

**OPERATIONAL ISSUES PERTAINING TO THE USE OF PHYSICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL  
COERCION IN INTERROGATION**  
An Overview

**(U) INTRODUCTION:** Throughout history, interrogation has frequently involved the application of various physical and/or psychological means of inducing duress. The objective of this application was to elicit information, compel the prisoner to produce propaganda, submit to political conversion, and or as a vehicle for intimidation. Throughout most of recorded history, the rights of prisoners were limited at best. The concept of international law that governs the treatment of prisoners is a modern phenomenon that remains the topic of continuing debate. This discussion is not intended to address the myriad legal, ethical, or moral implications of torture; rather, this document will seek to describe the key operational considerations relative to the use of physical and psychological pressures.

**(U) PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF INTERROGATION:** The primary objective of interrogation within the context of intelligence is the collecting of timely, accurate, and reliable information. The question that should immediately come to mind is whether the application of physical and/or psychological duress will enhance the interrogator's ability to achieve this objective. The requirement to obtain information from an uncooperative source as quickly as possible—in time to prevent, for example, an impending terrorist attack that could result in loss of life—has been forwarded as a compelling argument for the use of torture. Conceptually, proponents envision the application of torture as a means to expedite the exploitation process. In essence, physical and/or psychological duress are viewed as an alternative to the more time-consuming conventional interrogation process. The error inherent in this line of thinking is the assumption that, through torture, the interrogator can extract reliable and accurate intelligence. History and a consideration of human behavior would appear to refute this assumption. (NOTE: The application of physical and or psychological duress will likely result in physical compliance. Additionally, prisoners may answer and/or comply as a result of threats of torture. However, the reliability and accuracy information must be questioned.)

**(U) OPERATIONAL CONCERNS:**

**(U)** As noted previously, upwards of 90 percent of interrogations have been successful through the exclusive use of a direct approach, where a degree of rapport is established with the prisoner. Once any means of duress has been purposefully applied to the prisoner, the formerly cooperative relationship can not be reestablished. In addition, the prisoner's level of resolve to resist cooperating with the interrogator will likely be increased as a result of harsh or brutal treatment.

**(U)** For skilled interrogators, the observation of subtle nonverbal behaviors provides an invaluable assessment of the prisoner's psychological and emotional state. This offers important insights into how the prisoner can be most effectively leveraged into compliance. Further, it often enables the interrogator to form a reasonably accurate assessment of the prisoner's veracity in answering pertinent questions. The prisoner's physical response to the pain inflicted by an interrogator would obliterate such nuance and deprive the interrogator of these key tools.

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(U) The key operational deficits related to the use of torture is its impact on the reliability and accuracy of the information provided. If an interrogator produces information that resulted from the application of physical and psychological duress, the reliability and accuracy of this information is in doubt. In other words, a subject in extreme pain may provide an answer, any answer, or many answers in order to get the pain to stop.

(U) In numerous cases, interrogation has been used as a tool of mass intimidation by oppressive regimes. Often, the interrogators operate from the assumption (often incorrect) that a prisoner possesses information of interest. When the prisoner is not forthcoming, physical and psychological pressures are increased. Eventually, the prisoner will provide answers that they feel the interrogator is seeking. In this instance, the information is neither reliable nor accurate (note: A critical element of the interrogation process is to assess the prisoner's knowledgeability. A reasoned assessment of what the prisoner *should* know, based on experience, training, position, and access should drive the questioning process. )

(U) Another important aspect of the debate over the use of torture is the consideration of its potential impact on the safety of U.S. personnel captured by current and future adversaries. The unintended consequence of a U.S. policy that provides for the torture of prisoners is that it could be used by our adversaries as justification for the torture of captured U.S. personnel. While this would have little impact on those regimes or organizations that already employ torture as a standard means of operating, it could serve as the critical impetus for those that are currently weighing the potential gains and risks associated with the torture of U.S. persons to accept torture as an acceptable option.

(U) **CONCLUSION:** The application of extreme physical and/or psychological duress (torture) has some serious operational deficits, most notably, the potential to result in unreliable information. This is not to say that the manipulation of the subject's environment in an effort to dislocate their expectations and induce emotional responses is not effective. On the contrary, systematic manipulation of the subject's environment is likely to result in a subject that can be exploited for intelligence information and other national strategic concerns.