

Volume 11 | Issue 2

Summer 2008

Implementing "Torture Lite": An Army Interrogator's First-Hand Account

Tony Lagouranis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr>

 Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tony Lagouranis, *Implementing "Torture Lite": An Army Interrogator's First-Hand Account*, 11 N.Y. City L. Rev. 335 (2008).
Available at: [10.31641/clr110212](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr/10.31641/clr110212)

The CUNY Law Review is published by the Office of Library Services at the City University of New York. For more information please contact cunylr@law.cuny.edu.

IMPLEMENTING “TORTURE LITE”: AN ARMY INTERROGATOR’S FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

*Tony Lagouranis**

I was an army interrogator and I spent one year in Iraq. So I am just going to tell you my story about what happened and give you a little context for how these abuses could have taken place. I joined in 2001, before the attacks took place, and I was actually in interrogation school during the attacks of 9/11. We were taught in school that we could never torture anybody—cruel and inhuman treatment was not allowed. We were taught according to the Geneva Convention.¹ We were told that everyone would be treated as an enemy prisoner of war, even if they were not actually afforded that status. So even if we had an asserted detainee, we would have to treat him or her according to Geneva.

We believed that. We believed that we would never end up abusing detainees as interrogators, but by the time I was deployed to Iraq, we had already invaded Afghanistan. We talked to people that had been to Guantánamo and had been interrogated in Afghanistan. They were telling us that Geneva did not apply. We had also read Mark Bowden’s article in the *Atlantic Monthly*,² which advocates “torture lite.” “Torture lite,” as most of you know, is many of the things that Dr. Sveaass just described, like isolation and sleep deprivation, stress positions, and humiliation. Bowden said it worked—he said that “torture lite” worked.³

So we deployed to Iraq, and we were given a briefing by an Army psychiatrist about “Arabs” and what we were going to be dealing with. We were told that Arabs do not think logically, that they are liars, that they respond well to violence, that they are inordinately afraid of dogs. We were also told by our superiors that Geneva did not apply, and so we were in a situation where we did not know what our legal limits were. We were also given a document

* Tony Lagouranis was born in Chicago, IL. He is a former U.S. Army soldier who was stationed in Iraq. His first hand accounts of torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel are recorded in his book *FEAR UP HARSH: AN ARMY INTERROGATOR’S DARK JOURNEY THROUGH IRAQ* (2007), co-authored with Allen Mikaelian.

¹ Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3316, 75 U.N.T.S. 135.

² Mark Bowden, *The Dark Art of Interrogation*, *THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY*, Oct. 2003, at 51, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200310/bowden>.

³ *Id.*

issued by the Pentagon called the “Interrogation Rules of Engagement,”⁴ and it listed legal practices like using dogs, stress positions, inducing hypothermia—it did not explicitly name that, but it said “environmental manipulation,” which we took to mean hypothermia.⁵ It named other practices as well.

So we began implementing these things. A lot of the justification was that we had undergone many of those things ourselves: we were constantly afraid; using dogs was not torture; in the military, we experienced sleep deprivation; we often experienced hypothermia; we were forced to exercise to the point of severe pain; we were forced to sit in stress positions. The real difference is that it was not being inflicted on us by an evil actor—someone who was trying to cause us pain. They were asking us to do our job or trying to train us. That is a really big difference, and that is the difference between torture and simply being cold or isolated, or whatever.

I do believe those things are torture. I can tell you the effects on the detainees were severe. All of these things would be used in combination. So it was very intense. We would take a healthy person—a healthy rational person—and reduce them to somebody who could not think coherently and was clearly suffering physical effects within a very short period of time using these techniques. About halfway through the year, we stopped—we could not handle being so brutal. I should say, too, that a lot of the torture that we were doing was not really about intelligence gathering. It was about humiliation, revenge, and domination. At one point during the year, I was implementing all these things on a detainee who I realized had no information to give us. Even if he were guilty of what we had accused him of doing, he had no intelligence value. So I was up at two o’clock in the morning using dogs; he was in a shipping container, freezing cold, in a stress position. I realized that this was for nothing. I had been ordered to do this.⁶ It was not

⁴ A chart posted at Abu Ghraib in the fall of 2003 listed interrogation approaches authorized by Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez. Interrogation Rules of Engagement, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/torture/paper/rules.html>. See also John Diamond, *Senators Assail Request for Aid For the Military*, N.Y. TIMES, May 14, 2004, at A1.

⁵ Steven H. Miles, *Medical Ethics and the Interrogation of Guantanamo 063*, 7(4) AM. J. BIOETH. 5, 6–8 (2007) (Discussing medical collaboration in interrogation, specifically mentioning the use of an air conditioner which resulted in a detainee’s hospitalization for hypothermia. In looking at whether this was authorized under the Defense Department policy, it was found that cooling with an air conditioner was authorized environmental manipulation.)

⁶ See Memorandum by Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez for Commander, Central Command on CJTF-7 Interrogation and Counter-Resistance Policy (September 14, 2003), available at <http://www.aclu.org/FilesPDFs/september%20sanchez%20memo.pdf> (The memorandum provides authorization for interrogation techniques

just something I was doing for fun.

A friend of mine was using these same techniques in another location. He complained about them. They were even actually physically punching and kicking detainees also.⁷ He started complaining about it to the unit that he was working with. They asked JAG officers—military lawyers—to come out and explain to him why those things were legal, which they did. They said these were legal.⁸

I’m just going to close there. Thank you.

such as “exploit[ing] Arab fear of dogs while maintaining security during interrogations” and use of “stress positions.” The memorandum was unclassified and obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union pursuant to a FOIA request.); HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, “NO BLOOD, NO FOUL” SOLDIERS’ ACCOUNTS OF DETAINEE ABUSE IN IRAQ 12–13, 15 (2006), available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/07/22/no-blood-no-foul> (reporting that a soldier believed that “some sort of pressure to use aggressive techniques [was] coming from higher up in the chain of command” at Camp Nama, Iraq).

⁷ See Eric Schmitt, *Official Declines to Pin Blame for Blunders in Interrogations*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 11, 2005, at A10; see also Eric Fair, Op-Ed., *An Iraq Interrogator’s Nightmare*, THE WASH. POST, Feb. 9, 2007, at A19 (former interrogator in Iraq reflecting on his observation of colleagues’ abuse of detainees, including punching and kicking).

⁸ Douglas Jehl, *The Reach of War: Detainee Treatments; U.S. Rules on Prisoners Seen as a Back and Forth of Mixed Messages to G.I.’s*, N.Y. TIMES, June 22, 2004, at A7.

