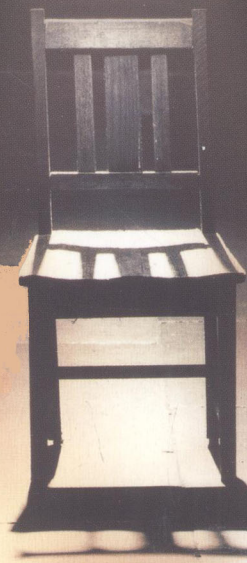


Foreword by MARK BOWDEN

THE U.S. INTERROGATORS WHO USED
BRAINS, NOT BRUTALITY, TO TAKE DOWN
THE DEADLIEST MAN IN IRAQ

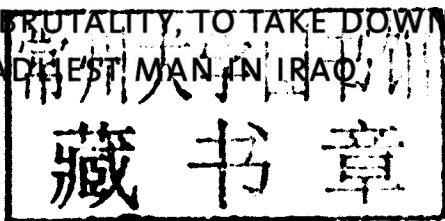


HOW TO BREAK A TERRORIST

MATTHEW ALEXANDER
with JOHN R. BRUNING

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THE U.S. INTERROGATORS WHO USED
BRAINS, NOT BRUTALITY, TO TAKE DOWN
THE DEADLIEST MAN IN IRAQ



Matthew Alexander
with John R. Bruning



St. Martin's Griffin
New York

*For the American soldiers and Iraqi civilians
who have died in this war.*

The views presented in this book are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other U.S. Government agency.

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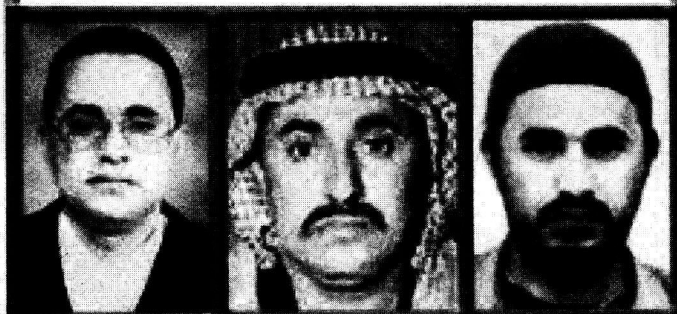
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HOW TO BREAK A TERRORIST

REWARD

Up to \$10,000,000 USD
ABU MUSAB AL ZARQAWI



**This man is wanted for murdering
innocent women and children.**

This terrorist born in Jordan also goes by the names:

**Ahmed Al Kalaylah,
Fadel Nazzal Al Khalaylah,
Abu Mussab Al Zarqawi,
Abu Musa Al Zarkawi**

778-4076 Inside Bagdad

01-778-4076 Inside Iraq

964-01-778-4076 Outside Iraq

Email: tips@orha.centcom.mil

Your identity will remain secret

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Author's Note

IT WOULD BE impossible to recollect every word of every interrogation that I conducted or monitored in Iraq, but I've detailed these conversations as accurately as I could. I am writing under a pseudonym, and I have deliberately changed names and some operational details throughout to protect U.S. troops, ongoing missions, and the families of detainees from Al Qaida reprisals. This material was submitted to the Department of Defense for prepublication review and the blacked out material reflects deletions made by the DoD.

Foreword

by Mark Bowden

I GREW INTRIGUED BY the subject of interrogation in 2001, not long after the September 11 attacks, because to combat small cells of terror-bent fanatics, the essential military tool would be not weaponry but knowledge. How do you obtain information about a secretive enemy? There would, of course, be spying, both electronic and human. America is perhaps the most capable nation in the world at the former and would have to get better fast at the latter. The third tool, potentially the most useful and problematic, would be interrogation.

How do you get a captive to reveal critical, timely intelligence? I wrote about interrogation theory for *The Atlantic* in 2002 in an article called "The Dark Art of Interrogation," which predated the revelations of abuses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. In the years since, the subject matter has become predictably politically charged and highly controversial, with liberals viewing harsher tactics as a sign of moral and legal degeneration, and conservatives regarding attitudes toward coercion as a litmus test of one's seriousness about the war on "terror."

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When I first met Matthew in 2007, it was a chance to learn exactly how our military was conducting high-level interrogations five years on. I was surprised (although I should not have been) to learn that a cadre of professional interrogators, or 'gators, had taken root inside the military: young men and women, some in uniform, others private contractors, who had years of hands-on experience interrogating prisoners in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. It was heartening to learn from Matthew that the army had outgrown some of the earlier cruder methods of questioning. The quickest way to get most (but not all) captives talking is to be nice to them.

But what does it mean to be "nice" to a subject under interrogation? As Matthew's firsthand story of the intelligence operation that located and ultimately killed Abu Musab al Zarqawi illustrates, it often means one thing to the subject and another to the interrogator. It means, ideally, getting to know the subject better than he knows himself and then manipulating him by role-playing, flattering, misleading, and nudging his or her perception of the truth slightly off center. The goal is to turn the subject around so that he begins to see strong logic and even wisdom in acting against his own comrades and cause.

The greater part of the noise in media and politics over interrogation concerns the use of physical coercion, which is relevant to only a tiny fraction of the cases handled by military intelligence. The real work, as this book illustrates, can be far more challenging, complex, and interesting. The work could not be more important. Long after U.S. troops leave Iraq and even Afghanistan, the work of defeating Islamic fanatics will go on worldwide. We need more talented 'gators

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like Matthew, ideally ones with broad knowledge and experience in the parts of the world where they work, with fluency in local languages and dialects, and with a subtle understanding of what makes people tick.

Because if you know that, you also know what makes them talk.

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AS WE APPROACH the tenth anniversary of 9/11, interrogators continue to play a vital role in keeping America safe, as we've seen recently with the interrogations of the would-be Christmas Day bomber and the Time Square Plot. In addition, I talked to an interrogator involved in uncovering the nickname of Osama bin Laden's courier through non-coercive interrogations, which led to the Al Qaeda leader's death. It has recently been made public that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind 9/11 and the former Al Qaeda #3 man, didn't provide helpful information in locating bin Laden and also lied to his interrogators to throw them off the trail—the result of his torture (including waterboarding). Mohammed, when he was captured in 2002, was our best lead to bin Laden. Instead of convincing him to cooperate through non-coercive methods and eliciting the true name of the courier or his location, the decision to torture him practically ensured that bin Laden would remain at large for another nine years. Just as professional interrogators have been saying since the start of this

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debate, torture and abuse only slow down the acquisition of timely and accurate intelligence information.

After the interrogation debacle of the Bush years, due to the hard work of actual interrogators, versus those who know nothing about the profession, we started to make significant headway in advancing our interrogation methods. Interrogators continue to prove capable of meeting our country's intelligence demands and skilled interrogators are needed now more than ever.

The Intelligence Science Board and other study groups have completed research over the past few years validating the opinions of experienced interrogators: rapport-building approaches produce the best chance of success, a multidisciplinary approach can improve our methods, and cultural knowledge is vital to convincing detainees to cooperate. These conclusions reaffirm the professionalism and dedication of U.S. military and civilian law enforcement interrogators who are committed to improving their craft. The false barrier between these two groups has crumbled and techniques have cross-pollinated because of the establishment of the High-Value Interrogation Group that put together interrogators from the military, law enforcement, and intelligence. America is safer for it.

Since the initial release of *How to Break a Terrorist*, I've spoken to more than a hundred audiences across America, fielding questions from university students, church congregations, professors, journalists, commentators, soldiers, interrogators, intelligence agents, elected officials, human rights defenders, researchers, and everyday citizens. I learned, just as I did as an interrogator, that questions can tell you just as much as answers. The majority of Americans are staunchly against the

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use of immoral interrogation methods in all circumstances, but there remains a portion of the American public that believes “enhanced interrogation techniques,” a euphemism for torture and abuse, should be permitted for certain hardcore or high-value detainees. Despite the moral, legal, and pragmatic arguments for an absolute prohibition against torture and abuse, supported by numerous professional interrogators and respected military leaders such as General David Petraeus, a small minority of citizens continue to believe to the contrary. That is why successful interrogation stories such as the chase for Zarqawi must continue to be told and retold.

Interrogators today are walking in the footsteps of giants. Veteran interrogators from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, Panama, and the First Gulf War created a rich legacy of service in this unheralded profession. Since 9/11, however, the demands of two wars and the intense operations tempo across the globe required a significant increase in the numbers of interrogators to support our missions. As a result, interrogators today are much younger than their counterparts in World War II or previous conflicts. Culturally, this next generation of interrogators brings both advantages and disadvantages. That said, I’m a firm believer that they are the perfect raw material from which to mold experts in the art.

First, this generation grew up in the age of globalization and the Internet. Younger generations are more culturally aware than their ancestors, which is one of the keys to success in the interrogation booth. Secondly, this is the Facebook generation and Al Qaeda, it turns out, is organized according to social networks, just like Facebook. Young interrogators

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intrinsically understand that the enemy we face is organized not like rank-and-file soldiers, but according to social relationships. Finally, this generation grew up watching reality television, and for all its faults, through it they have learned the power of raw emotions, and how to use them to their advantage. It turns out that emotional approaches are very effective against the most dedicated members of Al Qaeda. Why? Because these men were recruited using emotional approaches and, hence, they are the quite susceptible to them.

Several of the interrogators in *How to Break a Terrorist* were in their young twenties during the chase for Zarqawi. The majority of my team had yet to reach their third decade and for many of them it was their first trip outside the United States and their first time talking to an Arab or a Muslim when they sat down face-to-face with a member of Al Qaeda. They performed beyond everyone's expectations.

Ultimately, the hunt for Zarqawi was a team effort. Although the final months of the chase ended in a dramatic series of interrogations and raids told herein, hundreds of brave men and women, American and others, contributed to this effort over several years. Many of them gave their lives during the hunt for one of the most notorious mass murderers of our generation. They are not forgotten.

Matthew Alexander
May 14, 2011

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PART I

PROLOGUE

*By God, your dreams will be defeated by our blood
and by our bodies. What is coming is even worse.*

—ABU MUSAB AL ZARQAWI

