

9/11 TEN YEARS LATER: How Barack Obama Has Made Us Less Safe



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9/11 Ten Years Later

President Barack Obama has rightly called the killing of Osama bin Laden “the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s effort to defeat al-Qaeda.” The operation not only delivered justice to the man responsible for the worst attack on the American homeland in our nation’s history, it allowed the U.S. to recover a treasure trove of intelligence from bin Laden’s compound – millions of pages of captured enemy documents that will give the CIA unprecedented insight into al-Qaeda’s operations and plans for new attacks.

In normal times, the officials who uncovered the intelligence that led us to Osama bin Laden would get a medal. In the Obama administration, they were given subpoenas.

On his second day in office, Obama shut down the CIA’s high-value interrogation program. His Justice Department then reopened criminal investigations into the conduct of CIA interrogators —

inquiries that had been closed years before by career prosecutors who concluded that there were no crimes to prosecute. In a speech at the National Archives, Obama eviscerated the men and women of the CIA who ran the program, accusing them of “torture” and declaring that their work “did not advance our war and counterterrorism efforts — they undermined them.”

Now, it turns out that the very CIA interrogators whose lives Obama turned upside down are responsible for the greatest achievement of his presidency.

It is time for a public apology.

U.S officials have acknowledged that the key piece of intelligence that led the CIA to bin Laden — information on the al-Qaeda leader’s principal courier — came from detainees in CIA custody. In response to a direct question about the role of enhanced interrogation in the bin Laden operation, CIA Director Leon Panetta confirmed that, “Obviously there was, there was some valuable intelligence that was derived through those kind of interrogations.” His immediate predecessor, former CIA Director Mike Hayden, went further, de-

claring: “let the record show that when I was first briefed in 2007 about the brightening prospect of pursuing bin Laden through his courier network, a crucial component of the briefing was information provided by three CIA detainees, all of whom had been subjected to some form of enhanced interrogation.” Hayden compares those who deny the critical role CIA interrogations played in the bin Laden operation to “9/11 ‘truthers’ who, lacking any evidence whatsoever, claim that 9/11 was a Bush administration plot.”

This program did much more than lead us to Osama bin Laden’s lair – it played a critical role in virtually every counterterrorism success since the war on terror began. As Hayden explains, “It is nearly impossible for me to imagine any operation like the May 2 assault on bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that would not have made substantial use of the trove of information derived from CIA detainees, including those on whom enhanced techniques had been used.”

To understand the importance of CIA interrogations, think back to September 11, 2001 – to the smoldering rubble at ground zero, the Pentagon with a hole in its side, the shock we all felt

at the ability of terrorists to penetrate our defenses and wreak such destruction in our midst. All of us wondered: Who had attacked us? What did they want? And what else were they planning?

If someone had predicted back then that we would reach the year 2011 without another successful catastrophic terrorist attack on the American homeland, no one would have believed it. We all thought, inside and outside government, that the attacks of 9/11 were the first of many.

I was in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, working on a speech for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. I was blessed not to be at the point of impact. But I remember feeling the walls of my office shudder, and the smell of the smoke that filled the hallways. One memory stands out: to my surprise, no evacuation alarm ever sounded. All of us simply filed out onto the lawn outside, where we looked back at the broken and burning building.

In the months that followed, the evacuation alarms in the Pentagon went off on numerous occasions, as false reports came in that other planes were headed our way. Each time, we exited and stood on the lawn looking up at the sky waiting for

the next attack. That attack never came. There are only two possibilities to explain why: the terrorists lost interest in attacking America, or we uncovered their plans and stopped them. Which was it? The answer is self-evident.

In those early days after 9/11, we knew very little about the enemy that hit us. We knew that al-Qaeda was behind the attacks. But we did not know that Khalid Skeikh Mohammed (KSM) was the operational commander of al-Qaeda or the mastermind of 9/11. We did not know who his key accomplices were. And we did not know what follow-on attacks al-Qaeda had planned.

Unbeknownst to us, there were in fact two terror networks at large planning a “second wave” of attacks on the homeland. The first was the KSM network that had carried out 9/11. The second was the Hambali network – Southeast Asian terrorists recruited by KSM because he believed that the United States would be on the lookout for Arab men.

Both of these networks had set terrorist plots in motion. These included: a plot to blow up high-rise apartment buildings in the United States us-

ing natural gas; a plot to replicate 9/11 in Europe by flying hijacked airplanes into Heathrow airport and buildings in downtown London; a plot to replicate the East Africa embassy bombings in Pakistan by blowing up the U.S. consulate and Western residences in Karachi; a plot to blow up the U.S. Marine camp in Djibouti; use of anthrax developed by an al-Qaeda cell for attacks inside the United States; and a plot to carry out a second wave here in America by flying a plane into the Library Tower in Los Angeles.

The United States government did not know any of this. We were completely blind to the coming danger.

Then, beginning in 2002, we began to capture and interrogate senior terrorist leaders. The first to be taken into custody was Abu Zubaydah, a top aide to Osama bin Laden who served as al-Qaeda's terrorist travel facilitator.

The CIA had been interested in Zubaydah for some time. According to former CIA Director George Tenet, in June 2001, British authorities shared intelligence that Zubaydah was planning suicide car bomb attacks on American military tar-

gets in Saudi Arabia. Zubaydah had spent years screening al-Qaeda recruits, training them, and deploying them on missions across the world—including the would-be millennium bomber Ahmad Ressam, who was captured while entering the country in 1999 on a mission to blow up Los Angeles International Airport. Zubaydah had also been the Emir of the Khalden and Deronta training camps in Afghanistan, and had travelled to Saudi Arabia in 1996 to visit bin Laden and deliver \$600,000 to the al-Qaeda leader. According to Zubaydah's official U.S. government biography, "Bin Ladin recruited him to be one of al-Qa'ida's senior travel facilitators following Zubaydah's success in 1996 at securing safe passage of al-Qa'ida senior members returning from Sudan to Afghanistan. In November 2001, Abu Zubaydah helped smuggle now deceased al-Qa'ida in Iraq leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and some 70 Arab fighters out of Kandahar, Afghanistan, into Iran."

When taken into custody, Zubaydah was in intense pain from life-threatening injuries he suffered during his capture. The CIA flew in a specialist from Johns Hopkins University who saved Zubaydah's life. The agency then put off his questioning for several weeks while he recovered. During this

time, Zubaydah was questioned by the FBI, and gave up some nominal information that he thought we already knew, in order to give the impression he was cooperating. Some of this nominal information turned out to be extremely important. For example, Zubaydah identified Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, and revealed that his code name was “Muktar” – information that later helped us capture KSM.

After this revelation, Zubaydah continued to recover, growing stronger and also more resistant. So the CIA took over Zubaydah’s interrogation and began to apply the first, limited enhanced interrogation techniques. It was under these circumstances that Zubaydah provided additional information about an al-Qaeda terrorist named Abdullah al-Muhajir, whom he identified as an American with a Latino name. This terrorist was subsequently identified as Jose Padilla and captured as he arrived in Chicago thanks to information provided by Zubaydah. When Padilla was taken into custody, he was on a mission from KSM to blow up high-rise buildings in the United States using natural gas.

After providing this information about Padilla, Zubaydah stopped talking, and began resisting in-

terrogation. CIA officials faced a dilemma: since his capture, Zubaydah had provided them with the critical link that had identified KSM as “Muktar” and the mastermind of 9/11, as well as information that led to the capture of Padilla and the disruption of a planned attack on the American homeland. The CIA knew he had more information that could save lives. But now he had stopped talking—and was demonstrating his contempt for America.

So the CIA developed additional enhanced interrogation techniques to get him talking again, including waterboarding. The techniques worked. After waterboarding was employed, Zubaydah’s intelligence production became what one senior CIA official described to me as “a bonanza.” Zubaydah began to provide information on key al-Qaeda operatives, including information that helped the CIA find and capture more of those responsible for the 9/11 attacks.

Zubaydah’s questioning after the application of enhanced interrogation techniques led directly to the capture of Ramzi bin al-Shibh. Bin al-Shibh was a big catch. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, he was the primary communications intermediary between the 9/11

hijackers in the United States and the al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan—relaying orders from al-Qaeda senior operatives to the lead hijacker, Mohammed Atta, via email and phone.

When he was taken into custody, bin al-Shibh was at the end stages of planning a KSM-conceived attack that the CIA knew nothing about: a plot to replicate 9/11 on the other side of the Atlantic by hijacking multiple passenger planes and crashing them into Heathrow airport and the Canary Wharf business district in London. Indeed, the CIA did not learn the details of this planned attack until six months later when KSM and other terrorists involved in the plot finally revealed the information. It turned out that bin al-Shibh had been tasked by KSM to recruit operatives in Saudi Arabia for the Heathrow attack, and according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “as of his capture, Bin al-Shibh had identified four operatives for the operation.” Unbeknownst to the agency, his arrest set back plans for the plot and saved the lives of countless people at Heathrow airport and downtown London.

Zubaydah and bin al-Shibh (who reportedly talked without the application of enhanced inter-

rogation techniques) provided information that helped CIA officials plan and execute the operation that led the capture of KSM. After the application of enhanced interrogation techniques, KSM provided the CIA with critical information that led to the disruption of the “Second Wave,” a plot that KSM had hatched in late 2001 with a terrorist named Hambali, a leader of al-Qaeda’s Southeast Asian affiliate Jemaaah Islamiyah, or “JI.” The plan was to hijack an airplane and fly it into the tallest building on the West Coast. KSM later indentified the target as the Library Tower in Los Angeles. This plot was intended to complete KSM’s original vision for the 9/11 attacks, which was to hijack ten airliners and use them to simultaneously attack targets on both coasts of the United States. Osama bin Laden scaled the attack back, thinking the plan too ambitious to carry out all at once. KSM provided information that led to the capture of Hambali, the key members of his network, and a 14 member terrorist cell – known as the Ghuraba cell – that included trained pilots and was hiding out in Karachi, Pakistan, awaiting orders from Hambali for the West Coast attack.

KSM also provided information that led to the capture of his nephew and right-hand man, Ammar

al-Baluchi, on April 29, 2003. At the time of his capture, Ammar was in the final stages of preparations for an attack intended to replicate al Qaeda's bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—this time blowing up the U.S. Consulate and Western residences in Karachi. The plan was to use a motorcycle bomb to breach the gate, followed by a truck bomb. The truck bomb would ram through the remnants of the gate and then be detonated in the embassy compound. According to the evidence presented at his combatant status hearing at Guantanamo Bay, Ammar was captured as he awaited delivery of the explosives to be used in the Consulate attack. And according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Ammar “was within days of completing preparations for the Karachi plot when he was captured.”

Captured with Ammar was another top al-Qaeda terrorist, Walid bin Attash (a.k.a. Khallad). When both Ammar and Khallad were taken into custody, KSM finally revealed key details of the Heathrow airport plot. This information was then used to confront Khallad. Khallad was one of KSM's top deputies. He had selected and trained operatives in both the bombing of the USS Cole and the 9/11 attacks, and under questioning, he admit-

ted to having been involved in the Heathrow plot. He revealed that he had directed the cell leader to begin locating pilots who could hijack planes and crash them into the London airport, and said that he had considered ten countries as possible launch sites for the attack, but had narrowed the options to a set of locations that remain classified to this day. Using this information from Khallad, CIA officials confronted KSM and got him to flesh out other details about the operation—including an additional target in the United Kingdom that was part of the planned attack.

KSM also provided information that led to the capture of Dhiren Barot (a.k.a. Issa al Hindi), whom he had sent before 9/11 to case targets inside the United States—including the New York Stock Exchange, the World Bank, and the IMF. KSM provided information that helped lead to the arrest of Sayfullah Paracha and his son Uzair Paracha, businessmen whom KSM planned to use to smuggle explosives into the United States. KSM identified Sajid Badat—the second operative, alongside Richard Reid, in his plot to blow up commercial airlines using shoe bombs—leading to Badat’s arrest in November 2003. And KSM provided previously unknown information on Ali Saleh al-Mar-

ri, an operative in U.S. custody whom he had sent to the United States before September 11, 2001, to serve as a sleeper agent ready for follow-on attacks. KSM told us he brought al-Marri to meet Osama bin Laden, where he pledged his loyalty to the al-Qaeda leader and offered himself up as a martyr. Among the potential targets Ali Saleh discussed with KSM were water reservoirs, the New York Stock Exchange, and United States military academies. Following KSM's revelations, al-Marri was taken out of the criminal justice system and classified as an unlawful enemy combatant.

In addition to disrupting these and other specific terrorist plots, CIA detainees helped identify some eighty-six individuals whom al-Qaeda deemed suitable for Western operations—most of whom we had never heard of before. According to the intelligence community, about half of these individuals were subsequently tracked down and taken off the battlefield. Without CIA questioning, many of these terrorists could still be unknown to us and at large—and may well have carried out attacks against the West by now.

One CIA detainee captured in 2004 – a Somali terrorist named Gouled Hassan Dourad (a.k.a. Gu-

leed) – revealed a plot by a senior al-Qaeda leader in East Africa named Abu Talha. The plan was to attack the U.S. Marines at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti using water tankers loaded with explosives. Guleed told the CIA he had been sent by Abu Talha in September and October 2003 to case the Marine camp, and was tasked by the al-Qaeda leader to purchase two rocket-propelled grenades, five AK-47s, and four 9mm pistols. Information from Guleed—including the identities of the operatives associated with the plot—helped thwart this attack on our Marines in Djibouti. Had it been carried out, it could have rivaled the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut that killed nearly 300 service members. The mastermind of this plot, Abu Talha, reportedly met his end in a U.S. airstrike in Somalia in January 2007.

In addition to providing information that led to the capture of his key operatives across the world, KSM effectively became an al-Qaeda “management consultant” —running long seminars on al-Qaeda’s structure and operations—even role playing with CIA officials, explaining how he would act in certain situations they were confronting. According to the CIA, he explained the traits and profiles that al-Qaeda sought in Western operatives

after the 9/11 attacks, how al-Qaeda might conduct surveillance of potential targets, how it might select targets, what probable targets were, and the likely methods of attack.

In other words, KSM and other terrorists in CIA custody provided our first window into the operations of the terrorist network that had just attacked our country. They explained who al-Qaeda's top leaders were, how they interacted, how they made decisions, how they moved money, deployed cells, communicated with their operatives, and planned terrorist attacks.

In addition, CIA detainees helped the agency make sense of large volumes of documents and computer data seized in terrorist raids. For example, a computer seized during the raid that brought KSM to justice contained a list of email addresses for individuals KSM helped deploy abroad for terrorist operations. CIA officials were able to question KSM about these email addresses and take action on them.

The same computer also contained a list of names compiled by a key al-Qaeda financial operative of al-Qaeda members who were to receive

funds. CIA officials were able to question KSM and other detainees to determine who these individuals were and how important they were to al-Qaeda.

KSM and other captured terrorists provided the CIA with an unprecedented insight into the inner workings of al-Qaeda. And they gave the CIA information that allowed them to round up virtually all the key members of the terrorist networks that were still at large following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks – leading them to terrorists they did not know existed, and allowing them to disrupt the planned attacks about which the United States had not been aware.

The bottom line? When KSM was first captured, before enhanced techniques were employed, he was asked about his plans for new attacks. He told his interrogators: “I’ll tell you everything when I get to New York and see my lawyer.” If we had given KSM the lawyer he had requested – if we had told him “you have the right to remain silent” – there would likely be craters in the ground in Los Angeles, London, Karachi, Djibouti, or other cities to match the one at Ground Zero in New York City.



Fast forward to January 2009. President Barack Obama takes office and eliminates the CIA interrogation program that had allowed us to discover, dismantle and disrupt the two terrorist networks that were planning the second wave of al-Qaeda attacks. Obama even goes to CIA headquarters in spring of 2009 and tells the assembled officers that he understands his decision will force the government to protect the American people “with one hand tied behind our backs – and that’s ok.”

As Obama was busy tying one hand behind the CIA’s back, new dangers were rapidly emerging. A mysterious new terror network – al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – began plotting to attack the American homeland. And in December 2009, this network managed to penetrate America’s defenses, get an operative onto civilian planes headed for the United States, and nearly succeed in blowing up Northwest Airlines Flight 253 as it prepared to land in the city of Detroit.

By the Obama administration’s own admission, it was under the impression that AQAP was focused on regional attacks, and was completely unaware that this terrorist network had developed

the capability or intent to attack us here in America. Yet they very nearly blew up a plane over Detroit on Christmas Day.

Why was America caught blind? Because, unlike the period immediately after 9/11, the United States is no longer capturing and interrogating high-value terrorists who could tell us al-Qaeda's plans to attack the homeland. In fact, even when a high-value terrorist fell into our hands – as in the case of the Christmas Day bomber – instead of aggressively interrogating him, the Obama administration gave him a lawyer and told him he has the right to remain silent.

On Christmas Day we avoided disaster by pure luck. The Detroit airline bombing was not a foiled terrorist attack; it was a failed terrorist attack. The bomb malfunctioned.

But that failure has not deterred AQAP from trying again. Less than one year after the attempted attack in Detroit, AQAP penetrated our defenses a second time – this time getting two package bombs aboard planes headed for the United States. The sophisticated bombs were designed to go off just as the planes reached the eastern seaboard of the

United States. As with the Christmas Day attack, we did not foil this plot. The disaster was averted only because of a last minute tip from Saudi intelligence that allowed us to track down the explosives before they went off.

Twice in less than a year AQAP nearly succeeded in killing hundreds of innocent people. What has the Obama administration done about it? To this day, the United States has not captured or killed any of the top AQAP leaders behind these two attempted attacks on the American homeland – including AQAP’s spiritual leader, the radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. In November 2010, *The Washington Post* reported that President Obama had deployed unmanned predator drones to Yemen to go after the leaders of AQAP. But the drones have not been used. Why? According to the *Post*: The United States has ... not fired missiles from the unmanned aircraft because it lacks solid intelligence on the insurgents’ whereabouts, senior U.S. officials said.... Current and former U.S. intelligence officials said the drones’ surveillance prowess is often overstated and will be of limited use in identifying al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen without the aid of signal intercepts or human sources on the ground. “All Land Rovers look pretty much alike,”

said a former high-ranking U.S. intelligence official familiar with operations in Yemen. “You have to have something that tells you this is the one to follow.”

After AQAP nearly succeeded in blowing up a passenger plane over Detroit and two cargo planes over the eastern seaboard, we still have no idea where Awlaki or the other key leaders of this terrorist organization are hiding, where its operatives are training, or what they are planning – so we can’t hit them.

And that is just one al-Qaeda terror network that threatens us.

We face another emerging terrorist network ready to attack – this one based in East Africa. The Somali terrorist group al Shabab recently merged with al-Qaeda, pledged loyalty to Osama bin Laden, and promised to carry out attacks across the world on al Qaeda’s behalf. Last year, al-Shabab released a video showing its fighters chanting “Here we are O’ Osama. We are your soldiers O’ Osama,” while the group’s leader, Abu Zubair, promised bin Laden that “Allah willing, the brigades for Global Jihad will be launched from [Somalia] to deprive

the disbelievers of sleep and destroy their interests around the world.”

Where have they set their sights? One clue: al-Shabab is actively recruiting Americans. In July, 2010, a 20-year-old Northern Virginia man, Zachary Adam Chesser, was convicted of attempting to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabab as a foreign fighter. Before his planned departure, Chesser had been in direct communication with Anwar al-Awlaki, the AQAP cleric behind the attempted Christmas Day bombing over Detroit.

Chesser is not the first American to try to join al-Shabab. In June of 2010, two New Jersey men were similarly arrested at New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport for allegedly planning to fight with the terrorist group. Al-Shabab has also recruited more than 20 American citizens of Somali descent to be suicide bombers. Not only is al-Shabab recruiting American fighters, one of the group’s leaders is an American citizen; Omar Hammami, who grew up in Alabama, has justified the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and affirmed his group’s allegiance to bin Laden.

The fact that al-Qaeda’s new East African af-

filiate is seeking out Americans is an ominous sign. After all, al-Qaeda does not need suicide bombers with U.S. passports if its only objective to conduct terrorist attacks in Africa – it only needs operatives with American passports for an attack against the American homeland.

The Obama administration should be desperate to capture senior terrorist leaders in East Africa so it can interrogate them and learn more about al-Shabab and its plans for new attacks, to avoid a repeat of the Christmas Day debacle – or worse. President Obama had a golden opportunity to do just that – and he passed it up.

In February 2010, the *Washington Post* reported in a front page story that the U.S. had tracked down a senior terrorist leader named Saleh Ali Nabhan. Nabhan was al-Qaeda's leader in East Africa and also a senior leader in al-Shabab. Indeed, he was the man responsible for the merger of the two groups. He was clearly someone with whom U.S. officials ought to be interested in speaking.

When it located Nabhan, the U.S. military gave President Obama three options. First, U.S. Special Operations forces could kill him with an airstrike

while he was driving through southern Somalia. Second, they could kill him by firing from helicopters, and then land to collect DNA to confirm the kill. Third, they could try to take him alive and bring him in for interrogation. The military wanted Nabhan alive. “We wanted to take a prisoner,” a senior military officer told *The Post*. But Obama chose to have him killed. He used the second option – sending a helicopter crew to take him out, then having Special Operations commandos recover his remains. Obama could have taken Nabhan alive, but consciously chose not to do so.

Think of the intelligence that was lost with that decision – the information Nabhan could have shared about al-Qaeda’s networks in East Africa, its relations with bin Laden, its recruitment of American citizens, and its plans to attack the homeland. All of it was vaporized on President Obama’s orders. As a result, *The Post* reported, “the opportunity to interrogate one of the most wanted U.S. terrorism targets was gone forever.”

And why did the president choose to kill, rather than capture, Nabhan? U.S. officials told *The Washington Post* it was in part because of “the memory of the last time a U.S. combat helicopter was on the

ground in lawless Somalia, the 1993 Black Hawk debacle that resulted in the deaths of 18 soldiers.”

If al-Shabab succeeds in carrying out an attack on America, we can trace it back to that fateful choice made in the Oval Office.

In March 2011, news leaked that highest-ranking terrorist to be captured alive since Barack Obama took office had been taken into custody by Pakistani authorities. Umar Patek was a senior commander of al-Qaeda’s Southeast Asian affiliate, Jemaah Islamiyah, and one of the most wanted terrorists in the world. Patek was field coordinator for the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings and the last at-large member of the notorious Hambali network that had collaborated with Khalid Sheik Mohammed on a planned “second wave” of attacks on America after Sept. 11, 2001.

After Hambali and his gang were captured in 2003, Patek fled Indonesia and took refuge in the southern Philippines, where he linked up with Islamic terrorists and ran a terrorist training camp. The United States had offered a \$1 million reward for his capture.

Patek is a potential intelligence gold mine. A former U.S. senior intelligence official told me that he is precisely the kind of high-value terrorist who would have been taken into CIA custody for questioning during the Bush administration. But President Obama has eliminated the CIA's interrogation program and closed the agency's black sites. And as of this writing, the U.S. has not taken Patek into U.S. custody – as we did Patek's bosses, Hambali and KSM, during the Bush administration.

What might Patek tell us? It is significant that he was captured not hiding out in Southeast Asia but in Pakistan. There is only one reason an Indonesian terrorist with a million-dollar bounty on his head would risk traveling halfway across the world to Pakistan: to meet with al-Qaeda leaders. With whom specifically was he to meet? And what was he there to discuss. Here is clue: He was captured in Abbottabad — the same place where bin Laden was hiding.

According to the International Crisis Group, there are credible reports that just before traveling to Pakistan, Patek was in Yemen. If true, what was Patek doing visiting the base of operations for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) just before

going on to meet report to bin Laden in Pakistan? *The Washington Post* reported in March of 2011 that U.S. intelligence officials believe AQAP “may be close to launching a terrorist strike” against the homeland. What might Patek know about the location of AQAP leaders and their plans for new attacks? In addition to his visit to Yemen, the *Associated Press* reports that Patek “was believed to have attended a meeting of Southeast Asian and Mideast militants in the holy city of Mecca” before travelling to Pakistan. With whom precisely did he meet, what did they discuss?

These are vital questions to which the United States may never get answers.

According to multiple press reports, Pakistan has said it will not hand Patek over to the United States, but will send him to Indonesia instead. That would be a disaster for American national security. The only way to fully exploit the intelligence Patek possesses is for U.S. officials to interrogate him directly.

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The fact is that the government cannot protect the homeland unless it is able to interrogate captured terrorists. Why is terrorist interrogation so

essential? The answer is simple. Without it, we cannot obtain an accurate picture of the capability and intent of our enemies.

Unlike the adversaries America has faced in wars past, al-Qaeda does not mass large armies on borders or flotillas on the high seas that can be detected by satellites. There is only one way to find out what the terrorists have planned, and that is to get the information from the terrorists themselves. There are essentially three ways to do this.

The first, and hardest, is to penetrate the enemy—either by infiltrating agents into al-Qaeda, or recruiting operatives from within the enemy's ranks. This is no easy task. Al-Qaeda is a small, secretive network of Arab extremists that is extremely suspicious of outsiders. We have to overcome multiple barriers of race, language, culture, and tribal affiliations to get inside. Infiltrating an insular terrorist network is tougher, on an order of magnitude, than infiltrating the KGB. This is not to say it cannot be done. But as former CIA director Mike Hayden says, it is a “long-term project.”

After 9/11, it was a project that essentially had to begin from scratch. At the time of the attacks,



the agency had almost no informants inside al-Qaeda or other radical Islamic terrorist groups. The reason, a senior CIA official told me, was that in the 1990s the Clinton administration had imposed severe restrictions on the agency's ability to recruit sources. These restrictions were known as the "Deutch Guidelines." Named for former CIA director John Deutch, the guidelines established a rigorous set of criteria for CIA stations across the world, which required approval from senior officials at headquarters before field officers could recruit anyone with a history of torture, assassinations, or criminal activity (which means any member of al-Qaeda).

The guidelines, this official said, were written in response to revelations about the CIA's collaboration with governments and individuals in Central America that had abused human rights. But, he said, they "had a terribly chilling effect on our people in the field" and led to "sources just drying up." As a result, "we weren't penetrating any of those terrorist cells. We weren't recruiting al-Qaeda."

It would take many years of effort for the CIA to begin reversing the damage—which meant that in the period following the 9/11 attacks, this tool

was of extremely limited value. Even today, the difficulties of penetrating terrorist networks are substantial – as we saw when in 2009 a source that the CIA believed to be trustworthy entered a CIA camp in Afghanistan and blew himself up, killing nine people, including the chief of the base and six other CIA operatives and contractors.

The second method to learn what the terrorists are planning is “signals intelligence”—using advanced technology to intercept and monitor the enemy’s electronic communications. To do this, the Bush administration launched the Terrorist Surveillance Program, another vital intelligence tool that was exposed by leaks and came under intense sustained attack from the Left.

Signals intelligence has been essential to the fight against terror, but it has certain inherent limitations. For one thing, when intelligence officials monitor terrorist communications, they are passive listeners to the conversations of others. They cannot ask questions, probe for additional information, or in some cases even identify the voices or email addresses in intercepted communications. Moreover, the terrorists know they are being monitored, so they are careful to speak in codes that are dif-

difficult to break without inside information.

This leaves only one other human intelligence tool: interrogation.

The interrogation of senior terrorist leaders has distinct advantages over other forms of intelligence. It allows our intelligence professionals to ask the terrorists direct questions, and expose sensitive intelligence to them during questioning (because the terrorists are cut off from the outside world and cannot share it with terrorists still at large). Our intelligence professionals can confront captured terrorists with new information from other detainees to elicit still additional intelligence. They can get captured terrorists to verify whether sources we recruit inside al-Qaeda are providing reliable information. They can get captured terrorists to help them make sense of intercepted communications, and identify voices or email addresses they have uncovered. No other tool provides our intelligence community with this kind of dynamic flexibility.

Moreover, while signals intelligence or sources could give us scraps of information, interrogation of captured terrorists can result in a full picture. Former CIA Director Michael Hayden explained it

to me this way: intelligence is like putting together a large puzzle. You have all the pieces laid out on the table in front of you – and you must put them all together. But you are not allowed to see the picture on the cover of the box.

That is the challenge facing our intelligence officers. They have lots of puzzle pieces from different sources – tips, signals intercepts, and sources that they have recruited inside al-Qaeda. But they don't know how the pieces all fit together, or what the final picture looks like. There is only one way to get that final picture – by capturing the terrorist leaders who know what the picture on the cover of the box looks like. When we interrogate a terrorist mastermind like KSM, he is not simply giving us more puzzle pieces that we could find another way. He is providing information that is available in no other place — how the various pieces that we already have fit together. He is giving us the picture on the cover of the box.

That is what we have lost by eliminating our capability to detain and interrogate terrorist leaders. According to senior intelligence officials, well over half of the information our government learned about al-Qaeda after 9/11 — how it oper-

ates, how it moves money, how it communicates, how it recruits operatives, how it picks targets, how it plans and carries out attacks—came from the interrogation of terrorists in CIA custody. Consider that for a moment: without this capability, more than half of what we knew about the enemy would have disappeared.

For a decade now, we have been dining out on the information that the CIA obtained from KSM and other high-value terrorists to help disrupt terrorist plots and keep our country safe from new attacks. But with each passing year, that information becomes increasingly dated. New terror leaders rise through the ranks, new operatives are recruited, and new methods are used to communicate, move money, recruit operatives, and plan new attacks. We are no longer replenishing information about al-Qaeda's inner workings because we are no longer capturing and detaining the terrorist leaders who could refresh our knowledge about al-Qaeda's operations.

We can learn some of this from the captured enemy documents found in bin Laden's lair. But as former Attorney General Michael Mukasey explains, "What do we have in place now to exploit



the trove of material that we got from bin Laden's residence? According to all reports there was a huge amount of intelligence gained from this raid that is bound to lead to people – people who could, in turn, disclose valuable information. What program do we have in place to interrogate those people? The long and short of it is we don't have anything in place.”

Worse still, because we have shut down the CIA program for detaining senior al-Qaeda leaders, we not have a cadre of senior terrorists in custody who can explain to us the meaning of the bin Laden documents in the first place. The terrorists know we are monitoring their communications, so they use false names and speak in code. After 9/11, when the CIA captured al-Qaeda documents in a terrorist raid, they would turn to KSM and other captured terrorists to explain the meaning of these coded communications. Today, we have no fresh captures in U.S. custody who can help us understand the meaning of the documents found in bin Laden's compound – which makes it significantly more difficult for the CIA to decipher them. But the situation is even worse than that. In July, Vice Adm. William McRaven told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Obama administration has no

clear plan for handling captured terrorist leaders if they are caught alive outside the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, McRaven testified, “in many cases” terrorists captured in secret are taken to a U.S. Navy ship until they can be tried in a U.S. court or transferred to the custody of an allied country. But if neither option is feasible, he said, the terrorist is simply let go. “If we can’t do either one of those, then we will release that individual,” McRaven told the committee.

Think about that: The United States’ top special operations commander told Congress that because the United States has no place to hold captured terrorists, we simply let them go.

Until now, it was believed that the administration was not capturing senior terrorists alive outside the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, but simply killing them. Last year, The Washington Post reported that there had been no known high-value detentions by the United States since Obama took office. Now, it appears, the Obama administration has indeed captured some high-value terrorists alive, held them briefly, and then released them.

In his testimony, Adm. McRaven used the

phrase “in many cases,” which seems to indicate that not only has this happened, but it has happened in numerous instances. Well, exactly how many al-Qaeda terrorists have been taken into U.S. custody on Navy ships and released by the Obama administration? Who are these terrorists? Where were they captured? Who decided to release them? Where were they released? And what has become of them since? With Adm. McRaven’s testimony, the administration owes the American people — and the United States Congress — some answers, and fast.

What can be done now to remedy this situation?

First, we must whenever possible capture high-value terrorists alive, instead of killing them. There are times when it necessary to kill a terrorist with an unmanned drone — he may be in a remote region where we cannot send a special operations team, and our only choice is to kill him or lose him. But the default option should be to capture terrorists whenever possible and bring them in for interrogation. The next time we locate a high value terrorist like Saleh Ali Nabhan, our first priority should be to take him in alive, not vaporize all the intel-

ligence in his brain.

Second, we need somewhere to put them. President Obama has closed the CIA's black sites for good. But current CIA Director Leon Panetta recently suggested another viable option. Testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Panetta was asked what the U.S. would do if we captured Osama bin Laden or other senior al-Qaeda leaders. He replied that the Obama administration would probably transfer them to military custody and send them to Guantanamo Bay. Panetta is right: Guantanamo is the logical place to conduct terrorist interrogations.

Guantanamo is not closing anytime soon, whatever the President may have said in the past: the outgoing Democratic Congress saw to that by cutting off funds for any transfer of detainees to the United States. And according to press accounts, the base has a state of the art CIA detention facility, which already houses KSM and other high-value detainees. This facility could easily accommodate fresh captures.

Third, we need to put the CIA back in charge of terrorist interrogations. The Obama adminis-

tration's High Value Interrogation Group (HIG) – which was supposed to replace the CIA interrogation program that Obama eliminated – has been a colossal failure. The CIA has a cadre of trained interrogators with a proven record of success. They should be put back in charge of capturing, detaining, and questioning senior terrorist leaders.

Fourth, we must give interrogators the tools that they need to effectively question terrorists – tools beyond those currently in the *Army Field Manual* on interrogation. On January 22, 2009, Obama issued an executive order that declares:

“Effective immediately, an individual in the custody or under the effective control of an officer, employee, or other agent of the United States Government, or detained within a facility owned, operated, or controlled by a department or agency of the United States, in any armed conflict, shall not be subjected to any interrogation technique or approach, or any treatment related to interrogation, that is not authorized by and listed in the *Army Field Manual*.”



There are a wide range of lawful interrogation techniques that go beyond what is spelled out in the *Army Field Manual*—techniques that President Obama has chosen to forgo. As a former senior legal advisor in the Justice Department explains, “No one could reasonably maintain that the *Army Field Manual* exhausts the universe of lawful tactics that the United States can use in terms of the interrogation of these unlawful enemy combatants. Except for one technique, all the policies in the *Field Manual* are designed for use with traditional, privileged Prisoners of War. Terrorists are unlawful enemy combatants. ... And terrorists are not entitled to these traditional very, very high privileges and standards applicable to Prisoners of War.”

More shocking still, this former Justice Department official points out, is that the standards in the *Army Field Manual*, “are higher standards than are generally applied in, for example, local domestic police work in connection with bread and butter crimes.” So by ordering strict adherence to the *Army Field Manual*, President Obama is actually requiring that captured terrorists receive better treatment in the interrogation room than common criminals being questioned at your local police precinct.

Think of what that means. Under the rules put in place by the Obama administration, a police officer in New York City can be more aggressive in questioning a burglar who sticks up the local grocery store than our military and intelligence professionals can be in questioning Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—the man who murdered three thousand people in downtown Manhattan.

When President Obama eliminated the CIA program and released thousands of pages of documents detailing how our interrogators operated, he removed the veil of mystery that surrounded our interrogation techniques. This was a grave mistake. In releasing these documents, Obama told the enemy not just how waterboarding works, but also the classified details on the broad universe of less coercive techniques that could theoretically pass muster even in his administration (such as the “facial hold” and “tummy slap”). The release of this information makes those interrogation methods effectively useless.

To understand why, think of the release of the Justice memos like the popular television show, “Magic’s Biggest Secrets Revealed.” In that program, a masked magician takes you behind the

scenes and shows you how he saws the lady in half or makes a tiger appear out of thin air. Once you know the secret behind the trick, it doesn't work anymore. The same is true with enhanced interrogation techniques. Once you know the secret behind the techniques, they don't work anymore. President Obama has shown the enemy how the magic tricks work. The difference is, when the terrorists learn these secrets, more than a magic show is ruined—innocent people may be killed as a result.

To restore effective terrorist interrogation, we must restore that veil of mystery as to what captured terrorists will face in U.S. custody. During the Bush administration, the CIA interrogation program usually worked without the application of any interrogation techniques – because the terrorists did not know the limits. For example, in 2007, a senior al-Qaeda terrorist named Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi was captured and taken into CIA custody. When his interrogators told him he was in the hands of the CIA, he replied: “I’ve heard of you guys. I’ll tell you anything you need to know.” Just the existence of the CIA program, and the uncertainty of what it included, was enough to get this al-Qaeda terrorist talking. That would not happen

today. Obama has revealed the secrets behind how we question terrorists to the terrorists. And with the *Army Field Manual* on interrogation available on the internet, they can study our techniques and train to resist them.

Obama can correct this situation without bringing back the most controversial techniques that he opposes. On the morning Obama issued his executive order, CIA Director Mike Hayden called White House counsel Greg Craig and made a simple suggestion: Just add the words “unless otherwise authorized by the president.” Adding these words today would allow the administration to provide U.S. interrogators with additional lawful techniques. The president could also simply announce that he is adding a classified annex to the *Army Field Manual* with additional interrogation techniques. Taking these steps would restore a level of uncertainty for our enemies about what they would face in the interrogation room – which would increase the odds that other terrorists would respond the way that Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi did.

This would not be possible today. Under the rules President Obama has instituted, this terrorist would have to be declared within two weeks

to the International Red Cross. Instead of having three months to exploit the information the terrorist provided, before al-Qaeda realized he was in our hands, Obama would inform the enemy almost immediately—allowing the terrorists to quickly cover their tracks.



These are all actions that President Obama could easily take. And such steps are desperately needed – because the danger to our country is growing. In the past three years, America has suffered three near misses: the plot to blow up a plane over Detroit; an attempted bomb attack in Times Square; and the plot to blow up two package bombs on planes over the East Coast of the United States. And we need to be crystal clear: As Americans commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the terrorists are meeting in caves in Waziristan, and Yemen, and East Africa planning the next 9/11.

Our enemies are resourceful, they remain as dangerous as ever and as determined to attack America and kill thousands of innocent people. It may be that, even with our defenses lowered, the terrorists will fail to carry out the next attack. Let

us pray that is the case. But that does not mean the president's actions have not put us in grave danger. If you walk a tightrope between two tall buildings, without a net, and you manage to make it across, that does not mean you were just as safe during the journey as you would have been with the net in place. It simply means you were incredibly lucky. Depending on luck in our battle with al-Qaeda is not a wise or responsible strategy to protect the country. When President Bush left office, America marked 2,688 days without another terrorist attack on its soil. It was an achievement few thought possible in the days after September 11, 2001. Al-Qaeda tried repeatedly to strike us during those seven years, but they failed because a set of tools had been developed that successfully protected the country for more than seven years after 9/11.

By dismantling those tools, President Obama is risking catastrophic consequences. The president has, by his own admission, forced the CIA to operate with one hand tied behind its back. He has, by his own admission, made the agency's job of protecting us from terror harder. And he says that's okay. It's not.

On his 100th day in office, President Obama



stated at a White House press conference: “Ultimately I will be judged as commander-in-chief on how safe I’m keeping the American people.” This is one statement with which no one, whatever their party or political persuasion, can disagree.

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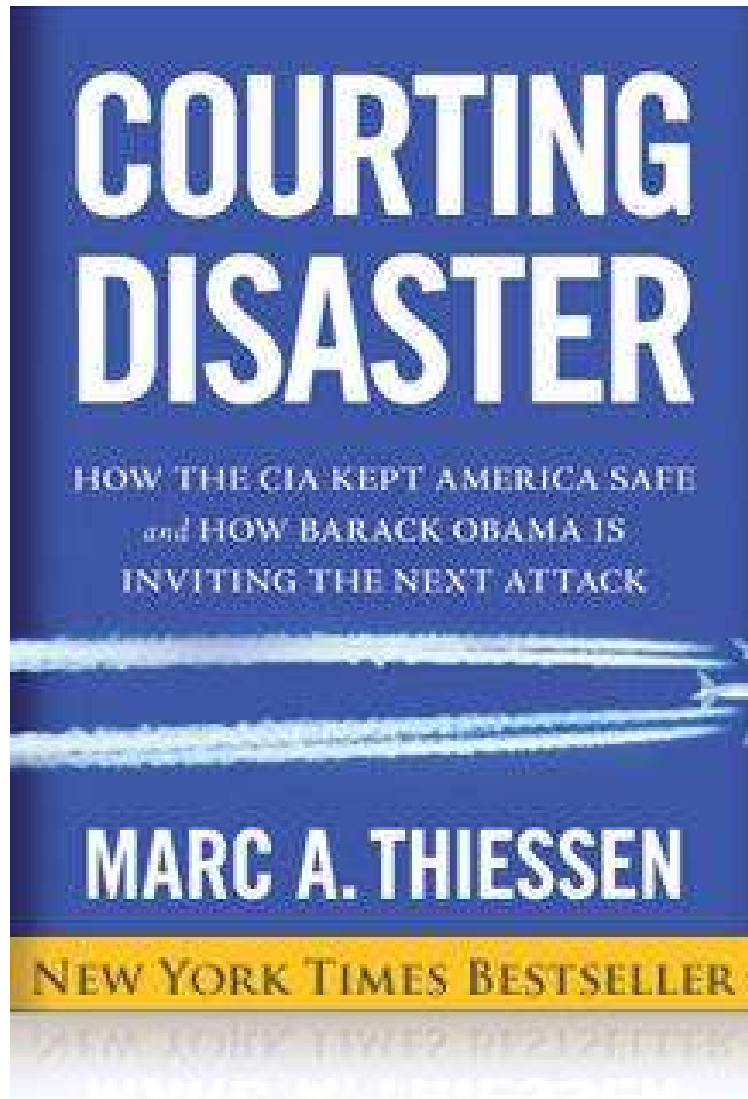
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