



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on March 30, 2009

Not One Terrorist Plot Foiled by Torture of Abu Zubaida

President Bush took peculiar note of Abu Zubaida in a [September 6, 2006 speech](#) on terrorism:

Within months of September 11, 2001, we captured a man named Abu Zubaidah. We believed that Zubaidah was a senior terrorist leader and a trusted associate of Osama bin Laden. Our intelligence community believes he had run a terrorist camp in Afghanistan where some of the 9/11 hijackers trained and that he helped smuggle Al Qaeda leaders out of Afghanistan after coalition forces arrived to liberate that country.



Zubaidah was severely wounded during the firefight that brought him into custody. And he survived only because of the medical care arranged by the CIA. After he recovered, Zubaidah was defiant and evasive. He declared his hatred of America. During questioning, he, at first, disclosed what he thought was nominal information and then stopped all cooperation. Well, in fact, the nominal information he gave us turned out to be quite important.

For example, Zubaidah disclosed Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, or KSM, was the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks and used the alias Mukhtar. This was a vital piece of the puzzle that helped our intelligence community pursue KSM. Zubaidah also provided information that helped stop a terrorist attack being planned for inside the United States, an attack about which we had no previous information. Zubaidah told us that Al Qaeda operatives were planning to launch an attack in the United States and provided physical descriptions of the operatives and information on their general location.

The only problem with Bush's speech was that every piece of information Zubaidah gave *after* his initial burst of cooperation (i.e., information given during torture) was false. The *Post* story reveals:

The [torture] interrogations led directly to the arrest of Jose Padilla, the man Abu Zubaida identified as heading an effort to explode a radiological "dirty bomb" in an American city. Padilla was held in a naval brig for 3 1/2 years on the allegation but was never charged in any such plot. Every other lead ultimately dissolved into smoke and shadow, according to high-ranking former U.S. officials with access to classified reports. "We spent millions of dollars chasing false alarms," one former intelligence official said.

Zubaida was not even an official member of al-Qaeda, the *Post* noted, but instead he was a low-level associate who ran a safehouse for them. As a mere associate, U.S. intelligence officials recently concluded, he didn't have access to any key information on terror plots. He had told everything he knew at the initial questioning, and only after torture did he claim to be a high-level al-Qaeda operative.

Of detainees actually charged with crimes by the Bush administration's "military commissions," the *Post* had this to say about their association with Abu Zubaida: "When they were first charged in 2005,



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these detainees were accused of conspiring with Abu Zubaida, and the charge sheets contained numerous references to Abu Zubaida's alleged terrorist activities. When the charges were refiled last year, his name had vanished from the documents."

Oops. The Bush administration had already realized what scrutiny would have done to claims by Zubaida's claims of grandeur. Zubaida had simply told U.S. interrogators what he thought they wanted to hear in order to stop the torture.

The *Post* story concluded: "Since 2006, Senate intelligence committee members have pressed the CIA, in classified briefings, to provide examples of specific leads that were obtained from Abu Zubaida through the use of waterboarding and other methods, according to officials familiar with the requests. The agency provided none, the officials said."

Perhaps the Bush administration should have listened to senior intelligence officials from the beginning, who had advised torture doesn't work, instead of shunting them aside. Following that practical advice would have conformed with the principles of the Constitution as well, since the [Eighth Amendment](#) bans torture.

— Photo: U.S. Army Sgt. Sara Wood



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