

BOOK REVIEWS

Rebuttal: The CIA Responds to the Senate Intelligence Committee's Study of its Detention and Interrogation. George J. Tenet, Porter J. Goss, Mike Hayden, John McLaughlin, Philip Mudd, and Jose A. Rodriguez. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015, 352 pp., \$14.90.

Broken!: A True Story of Terror, Torture, and Treason, in Fictional Form to Avoid Legal Retaliation Against Those Who Were There. Michael S. Kearns and Ronald B. Solomon. Evergreen, CO: Rocky Mountain Press, 2015, 504 pp., \$17.99.

Two books—one a book of lies marketed as the truth, the other real-world experience disguised as fiction—offer us an opportunity to understand how easily individuals, organizations, and entire countries can become “unhinged”—deranged and divorced from all that they claim to hold sacred, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness . . . and the due process of law that underlies these goals.

REBUTTAL: LIES PRESENTED AS TRUTH

Rebuttal is a book of lies—the authors are doubling down on the lies they told previously. They seek to preserve what political and financial cachet they still have by claiming their embrace of torture has only been criticized by an isolated group of partisan Democratic senators. They studiously avoid the detailed critical report of the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) own Inspector General, then John Helgerson, which damned CIA “leaders” and found multiple violations of policy and practice. They refuse to acknowledge the report by the Senate Armed Services Committee on detainee treatment that reached the same conclusions about the origins, evils, and harm to U.S. policy and intelligence collection of “enhanced interrogation,” a euphemism for “torture” first used as a pervasive instrument of modern national policy and practice by Nazi Germany during World War II. Naturally, they do not recognize the persistent professionals who have protested across many forums, including a letter in 2005 to Senator John McCain (R-AZ) signed by, among others, Admiral and former Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner (Human Rights First, 2005). A decade later, an editorial review easily itemized “Twelve Errors (and Counting)” in *Rebuttal* (Human Rights First, 2015). Another recent letter against *Rebuttal* is cosigned by Philip Giraldi (2015), himself a former CIA officer.

In 2015, 28 intelligence professionals submitted an open letter about this book to President Barack Obama. The complete letter was first published as “US Intel Vets Decry CIA's Use of Torture.” The letter has been widely reprinted and also appears as a book review at Amazon. The following is the conclusion of the letter:

The book, *Rebuttal*, is a new incarnation of the lie extolling the efficacy of torture. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, a time of perceived crisis and palpable fear,

the leaders of the CIA decided to ignore international and domestic law. They chose to discard the moral foundations of our Republic and, using the same justifications that authoritarian regimes have employed for attacking enemies, and embarked willingly on a course of action that embraced practices that in earlier times the United States had condemned and punished as a violation of U.S. laws and fundamental human rights.

As former intelligence officers, we are compelled by conscience to denounce the actions and words of our former colleagues. In their minds they have found a way to rationalize and justify torture. We say there is no excuse; there is no justification. The heart of good intelligence work—whether collection or analysis—is based in the pursuit of truth, not the fabrication of a lie. (Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, 2015, para. 27–29)

It is helpful, in challenging the lies in this book about the efficacy of waterboarding, to point out that after each of the major invasions the United States has mounted in recent history, from Panama onward to Iraq, a single U.S. Army colonel, one of the most successful counterintelligence officers in the U.S. ranks, has been brought out of retirement to create and manage the equivalent of a Marriott Courtyard for high-value prisoners. This officer, who prefers not to be named, has never had difficulty eliciting every scrap of useful information from his prisoners, each treated with dignity, well fed, and able to sleep soundly, each deeply aware of the benefits of collaboration that include financial rewards and resettlement anywhere in the world including the United States.

It is also helpful to observe that with the exception of Consortium News and a few other alternative news outlets, the letter by proven intelligence professionals has been ignored by the mainstream media.

BROKEN!: THE TRUTH AS FICTION

Broken!, necessarily a work of fiction to avoid legal battles with the mandarins and minions of the American Empire, provides a direct look into the dysfunctional elements of the American war machine that has become deeply corrupt—unhinged. The lead author devised the original torture scenarios for the Special Operations Forces (SOF) Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) programs and defined—as an international standard—the line between legitimate interrogation techniques and torture. He worked directly with Bruce Jessen, the person who promoted—perverted—the conversion of SERE to an interrogation program without limits. The notes he took at the time document very clearly that Jessen subsequently violated all prior professional precepts and “sold” CIA bureaucrats far removed from all prisoners, a menu of torture techniques both reprehensible and ineffective. Jessen’s loss of moral reckoning was endorsed by the American Psychological Association, which chose to collude with the weakening of their ethical guidelines and the approval of psychologists participating in coercive interrogations (Mansoor, 2015; Miller, 2015).

Broken! offers seven core points, all deeply rooted in real-world experience.

1. Torture does not work. It produces false leads that cost time and money.
2. Drone assassinations create more terrorists than they kill while also having a 98% “collateral damage” ratio—for every two nominal “terrorists” killed without due process, 98 children, women, and innocent men are also killed (The World Post, 2013).

3. Intelligence as practiced in the United States is not about producing decision support useful to strategy, policy, acquisition, or operations—it is, as National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower William Binney (2015) says, about keeping the problems alive to keep the money moving. At Hackers on Planet Earth in New York City in July 2014, the author heard Binney say, as recollected, “The intelligence community is not about providing intelligence, it is about keeping the problem alive so as to keep the money moving.”
4. Intelligence is irrelevant to the decisions made by U.S. political leaders. Henry Kissinger says this about that “intelligence is not all that important in the exercise of power and is often, in point of fact, useless” (Kissinger; as cited in Thomsett & Thomsett, 1993).
5. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is impotent; it is not allowed to do its job—identifying and neutralizing traitors—and more often than not is used to neutralize patriots and loyal dissenters in favor of special interests.
6. Secret intelligence programs with a great deal of money and no oversight are the perfect breeding ground for waste, mischief, and brutality.
7. If you do not allow the FBI to do its job, democratic order is in peril.

Rooted in real-world experience at the lowest rung of the political exploitation ladder, *Broken!* goes on to illuminate the deep corruption and questionable moral and intellectual premises of those who market torture as well as drones for assassination without due process and the politicians who embrace communist and fascist methods for effect, some would say as posturing, most of these people having dodged the draft and avoided military service.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Rebuttal is a cover story from CIA leaders who are all indictable before an international tribunal for crimes against humanity. *Broken!*, in contrast, is an educational narrative, one that allows the reader to explore, experience, and understand the moral hazard that is always present when one enjoys absolute power without accountability of any kind. As we know from Abu Ghraib, gang rape, drowning, hanging with dislocated shoulders, and humiliation with feces—these are what American boys and girls consider “fun” when allowed to become unhinged, without adult supervision. The photos of Abu Ghraib atrocities are among the most potent recruiting elements for those who wish to portray the American Empire as a violent abusive criminal enterprise with global reach. Among the more thoughtful reviews of how Abu Ghraib came to be is that provided by Mastroianni (2013).

Leadership appears in both books. In *Rebuttal*, the “leaders” unintentionally reveal themselves to be afraid of failure, unwilling to demonstrate integrity, and therefore all too ready to embrace fratricide and fear mongering to “lead” others into overlooking their hubris and immorality. In *Broken!*, leadership is the platonic ideal of the protagonist and his special forces colleagues, with moral, intellectual, and practical manifestations, most of which demand personal integrity and risk. Both books together represent the reality that in today’s world, U.S. national security operates on the basis of obedience to orders however illegal or unconstitutional they might be, enabled by the immunity from prosecution characteristic of a dysfunctional theatrical political environment.

John Caputo (2014)—a theologian as well as a philosopher—has given us a capstone book, *Truth: Philosophy in Transit*, that puts all of this in perspective. Truth is in constant

motion, a process of evolution that is deeply moral, which is to say, as much about faith and the heart as it is about the head. We are nearing the end of the era of scientific reductionism, religious dogma, and political crime. We are becoming, emerging, as a greater whole, public power finally made possible by the Internet and other influences, the antithesis of concentrated financial wealth and the absolute political and police power of the state.

The truth is open, not secret. The truth is what we the people say it is, not what a few mandarins accustomed to power without accountability might propose. America is unhinged—terror, torture, and treason have become synonymous with American “exceptionalism.” From this point forward, we must pray for a public realization that leaders lie and that the deepest truth about torture is that the person being tortured is the winner.

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Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry

An International Journal of Critical Inquiry

Volume 18 • Number 2 • 2016

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VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 2 • 2016

Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry

*An International Journal
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