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Editor's Note: The [disclosure](#) that Army Pvt. Bradley Manning was subjected to seven hours of forced nudity on Wednesday – amid new pressures aimed at getting him to identify others involved in the WikiLeaks case – recalled how the Bush administration used nudity and other abusive tactics to break down “war on terror” detainees.

In 2004, the CIA told President George W. Bush's lawyers how useful forced nudity was for instilling “learned helplessness” in prisoners, though the repeated emphasis on nudity took on a lewd and sadistic quality, as Robert Parry reported in this article from the archives:

The CIA shared with George W. Bush's Justice Department the details of how an interrogation strategy – with an emphasis on forced nudity and physical abuse – could train prisoners in “learned helplessness” and demonstrate “the complete control of Americans.”

The 19-page document, entitled “[Background Paper on CIA's Combined Use of Interrogation Techniques](#)” and dated Dec. 30, 2004, contains repeated references to keeping suspected al-Qaeda captives – called “high-value detainees” or HVDs – naked as part of the strategy for breaking down their resistance.

The first of several “specific conditioning interrogation techniques” lists “Nudity. The HVD's clothes are taken and he remains nude until the interrogators provide clothes to him.” [Underline in original.]

The CIA said the prisoner is kept nude (or occasionally dressed in a diaper) while being subjected to other “conditioning techniques,” sleep deprivation and a bland diet of Ensure. Nudity continues while interrogators apply other more aggressive techniques designed to emphasize a prisoner’s helplessness.

The background paper, which was prepared for the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel and released in August 2009 in response to an ACLU lawsuit, described in bureaucratic wording the process used to interrogate a suspected terrorist after his capture and “rendition” to a CIA-run “black site.”

“During the flight, the detainee is securely shackled and is deprived of sight and sound through the use of blindfolds, earmuffs, and hoods,” the report said. “There is no interaction with the HVD during this rendition movement except for periodic, discreet assessments by the on-board medical officer.”

From the start, the goal was to dramatize the prisoner’s vulnerability.

“The HVD is subjected to administrative procedures and medical assessment upon arrival at the Black Site,” the report said. “The HVD finds himself in the complete control of Americans.”

Initially, that control is underscored by an ominous coldness of the reception.

The report said: “The procedures he is subjected to are precise, quiet, and almost clinical; and no one is mistreating him. While each HVD is different, the rendition and reception process generally creates significant apprehension in the HVD because of the enormity and suddenness of the change in environment, the uncertainty about what will happen next, and the potential dread an HVD might have in US custody.”

The prisoner is next subjected to a dehumanizing process in preparation for the interrogations.

“The HVD’s head and face are shaved,” the CIA report says. “A series of photographs are taken of the HVD while nude to document the physical condition of the HVD upon arrival. A Medical Officer interviews the HVD and a medical evaluation is conducted to assess the physical condition of the HVD. ... A Psychologist interviews the HVD to assess his mental state.”

Then, if no “contraindications” are found, the interrogations begin, with continued emphasis on stripping the prisoner of his clothing, his self-respect and his ability to resist.

‘Learned Helplessness’

“Effective interrogation is based on the concept of using both physical and psychological pressures in a comprehensive, systematic, and cumulative manner to influence HVD behavior, to overcome a detainee’s resistance posture,” the CIA report said.

“The goal of interrogation is to create a state of learned helplessness and dependence conducive to the collection of intelligence in a predictable, reliable, and sustainable manner.”

The report said a typical “session one” would start as “the HVD is brought into the interrogation room, and under the direction of the interrogators, stripped of his clothes, and placed into shackles.”

After a round of questioning – that would include some slaps and slamming the prisoner against a wall – sleep deprivation and dietary manipulation (which along with nudity are regarded as “conditioning techniques”) are begun.

The report said: “The interrogators, assisted by security officers ... will place the HVD in the center of the interrogation room in the vertical shackling position and diaper the HVD to begin sleep deprivation. The HVD will be provided with Ensure Plus ... to begin dietary manipulation. The HVD remains nude
.” [Underlines in original.]

In the next session, “coercive techniques” are brought into play. The nude prisoner is doused with cold water, repeatedly slammed against a wall and forced into stress positions before being returned to the shackling position for more sleep deprivation and more dietary manipulation, with the recurring advice, “the HVD remains nude.”

Summing up this second session, the CIA wrote, “the following techniques were used: sleep deprivation, nudity, dietary manipulation, walling, water dousing, attention grasp, insult slap, and abdominal slap. The three Conditioning Techniques were used to keep the HVD at a baseline, dependent state and to weaken his resolve and will to resist.”

For session three, the CIA also noted that the prisoner “is nude” before more abusive techniques are added to the mix and then applied in combination. The report stated:

“Interrogators will often use one technique to support another. As an example, interrogators would tell an HVD in a stress position that he (HVD) is going back to the walling wall (for walling) if he fails to hold the stress position until told otherwise. ... This places additional stress on the HVD who typically will try to hold the stress position for as long as possible to avoid the walling wall.”

According to the report, wall slamming, which involves putting a harness around a prisoner’s neck and whipping him into a wall, “is one of the most effective interrogation techniques because it wears down the HVD physically, heightens uncertainty in the detainee about what the interrogator may do to him, and creates a sense of dread when the HVD knows he is about to be walled again. ...

“An HVD may be walled one time (one impact with the wall) to make a point or twenty to thirty times consecutively when the interrogator requires a more significant response to a question. During an interrogation session that is designed to be intense, an HVD will be walled multiple times in the session.”

After the end of the third session, the prisoner is put back “into the vertical shackling position to resume sleep deprivation. Dietary manipulation also continues, and the HVD remains nude,” the

report said.

Cramped Confinement

In later interrogations, the prisoner could also be locked in boxes for differing periods depending on the size of the box. Under guidance from the CIA's medical personnel, "the duration of cramped confinement limits confinement in the large box to no more than 8 hours at a time for no more than 18 hours a day, and confinement in the small box to 2 hours," the report said.

According to the report, "sleep deprivation may continue to the 70 to 120 hour range, or possibly beyond for the hardest resisters, but in no case exceed the 180-hour time limit."

Although "the entire interrogation process outlined above ... may last for thirty days," the report said, "if the interrogation team anticipates the potential need to use interrogation techniques beyond the 30-day approval period, it will submit a new interrogation plan to HQS for evaluation and approval."

The Bush administration insisted that its "enhanced interrogation techniques," which earlier also included the near-drowning of "waterboarding," were effective in eliciting valuable intelligence about al-Qaeda and its plans, but FBI and some military interrogators opposed the techniques as counterproductive.

As early as spring 2002, FBI agents objected to the CIA's brutal treatment of badly wounded al-Qaeda captive Abu Zubaydah, only to be informed that the tactics had been approved "at the highest levels," according to a Justice Department [Inspector General's report](#) that was released last year.

FBI interrogators claimed that they achieved better results from rapport-building and other non-violent techniques with Zubaydah than the CIA did later with its use of torture.

For instance, author Jane Mayer in her book *The Dark Side* wrote that the two FBI agents, Ali Soufan and Steve Gaudin, “sent back early cables [in 2002] describing Zubayda as revealing inside details of the [9/11] attacks on New York and Washington, including the nickname of its central planner, ‘Mukhtar,’ who was identified as Khalid Sheikh Mohammad. ...

“During this period, Zubayda also described an Al Qaeda associate whose physical description matched that of Jose Padilla. The information led to the arrest of the slow-witted American gang member in May 2002, at O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. ...

“Abu Zubayda disclosed Padilla’s role accidentally, apparently. While making small talk, he described an Al Qaeda associate he said had just visited the U.S. embassy in Pakistan. That scrap was enough for authorities to find and arrest Padilla.

"These early revelations were greeted with excitement by [CIA Director George] Tenet, until he was told they were extracted not by his officers but by the rival team at the FBI.”

Soon, a CIA team arrived at the secret CIA detention center in Thailand where Zubaydah was being held and took command, adopting more aggressive interrogations tactics, Mayer wrote. The Bush administration approved the full battery of harsh tactics, including waterboarding, in mid-summer 2002.

Mayer's account was backed up by one of the FBI agents, Ali Soufan, who broke his long silence on the topic in an op-ed in the New York Times, citing Zubaydah's cooperation in providing information about Padilla and KSM before the CIA began the harsh tactics.

"It is inaccurate ... to say that Abu Zubaydah had been uncooperative," Soufan wrote. "Under traditional interrogation methods, he provided us with important actionable intelligence." [[NYT, April 23, 2009](#)]

After taking office in January 2009, President Barack Obama issued an executive order closing the "black sites" and prohibiting the CIA's "enhanced interrogation techniques." The Obama

administration also has released documents describing how Bush's Justice Department issued legal opinions that permitted waterboarding and other torture techniques.

In August 2009, the Obama administration released a 2004 CIA Inspector General's report, which was critical of the CIA's abusive interrogations. The CIA background paper detailing how the methods were used in combination was part of the package of documents made public at that time.