

## **The Morality of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques**

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After the events that took place on September 11, 2001, the United States intelligence community has received backlash for its actions taken against terrorist detainees during interrogation. There has been a split among citizens of the United States - those for and those against the actions taken. Many Christians oppose these techniques by arguing that inflicting pain for the purpose of learning something is evil, while others believe it is the only way. Enhanced interrogation techniques are used to fulfill a higher moral duty, and they are acceptable when done with correct intentions in certain scenarios.

### **Background of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques**

Enhanced techniques were used after the horrific terrorist attack in New York City twenty years ago. Once the aftermath of the attack had been evaluated, 2,996 people were dead from the crashes (History, 2011). Never in the history of the United States had such an attack taken place.

The leading nation of the Free World would now turn its sights toward the War on Terror, with the goal of thwarting terrorist attacks and seeking justice for the thousands of victims on the 11th. President George W. Bush stood atop the ashes of the World Trade Center and spoke to the American people saying, “On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country [...] All of this brought upon us in a single day, and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack” (Bush, 2001). Bush’s speech continued on, inciting patriotism and unity among the American people.

### **A Shift in Public Opinion**

This unity would shortly be undone after the news broke regarding the techniques of interrogation used against terrorist group members. Many viewed these tactics as inhumane and

evil, while others viewed these methods as just and necessary. The Obama Administration took a strong stance against the methods, stating that they were actions taken “contrary to our values” (Jackson, 2014). However, when President George W. Bush was in office, times were different, and a more imperative situation regarding stopping terrorism was a priority. The Obama Administration banned the use of said techniques in 2009, but the shock and rapid development of solutions was not as high of a priority eight years later. Bruce Jessen, one of the psychologists involved in developing enhanced interrogation techniques said that, “We served our country at a time when freedom and safety hung in the balance” (Chappell, 2017). Jessen also stated that what he and his colleagues did during that time was “legal and authorized and protected our country from another vicious attack” (Chappell, 2017). The Director of National Intelligence at the time, Dennis Blair, clarified that he did not believe that the CIA should be punished for its actions taken against terrorist prisoners. He also declared that “the information gained from these techniques was valuable in some instances” (Blair, 2009). Director Blair’s statements showed that even if there was not an overabundance of valuable intelligence from using enhanced techniques, some was still gathered that benefitted the United States and its War on Terror. Times were very different from September 11, 2001, to the beginning of 2009. Blair knew this when he also stated that “we do not need these techniques to keep America safe” (Blair, 2009). Even today, thirteen years after the methods were banned, times have changed even more.

### ***Differentiating Between Enhanced Interrogation Techniques and Torture.***

Interrogation techniques have been used for centuries, and many have never been opposed to them. However, these techniques under fire are known as “enhanced interrogation techniques.” They are a step above ordinary questioning, and they include soliciting a high level

of discomfort (psychological, emotional, and/or physical) on the detainee. A common term for these tactics is torture, but there is a distinct and important difference between the two.

The Merriam-Webster definition of torture is “the infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Essentially, torture is the infliction of serious pain for immoral reasons. Torture has been used throughout history, many times for religious reasons. During the Catholic Church’s rule, predominantly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thousands of Protestants were horrifically tortured until they died for their beliefs (Hamilton, 2020).

Torture and enhanced interrogation techniques are different because of the intentions and methods. Enhanced techniques are used for the purpose of extracting intelligence. The reason they are being employed to begin with is because the detainee has refused to share any information regarding terrorist activity through an ordinary interrogation process. The thumb screw and torture rack were methods of torture used during the Spanish Inquisition. Enhanced interrogation techniques include waterboarding (simulating drowning), standing for long periods of time with no rest, sleep, water, and/or food deprivation, and some go as far as electric shocking (Associated Press, 2014). Enhanced interrogation techniques should be used as minimally as possible, and with the least pain necessary.

### **Understanding Terrorists**

According to The Economist, the majority of terrorist attacks in western Europe were committed by Islamists (The Economist, 2015). Islamic terrorists are extremely dedicated to the Islamic faith. Their holy book is the Qur’an, and in it are graphic passages that speak of killing infidels. In chapter nine, verse five, the Qur'an reads, “And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and

sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is forgiving and merciful” (Sahih International Version). Another verse in the Qur’an states, “[Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels, ‘I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip’” (Sahih International Version). Any person acting on the basis of religion is the hardest type of person to turn from their ways.

If terrorists in custody refuse to answer questions regarding terrorist attacks, they are subjecting themselves to whatever methods are used. Clearly, the United States is an example to the world of freedom, fairness, and justice, so not any method should be used. However, not learning of any terrorism intelligence puts the American people (and the rest of the world) at serious risk of danger. The intelligence community must provide policymakers with information processed through the intelligence cycle in order to make impactful decisions. Terrorist attacks are imminent threats, especially because they are targeted at large masses of people (National Prevention Framework, 2016).

### **Defense of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques**

Interestingly, those in favor of using enhanced techniques defend their positions by believing it is their moral duty to do so. The ticking time bomb scenario is a commonly used argument by those in favor of these more extreme methods. This scenario would involve, for example, a pending attack that law enforcement knows of, but has no further information on. The only way to prevent this attack is by gathering reliable intelligence from an insider. As Bentham writes, we must “consider whether the immoral act of torture on one criminal can be

justified if committing it leads to the reduction in the equal suffering or torture of the many, especially when those individuals have committed no such crime.” (Bentham, 24).

### **Philosophical Defense**

The Just War Theory is a crucial reference for those in the intelligence community to look to for guidance. Enhanced interrogation methods must only be used with proper approval by an appropriate leader. These techniques are only morally acceptable if done for a just cause, such as stopping a major attack on civilians - also passing the avoidance of civilian harm principle. The difference between torture and enhanced techniques is the intentions behind each. The interrogation process must be used to aid the just cause, not to inflict pain for pain's sake. Of course, the United States government should not use these methods unless there are no other means through which to gather timely intelligence.

### ***Biblical and Historical Defense***

Most Christians believe that these methods are appalling because they go against God's Word and His Commandments. At first glance, these interrogation tactics seem to violate many of the Ten Commandments given to Moses in the Old Testament. However, Christians were some of the most instrumental in rescuing the Jews by breaking these Commandments. The Nazi party was ruthless and seemed impossible to stop. The Christians in the 1930s and 1940s lied, cheated, and stole in order to protect the Jews from the Nazi Party. They secretly delivered Swiss passports in newspapers, and pastors forged baptismal certificates as safeguards against home invasions. Those hiding Jews in their homes had to lie convincingly to the Gestapo, like Corrie Ten Boom and Irena Sendler. Would God have rather them be honest about their involvement in rescuing the victims of World War II? Would He have rather them allow the injustices and horrific human rights violations to happen without fighting against them in all the

ways possible? It would have been immoral to sit idly by as the Jews were tortured and killed, and it would have been a violation of the Ten Commandments and other Biblical principles.

The majority of abolitionists during the period of slavery in the nineteenth century were Christians. They protected people who had no means of protecting themselves by lying and deceiving slave owners and traders. Those fighting to destroy the slave trade stole slave owners' "property." That property was not truly property though, it was human beings. Lies had to be told to the slave owners, forged legal documents had to be created, and covert operations had to be conducted.

Looking back on the times in history when thousands of lives were saved because of the people who chose to make difficult, ethical decisions, no person with a sound moral foundation would argue that they should not have done what they did. Lying, deception, and even violence are the most moral options in the face of certain situations when the alternative is much worse.

Those referencing Biblical principles in their reasoning against enhanced interrogation techniques tend to get tunnel vision. They look at certain passages and principles, and they make decisions based on those, but all factors must be considered in each situation. Jesus did not condemn all violence, and He actually supported some forms in specific cases. In Matthew 10:34, Jesus spoke, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (English Standard Version). If a Biblical worldview is the reasoning people are against such techniques, certain claims must be addressed.

According to the Bible, all sins carry the same weight, but not all have the same consequences. James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (English Standard Version). Because of this Biblical fact, why

are people against interrogation methods that are used solely to provide intelligence, but they are in support of methods used to rescue innocent people throughout history?

The twelve spies sent into the Promised Land to spy had to act deceptively. Joshua and Caleb sought the help of a prostitute woman who hid them in her home and lied to those in pursuit of the two Israelites. Because of her lying and deception (and despite her sinful life), she and her family were spared by God from destruction.

David is one of the most well-known men of the Bible. He defeated Goliath with a slingshot and became King of Israel. As king, he was planning to build a magnificent temple for the Lord, but God commanded him to stop. In 1 Chronicles 22:5 it states, “For David said, ‘Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it’” (English Standard Version). Later, in verse eight, God tells David otherwise. “But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth’” (English Standard Version). God continued to tell David that his son, Solomon, would lead a peaceful life, and he would be called to construct a great temple instead. David was a warrior in many just wars, and he had ended many lives in war. Of course, war is a just reason to take lives, but it is still a tragedy to end the life of one of God’s most precious creations. David's intentions for building the temple were not selfless either. He wanted it to be an incredibly beautiful structure to honor the Lord, but he also wanted to do that for glory and fame - unrighteous intentions. King David’s son had a very different calling. Solomon was a peaceful man whose calling *was* to construct a temple for the Lord.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of People and Government**

This exemplifies why it is so important to understand God's calling. Of course, not many ordinary people would want to involve themselves in national security work, let alone employing interrogation techniques, but some are called into this type of work. The wars that David fought were righteous wars, and someone had to fight them. If David had not, would the enemy have prevailed? Perhaps, and that would have led to so many innocent deaths - including those of women and children. A psychologist who served as a CIA contractor, James Mitchell, explained that "[The CIA] said [enhanced interrogation techniques] disrupted attacks. That it allowed them to understand better the enemy that we had. That it saved lives, and that it prevented another catastrophic attack here in the United States" (Mitchell, 2016). He then continues to defend his part in the decision to use enhanced interrogation techniques by concluding that it was a moral decision he had to make. There are parts of life that are not perfect, but instead are complicated and imperfect but must be done to preserve the safety of innocent members of society. As Matthew 24:6 reads, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet" (English Standard Version).

The United States government has strongly focused its intelligence arm on terrorism after 2001, and with that focus came difficult ethical problems. Every situation must be examined from multiple perspectives in order to make the correct and moral decision, but the best course of action is not always pretty. There are times when lies, deception, and forms of violence are inevitable actions that must be taken to avoid even worse situations that affect many more people in even worse ways. Enhanced interrogation techniques may look detestable at first glance, but unfortunately there are times when these methods are the most moral to use in highly dangerous scenarios.

In closing, enhanced interrogation techniques differ from torture mainly when it comes to the intentions behind each. Enhanced techniques should never be used to inflict pain for pain's sake, but instead to gather intelligence that could prevent a deadly attack on innocent civilians. On occasion, moral compromises must be made in order to reduce possible harm and prevent a worse alternative. While the actions of past individuals should not determine what is right and wrong, there are examples throughout the Bible of people using lying and deception to protect people from dangerous foes. Enhanced interrogation techniques should be used as a last resort, and in the least intrusive way possible. Using such methods is morally acceptable after looking at a situation from various perspectives and determining that those actions are taken as a last resort with righteous intentions behind them.

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