals, traitors, or just “wrong-doers” should be tortured instead of killed because they will die sometime anyway so they didn’t consider it much of a punishment. As time went on and civilizations grew, the need for a code of laws came. Public displays such as stoning or crucifixion were used mainly to discourage other criminals from committing crimes. It was only in the 1700s and early 1800s that the use of torture for prosecution was banned throughout the civilized world. Within the last few centuries, countries began to use torture to extract information from individuals captured on the battlefield, and used that information against their enemies.

During the 20th century, many governments and intelligence agencies began to experiment with many unusual techniques in order to gain information from individuals through alternative methods. Starting around the 1950s, interrogation teams from several intelligence agencies began to experiment on prisoners of war using psychoactive drugs, psychiatric procedures, hypnosis, and even electric shock therapy. In the mid to late 1950s, -

experiments using “black techniques,” as the agency called them, were conducted in prisons, hospitals, and other field-testing sites. These experiments and practices lasted for decades through most of the cold war. It wasn’t until 1977, post-Watergate crisis, that Congress stepped in and began to investigate these techniques.

These days, it’s highly frowned upon to use techniques such as torture, or even make the slightest hint of it, and for good reason. There are many reasons why the United States cannot conduct torture. One of which is the strong moral argument against torture. The United States, the world’s beacon of democratic freedom, cannot be seen as a nation which endorses such barbaric methods as torture. Torture is reserved for those countries that are considered, by most nations, to be ruled by anarchy or possibly by a government that sponsors terrorism. President Bush singled out some of those governments in his 2002 State of the Union Address when he talked about the “axis of evil”. Torture should never be mentioned as a viable means of interrogation. The United States will lose all creditability with the free world in regards to morality and ethics. The lasting damage from the Abu Ghuraib incident highlights the damage that a perceived incident of torture can cause.

There are other means for obtaining information from detained individuals besides just asking simple questions or pulling finger nails out. One of these methods is a coercive interrogation. A coercive interrogation is a method that could be either a physical or mental mind game. Stress positions, sleep deprivation, and humiliation are all considered torture by some means but none of which leave long term effects. Police tactics like making the individual believe he is doomed to the electric chair, or family members have now been detained and -

harassed due to their actions are methods that also leave no scars but can be used to extract valuable information. These tactics can be used separately or together and can be used to make more of an impact to extract information in a timely manner. Information for an impending attack cannot be extracted from an individual that doesn't care about life by yelling at him to "answer the question". There must be consequences for not answering questions that are critical for national protection as well as force protection.

Now understand, not anyone can apply these techniques. They must be trained interrogators with a higher level skill set than the average school house trained interrogator. There will also have to be checks and balances. Someone's sole job would be to over watch the procedure to monitor the situation and health of the detainee, similar to a doctor's job of monitoring the execution of an inmate on death row. This person's sole job would be to monitor the interrogation so things don't get out of control, similar to the Abu Ghuraib situation in Iraq. The coercive interrogation techniques above would still be able to be applied, but only by someone trained to do that very thing and monitored by a separate individual to keep the interrogation from getting out of control.

Commanders should also be prepared to corroborate information coming from these interrogations with other information they may have or are prepared to gather by other intelligence means. The information can be corroborated by other sources, detainee reporting, or other IMINT or SIGINT intelligence means. When a detainee is put in a position that he no longer wants to be in, there is always a chance he will tell the interrogator what he thinks he wants to hear. If this information is not vetted, the information is not actionable and only -

wastes precious time. Information coming out of a detainee's booth during an interrogation should only be corroborating information already gathered by other sources or should only point the intelligence gatherers in the right direction. A single source, un-vetted intelligence report from a detainee may result in wasted time or a dangerous situation.

Using the nuke-in-Manhattan scenario, a terrorist plants a nuclear bomb in the middle of New York City. The government only has a limited time to extract the information from the terrorist they've captured. This terrorist knows where the bomb is but is not talking. What do you do? Ok, that may be extreme, but possible. So let's look at it in a military scenario. A vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) manufacturer was captured twelve hours before ten explosions are reported to be detonated throughout some far off city you were sent to protect, and he's not talking. What do you do now? Using these coercive interrogation techniques a commander may be afforded the opportunity to extract timely, actionable intelligence that could possibly save hundreds or even thousands of lives. With the checks and balances mentioned before, the interrogation can be done without harm to the detainee as well as protecting the U.S. government from legal scrutiny.

From the time you get a detained individual, to the time his information is useless depends on the importance of what he knows. If the information you need from the individual will save lives, the information may have to be exploited immediately. If information from the individual is about the whereabouts of his cell members, you may have a little more time depending on the response of his cell members to his capture. Actionable intelligence has a shelf life. The individual, and the type of information he has, will determine how long the -

intelligence is actionable. Under a normal interrogation, if the detained individual gives you little crumbs of information, then most likely the information is dated and is no longer actionable, and he knows it. Using coercive interrogation methods, an interrogator has the advantage to exploit information from the detainee in a timely manner.

Many people would argue against the use of coercive interrogations. The United States cannot afford another torture scandal. Abu Ghuraib is the perfect example of how the US cannot be seen in the eyes of the rest of the world. Torture is one of those subjects reserved for countries that are ruled by anarchy. The United States government cannot be seen as a country with double standards who willingly allows such atrocities to occur. We as a nation are trying to fight an ongoing war against terrorism, and if the US is seen as committing the same crimes against humanity as the terrorist we are hunting, we will lose all of the support that we may have had in this fight. We also can't afford to put our uniformed men and women overseas at risk of being captured and put through torturous episodes because their captives perceive that the United States military conducts and condones torture. With the perceived notion that the United States condones the use of torture during interrogations, we are putting all our soldiers and government officials at risk. Perception is reality.

Given a continuing terrorist threat, the United States must obtain information through interrogations for military commanders and government officials to make timely decisions. It is through these interrogations that usable and reliable information is extracted and transferred into actionable intelligence to achieve mission success. At times, to achieve mission success in order to prevent harm to innocents, alternative coercive interrogation methods may be

necessary to extract actionable information. There are methods that can be utilized to exploit information from detainees that can be extremely effective while not putting the individual at risk of death or bodily harm. These methods can also be utilized without scrutiny by our own government, or the governments of others by using the checks and balances mentioned before. The military depends on timely, actionable intelligence from detained individuals to prevent and disrupt ongoing terrorist activities.

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