

# Author's Note

**You should not be reading this book.**

I should not have been able to write it.

This volume contains some of the most sensitive intelligence information our country possesses: the secrets behind how the CIA successfully interrogated the men who killed thousands on September 11, 2001, and stopped them from killing thousands more.

This information has been leaking, drip by drip, into the public domain for years, as irresponsible government officials have shared secrets they swore to protect with the news media, and left-wing journalists have twisted this information to paint our intelligence community as a band of rogue operators who abandoned our ideals in the fight against terror.

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When Barack Obama took office, those drips turned into a torrent, as the new president released reams of highly classified documents describing the details of our nation's interrogation policies. President Obama declared our intelligence professionals had committed "torture." They did nothing of the sort. And while Obama's revelations have done enormous damage to our national security, they have also made it possible to prove that he is wrong.

Now, for the first time, the true story can finally be told: the story of how dedicated men and women at the Central Intelligence Agency went head-to-head with the world's most dangerous terrorists, got them to tell us their plans, and kept America safe for eight years; this is the story of how Barack Obama has exposed their secrets to the enemy, unilaterally disarmed us in the face of terror, and invited the next attack.

# “Sheikh Osama Warned You”

It is the morning of September 11, 2006. President Bush wakes up at 5:00 a.m., and after breakfast with the First Lady, he walks down the colonnade past the Rose Garden to the Oval Office. There, he receives his morning briefing from the Director of National Intelligence and then calls in his speechwriters to make final edits on his televised address that night marking the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

At 8:46 a.m.—the moment the first plane struck the North Tower—the president walks out to the South Lawn with Mrs. Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Mrs. Cheney to observe a moment of silence. The networks cover the event live and then cut back to New York City where the families of the fallen are gathered at Ground Zero for memorial ceremonies. As bagpipes play in the background,

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a morning show anchor interviews former Mayor Rudy Giuliani about his recollections of the day.

Suddenly, the coverage is interrupted by a breaking news bulletin: Networks are receiving reports that air traffic controllers have lost contact with United Airlines Flight 931, bound for San Francisco from London's Heathrow Airport. The plane suddenly fell off the radar screen as it crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

Reporters scramble to figure out what has happened, when a second report comes in: air traffic controllers have lost contact with another plane—United Flight 959 bound for Chicago, also departing from Heathrow.

Moments later, another report: Air Canada Flight 849 bound for Toronto has gone missing.

Then another: Air Canada Flight 865 bound for Montreal has disappeared.

Then another: American Airlines flight 131 bound for New York has disappeared.

Then another: United Flight 925 bound for Washington has disappeared.

Then another: American Airlines Flight 91 bound for Chicago has disappeared.

As the reports roll in, it becomes clear that the unimaginable has happened: al Qaeda terrorists have hijacked seven planes, carrying at least 1,500 passengers, and blown them up as they crossed the Atlantic.

It is the second deadliest terrorist attack in history, surpassed only by the 9/11 attack itself.

The following day, as images of debris floating in the ocean fill our TV screens, the terrorists' martyrdom videos are delivered to *al Jazeera* and broadcast to the world.

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One of the hijackers sputters: "We will rain upon you such terror and destruction that you will never know peace. There will be floods of martyrdom operations and bombs falling through your lands."

The ringleader of the plot, a terrorist named Abdulla Ahmed Ali, pokes his finger at the camera and declares: "Sheikh Osama warned you. . . . Now the time has come for you to be destroyed."<sup>1</sup>

Five years after striking the Pentagon and World Trade Towers, al Qaeda has launched another mass casualty attack to rival the destruction of September 11, 2001.



A scenario like this did not happen, in part, because the following scenario did<sup>2</sup>:

Just before dawn on March 1, 2003, two dozen heavily armed Pakistani tactical assault forces move in and surround a safe house in Rawalpindi. A few hours earlier they had received a text message from an informant inside the house. It read: "I am with KSM."

Bursting in, they find the disheveled mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, in his bedroom. KSM lunges for a rifle and shoots one of the Pakistani soldiers in the foot before being finally subdued. He is taken into custody along with another senior al Qaeda operative, Mustafa al-Hawsawi, the paymaster of the 9/11 plot. In the safe house, they find a treasure trove of computers, documents, cell phones, and other valuable "pocket litter."

Once in custody, KSM is defiant. He refuses to answer questions, informing his captors that he will tell them everything when he gets to America and sees his lawyer. But KSM is not taken to America to see a lawyer. Instead he is taken, via a third country, to a secret CIA "black site" in an undisclosed location.

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Upon arrival, KSM finds himself in the complete control of Americans. His head and face are shaved. He is stripped naked, his physical condition is documented through photographs, and he undergoes a medical exam and psychological interview. He does not know where he is, how long he will be there, or what his fate will be.

Despite his circumstances, KSM still refuses to talk. He spews contempt at his interrogators, telling them that Americans are weak, lack resilience, and are unable to do what is necessary to prevent the terrorists from succeeding in their goals. He has trained to resist interrogation. When he is asked for information about future attacks, he tells his questioners scornfully:

“Soon, you will know.”

It becomes clear he will not reveal the information using traditional interrogation techniques. So he undergoes a series of “enhanced interrogation techniques” approved for use only on the most high-value detainees. The techniques include waterboarding.

His resistance is described by one senior American official as “superhuman.” Eventually, however, the techniques work, and KSM becomes cooperative—for reasons that will be described later in this book.

He begins telling his CIA de-briefers about active al Qaeda plots to launch attacks against the United States and other Western targets—information that leads to the arrest of operatives tasked to carry them out. He holds classes for CIA officials, using a chalkboard to draw a picture of al Qaeda’s operating structure, financing, communications, and logistics. He identifies al Qaeda travel routes and safe havens, and helps intelligence officers make sense of documents and computer records seized in terrorist raids. He identifies voices in intercepted telephone calls, and helps officials understand the meaning of coded terrorist communications. He provides

information that helps our intelligence community capture other high-ranking terrorists, some of whom are also taken into CIA custody and questioned—resulting in still more intelligence on the enemy's plans for new attacks.

KSM's questioning, and that of other captured terrorists, produces more than 6,000 intelligence reports, which are shared across the intelligence community, as well as with our allies across the world.

In one of these reports, KSM describes in detail the revisions he made to his failed 1994–1995 plan known as the "Bojinka plot"—formulated with his nephew Ramzi Yousef—to blow up a dozen airplanes carrying some 4,000 passengers over the Pacific Ocean.<sup>3</sup>

Years later, an observant CIA officer notices that the activities of a cell being followed by British authorities appears to match KSM's description of his plans for a Bojinka-style attack. He shares this information with British authorities. At first they are skeptical, but soon they acknowledge that this is in fact what the cell is planning. Intelligence from terrorists at Guantanamo Bay provides further insight into the cell's plans for the use of liquid explosives.

In an operation that involves unprecedented intelligence cooperation between our countries, British officials proceed to unravel the plot. On the night of August 9, 2006—just over a month before the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks—they launch a series of raids in a northeast London suburb that lead to the arrest of two dozen al Qaeda terrorist suspects. They find a USB thumb drive in the pocket of one of the men with security details for Heathrow airport, and information on seven trans-Atlantic flights that were scheduled to take off within hours of each other:

United Airlines Flight 931 to San Francisco departing at

2:15 p.m.;

Air Canada Flight 849 to Toronto departing at 3:00 p.m.;

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Air Canada Flight 865 to Montreal departing at 3:15 p.m.;  
United Airlines Flight 959 to Chicago departing at 3:40 p.m.;  
United Airlines Flight 925 to Washington departing at 4:20  
p.m.;  
American Airlines Flight 131 to New York departing at 4:35  
p.m; and  
American Airlines Flight 91 to Chicago departing at 4:50  
p.m.

They seize bomb-making equipment and hydrogen peroxide to make liquid explosives. And they find the chilling martyrdom videos the suicide bombers had prepared—including those quoted above scolding Americans that “Sheikh Osama warned you” and promising “you will never know peace.”

While there is no way to know precisely what day they planned to launch the attack, American intelligence officials believe that the plot was just weeks away from execution.

Today, if you asked an average person on the street what they know about the 2006 airlines plot, most would not be able to tell you much. If pressed, they might vaguely recall it had something to do with why they can no longer bring more than three ounces of liquid in their carry-on luggage. But few Americans are aware of the fact that al Qaeda had planned to mark the fifth anniversary of 9/11 with an attack of similar scope and magnitude.

And still fewer realize that the terrorists’ true intentions in this plot were uncovered thanks to critical information obtained through the interrogation of the man who conceived it: Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

This is only one of the many attacks stopped with the help of the CIA interrogation program established by the Bush Administration in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.



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Information from detainees in CIA custody led to the arrest of an al Qaeda terrorist named Jose Padilla, who was sent to America on a mission to blow up high-rise apartment buildings in the United States.

Information from detainees in CIA custody led to the capture of a cell of Southeast Asian terrorists which had been tasked by KSM to hijack a passenger jet and fly it into the Library Tower in Los Angeles.

Information from detainees in CIA custody led to the capture of Ramzi Bin al-Shibh, KSM's right-hand-man in the 9/11 attacks, just as he was finalizing plans for a plot to hijack airplanes in Europe and fly them into Heathrow airport and buildings in downtown London.

Information from detainees in CIA custody led to the capture of Ammar al-Baluchi and Walid bin Attash, just as they were completing plans to replicate the destruction of our embassies in East Africa by blowing up the U.S. consulate and Western residences in Karachi, Pakistan.

Information from detainees in CIA custody led to the disruption of an al Qaeda plot to blow up the U.S. Marine camp in Djibouti, in an attack that could have rivaled the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut.

Information from detainees in CIA custody helped break up an al Qaeda cell that was developing anthrax for terrorist attacks inside the United States.

In addition to helping break up these specific terrorist cells and plots, CIA questioning provided our intelligence community with an unparalleled body of information about al Qaeda—giving U.S. officials a picture of the terrorist organization as seen from the inside, at a time when we knew almost nothing about the enemy who had attacked us on 9/11.

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Until the program was temporarily suspended in 2006, intelligence officials say, well over half of the information our government had about al Qaeda—how it operates, 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.

Former CIA Director George Tenet has declared: “I know that this program has saved lives. I know we’ve disrupted plots. I know this program alone is worth more than what the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency put together have been able to tell us.”<sup>4</sup>

Former CIA Director Mike Hayden has said: “The facts of the case are that the use of these techniques against these terrorists made us safer. It really did work.”<sup>5</sup>

Former Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte has said: “[T]his is a very, very important capability to have. This has been one of the most valuable, if not *the* most valuable . . . human intelligence program with respect to Al Qaeda. It has given us invaluable information that has saved American lives. So it is very, very important that we have this kind of capability.”<sup>6</sup>

Former Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell has said: “We have people walking around in this country that are alive today because this process happened.”<sup>7</sup>

Even Barack Obama’s Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, has acknowledged: “High value information came from interrogations in which those methods were used and provided a deeper understanding of the al Qaeda organization that was attacking this country.”<sup>8</sup>

Leon Panetta, Obama's CIA Director, has said: "Important information was gathered from these detainees. It provided information that was acted upon."<sup>9</sup>

And John Brennan, Obama's Homeland Security Advisor, when asked in an interview if enhanced interrogation techniques were necessary to keep America safe, replied: "Would the U.S. be handicapped if the CIA was not, in fact, able to carry out these types of detention and debriefing activities? I would say yes."<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the official assessment of our intelligence community is that, were it not for the CIA interrogation program, "al Qaeda and its allies would have succeeded in launching another attack against the American homeland."<sup>11</sup>

And in his first forty-eight hours in office, President Barack Obama shut the program down.



On January 22, 2009, President Obama issued Executive Order 13491, closing the CIA program and directing that, henceforth, all interrogations by U.S. personnel must follow the techniques contained in the Army Field Manual.

The morning of the announcement, Mike Hayden was still in his post as CIA Director, awaiting the confirmation of his successor. He had not been allowed to see the draft executive order, but Hayden got wind of what it contained. He called White House Counsel Greg Craig and told him bluntly: "You didn't ask, but this is the CIA officially nonconcurring."<sup>12</sup> The president went ahead anyway, overruling the objections of the agency.

A few months later, on April 16, 2009, President Obama ordered the release of four Justice Department memos which described in detail the techniques used to interrogate KSM and other high-value

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terrorists. This time, not just Hayden (who was now retired) but *five* CIA directors—including Obama’s own director, Leon Panetta—objected. George Tenet called to urge against the memos’ release. So did Porter Goss. So did John Deutch. Hayden says: “You had CIA Directors in a continuous unbroken stream to 1995 calling saying, ‘Don’t do this.’”

In addition to objections from the men who led the agency for a collective fourteen years, the president also heard objections from the agency’s covert field operatives. A few weeks earlier, Panetta had arranged for the eight top officials of the Clandestine Service—the agency’s spies—to meet with the president at the White House. It was highly unusual for these clandestine officers to visit the Oval Office, and they used the opportunity to warn the president that releasing the memos would put agency operatives at risk. The president reportedly listened respectfully—and then ignored their advice. Once again he overruled the expressed concerns of the intelligence community and went forward over their objections.<sup>13</sup>

With these actions, Barack Obama arguably did more damage to America’s national security in his first 100 days of office than any president in American history.

In shutting down the CIA program, Obama eliminated our nation’s most important tool to prevent the terrorists from striking America. And in releasing highly sensitive documents describing the details of how we have interrogated captured terrorists—and the legal limits of our interrogation techniques—Obama gave critical intelligence to the enemy.

These were two of the most dangerous and irresponsible acts an American president has ever committed in a time of war. It is as if Winston Churchill had shut down the ULTRA program, which had broken German codes, and then shared secret documents detailing

how it worked with the public—and thus with the Nazi leadership in Berlin. President Obama has given up a vital source of intelligence needed to protect our country. And al Qaeda will now use the information Obama released to train its operatives to resist interrogation, and thus withhold information about planned attacks. Americans could die as a result.

In addition to providing vital intelligence to the enemy, Obama's decision to release these documents has unleashed a flood of recrimination against the men and women of our intelligence community. This recrimination has been fed by loose talk from the president, Attorney General Eric Holder, and other administration officials who have accused dedicated CIA officers of "torture"—a felony under U.S. law.

These statements have, in turn, given ammunition to those, at home and abroad, calling for indictments of the individuals involved. And in August 2009—after months of empty rhetoric from the president promising his administration would "look forward, not backwards"—Attorney General Holder appointed a special prosecutor to consider criminal charges against CIA officials.

Such prosecutions would do immense damage to our intelligence community—and not just to those targeted by the special prosecutor. Other talented and dedicated intelligence professionals have seen their careers irreparably damaged, and many have reportedly left government service—a loss of unparalleled talent, knowledge, and experience that will cost our country dearly.

Moreover, the demonstration effect for young officers coming up the ranks has been devastating. With his actions, President Obama has sent a dangerous message to CIA officers across the world: don't take risks in the fight against the terrorists; play it safe if you want to survive. This increases the danger that the CIA will slip back into

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a risk-averse, September 10th mentality, and that could have devastating consequences for America.

Obama's actions have also damaged the office of the presidency. A president must be able to get unvarnished, confidential legal advice so that he can make good decisions about the security of our country. In revealing the classified legal advice that was given to President Bush—and threatening the lawyers who provided that advice with prosecution or disbarment—the Obama administration has sent a chill through the government's legal ranks. No lawyer in his right mind will ever tell the president what he really believes on controversial national security issues, for fear that when the political winds change direction he will be hung out to dry. This will harm the quality of advice the current occupant of the Oval Office receives, as well as the advice received by those who succeed him. And it will limit the options American presidents have in dealing with grave threats to the safety and security of our citizens.

You may ask: Obama has done all this damage simply by ending the CIA interrogations and releasing a handful of classified memos? Isn't that a bit overheated? After all, hasn't Obama continued many of the counter-terrorism policies of the Bush administration? In some respects he has. He approved a robust counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan based on the success of the Iraqi surge. He has, thus far, continued a measured drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq set in motion by President Bush. He has reportedly continued, and even expanded, the targeted killing of terrorists in Pakistan using Predator and Reaper drones. He has, thus far, not followed through on his campaign promise to put new restrictions on the National Security Agency's terrorist surveillance program, and has continued using the state secrets privilege to shut down lawsuits challenging his national security policies. He has opposed the extension of *habeas corpus*

rights to terrorists held in Afghanistan, asserted the right to indefinitely detain captured terrorists, and left in place the Bush administration's military commissions with only cosmetic changes.

For these actions (or inactions), Obama has come under withering criticism from the Left. American Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Anthony Romero says: "President Obama may mouth very different rhetoric. . . . But in the end, there is no substantive break from the policies of the Bush administration."<sup>14</sup> In the world of left-wing politics, those are fighting words.

The fact that Obama has not dismantled every national security tool left to him by the Bush administration is not surprising. The wholesale dismantling of all these policies, as the Left demands, would be the equivalent of unilateral surrender. No commander in chief, confronted with daily intelligence on terrorist threats, could possibly do this and still be true to his constitutional oath to protect the country. As former Vice President Cheney told me, "In some cases, they've been forced, for one reason or another, to take a similar position to what we did. . . . He's having to deal with the real world out there now, and he finds that he's the guy in the Oval Office who reads the latest intelligence and is continually kept up to speed out there among our terrorist adversaries, and he can't walk away from that."<sup>15</sup>

But the fact that Obama has kept many of the tools President Bush left him to fight the terrorists does not absolve him of responsibility for discarding what is arguably the most important tool in our battle against the terrorists. As this book will explain, interrogation of captured enemy fighters is more important in this war than any previous war in our history—because unlike previous enemies, the terrorists we face today do not have mass armies or flotillas of warships that can be observed by spies or tracked by satellites.

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Instead, the terrorists conspire in secret, hide among civilians, and attack us from within. Their plans to kill innocent men, women, and children are known only to a handful of cruel men—and our ability to find out what is in the minds of these individuals could mean the difference between stopping the next attack and seeing bodies scattered in the streets.

Because of President Obama's actions, today America no longer has the capability to detain and effectively question high-value terrorists. By eliminating this capability, the president is denying America's military and intelligence professionals the information they need to stop new terrorist attacks before they are carried out. And that means that America is significantly less safe today than it was when Obama took office.

Some argue that Obama's actions shutting down the CIA program, and ordering the closure of the strategic interrogation center at Guantanamo Bay, are designed to appease the far Left and give him running room to maintain other Bush-era policies. Perhaps that is so. But this running room comes at an enormous cost. This book will describe the damage done by the Obama administration's actions. It will tell the story of how the CIA interrogation program was nearly destroyed during the Bush administration, through leaks and attacks from without and within. And it will explain how President Bush rescued the program, put it on a sound legal footing, and left it intact for his successor, only to see him squander those efforts on his second day in office.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the Bush administration's interrogation policies. It will be years before many details of these policies are publicly known and a complete history can be written. Rather, this book is intended to give the reader a window into one of the most important, misunderstood,



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and successful intelligence efforts in the history of our nation. It is an effort to explain the necessity of this vital tool in the war on terror, and to refute many lies that have been told about the CIA program—falsehoods that have been repeated by President Obama, widely echoed in the news media, and have become part of the conventional wisdom.

In preparing this volume, I have had unique access to key decision-makers who created, developed, and saved these tools in the war on terror—including former Vice President Cheney, National Security Advisor Steve Hadley, CIA Director Mike Hayden, Directors of National Intelligence Mike McConnell and John Negroponte, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and many other current and former intelligence, defense, and national security officials. Many of the officials I interviewed spoke on the record. Others requested anonymity, some because they remain under threat of prosecution or professional sanction. Still others wished me well, but said they could not risk cooperation. That they live under legal threat today for the crime of protecting our nation from terrorist dangers is shameful.

I have also drawn on my personal experiences serving in the Defense Department and the White House during the entire eight years of the Bush administration. At the Pentagon, I served as chief speechwriter for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, working side-by-side with him and other top Pentagon officials during the first three years of the war on terror. During this period, I saw the challenges of this new war up close—from the planning rooms of the Pentagon to the major battlefronts of the Middle East.

After moving to the White House, I was given an historic assignment: crafting President Bush's address acknowledging the existence of the CIA program and announcing the transfer of Khalid Sheikh

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Mohammed and other terrorists to Guantanamo Bay for trial. To prepare this speech, I spent countless hours with the men and women who ran the CIA's top secret interrogation program—including the officials who interrogated and questioned KSM and other senior terrorists and got them to share vital intelligence on their plans for new attacks.

As a result of these experiences, I gained unique insights into the CIA program and how it saved American lives; and I developed a deep respect for the patriotic men and women who ran it. Each day, their names are dragged through the mud in the press. They are accused of “torture” by columnists, commentators, and even their commander in chief. I know many of these men and women. They are not torturers. They are heroes. They stopped the next 9/11. I hope, after reading this volume, you will see them as heroes as well. Their identities are secret, so they cannot speak for themselves. This book is my meager effort to speak up in their defense and refute the many calumnies that have been hurled against them.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was in my Pentagon office when American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the building. The walls shuddered. Smoke filled the hallways. But to my surprise, no evacuation alarm ever sounded. Those of us blessed not to have been at the point of impact simply filed out of the building and onto the lawn outside—where we looked back in horror at the broken and burning Pentagon. It was a sight none of us will ever forget.

In the weeks and months that followed, the evacuation alarms in the Pentagon finally did go off, as false reports came in that other planes were headed our way. Each time, we left our offices, exited the building, and stood looking up at the sky. Like the rest of America, we were on edge, waiting for the next attack.

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That attack never came. There are only two possibilities that can explain why this is so: Either the terrorists lost interest in striking America, or we uncovered their plans and stopped them. The critics want you to believe the former is true. But, as I will explain in the pages that follow, the terrorists did try to attack us again, and again, and again.

They failed, because in the months and years that followed 9/11, we captured many of al Qaeda's top operational leaders—the terrorists tasked with carrying out the "second wave" of attacks—and got them to tell us what they were planning. As a result, America has gone more than eight years without another terrorist attack on our soil.

This unlikely achievement is taken for granted in some quarters today. But think back to the morning of September 12, 2001. Would you have believed, back then, that it was possible? Would you have imagined, as you looked at the smoldering remains of the World Trade Center, that we would go eight years without another attack?

If not, then read on and meet some of the men and women you have to thank for that accomplishment. Learn how they protected our country from another calamity, how their legacy is being squandered, and why the danger is growing that America will suffer the next attack.

*Marc A. Thiessen*

*January 2010*

*Boulder View*

*Maine*

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