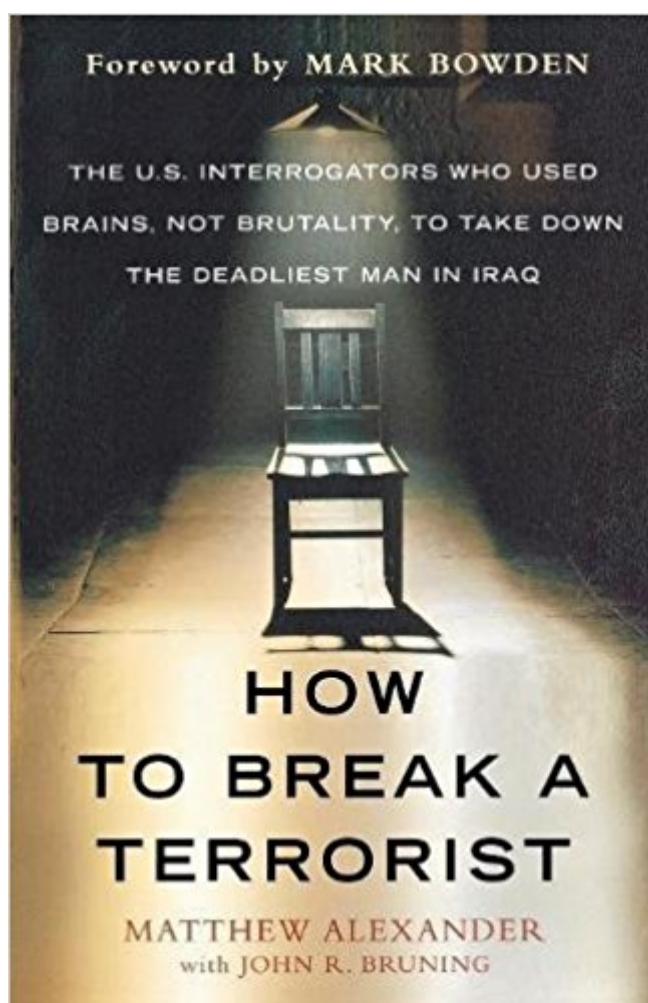


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How To Break A Terrorist: The U.S. Interrogators Who Used Brains, Not Brutality, To Take Down The Deadliest Man In Iraq



Synopsis

Finding Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, had long been the U.S. military's top priority—trumping even the search for Osama bin Laden. No brutality was spared in trying to squeeze intelligence from Zarqawi's suspected associates. But these "force on force" techniques yielded exactly nothing, and, in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the military rushed a new breed of interrogator to Iraq. Matthew Alexander, a former criminal investigator and head of a handpicked interrogation team, gives us the first inside look at the U.S. military's attempt at more civilized interrogation techniques—and their astounding success. Matthew and his team decided to get to know their opponents. Who were these monsters? Who were they working for? Every day the "Interrogators" matched wits with a rogues' gallery of suspects brought in by Special Forces: egomaniacs, bloodthirsty adolescents, opportunistic stereo repairmen, Sunni clerics horrified by the sectarian bloodbath, al Qaeda fanatics, and good people in the wrong place at the wrong time. This account is an unputdownable thriller—more of a psychological suspense story than a war memoir—and a reminder that we don't have to become our enemy to defeat him.

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Customer Reviews

Alexander, a pseudonymous air force officer, and writer Bruning (House to House), collaborate to tell the stranger-than-fiction story of the intelligence operation that located and ultimately killed Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq. An Air Force investigator turned interrogator, Alexander was trained in the post-Abu Ghraib interrogation techniques that replace fear

and control with respect, rapport, hope, cunning and deception. He arrived in Iraq in March 2006, a month after al-Qaeda bombed the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra in an effort to incite sectarian violence, and Zarqawi became the most wanted man in Iraq and the primary focus of U.S. intelligence efforts. Using the new methods, Alexander interrogated five captured al-Qaeda members and tracked down Zarqawi's personal spiritual adviser, who unwittingly led U.S. Special Forces to Zarqawi's hideout; this vindicated Alexander's methods and eliminated the key terrorist leader. Alexander provides a front-row seat to the intelligence war inside the Global War on Terrorism in a riveting, fast-paced account that reads like a first-rate thriller. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“Gripping.” —*TIME* “Alexander provides a front-row seat to the intelligence war inside the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ in a riveting, fast-paced account that reads like a first-rate thriller.” —*Publishers Weekly* “Fascinating and informative content.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

This was fascinating not only for what the author put on the page, but for what he didn't intend to convey. An intelligent soldier trained in and devoted to non-coercive interrogation techniques is sent in under heavy pressure to find a dangerous man driving Iraq into civil war. He arrives to find that humane, legal methods are the only ones being used, but they are not believed in universally or being applied effectively; in other words, he's still fighting an uphill battle. The first interesting (from a human nature standpoint) contrast is with the writings of, say Ali Soufan. Soufan is an ethical and compassionate human being who isn't reluctant to admit to crying and feeling sincere grief for the sailors killed aboard the USS Cole, for his adored boss who died in the WTC, or feeling empathy for a terrorist or his family. He's also one of our most effective interrogators. Alexander, like Soufan, is firmly opposed to torture. But you can read his combat background and the intolerance of his working situation plainly, even down to the harsh title of the book. He feels he's a good guy, and compared to many, he is. But he tells the story of successfully interrogating a man who built bombs to financially support his second wife, while deeply in love with his first wife. Alexander gains his cooperation by giving him fake divorce papers from his second wife, and the opportunity to write a letter, which Alexander assumes will be to the second wife. The bomb-builder knows his confession will lead to his execution. He writes the letter, which turns out to be a deeply loving message to his first wife. Alexander realizes this man has traded his life for the chance to make things right with his

wife and essentially send her one final love letter. The bomb-maker is taken off to face execution at Abu Ghraib, and Alexander has to decide whether or not to mail the letter. Thinking of the horrific photos and videos he's seen of the victims of suicide bombers, he decides not to grant this man his redemption, and destroys the letter. It's a petty and spiteful move that hurts only the innocent wife who could have learned that her husband loved her and gave his life for her. In another instance, he interrogates a young man whose car was followed to his house after being used in a crime. It seems open and shut, as the car was followed by helicopters. The young man vehemently denies any wrongdoing, which angers Alexander. Alexander tells him that he and his two brothers are going to be executed at Abu Ghraib, but if he cooperates maybe the brothers can be spared. The sobbing suspect insists he's innocent. The next day, Alexander tells him that now only one brother can be spared. He hands the suspect photos of his two brothers and tells him to choose one. He has the guy sobbing in emotional anguish, begging to be believed, saying they're innocent and he can't pick one of his brothers to live and the other to die. Spoiler: They're all innocent. The neighbor with a similar car did it. Alexander, to his credit, feels horrible about what he did and personally apologizes. He feels even worse when the suspect sincerely forgives him. Buthere's a guy who's talking about not believing in torture, and he put an innocent man through brutal psychological torture without even thinking about it in those terms. He writes about how upsetting the content of the videos of terrorist acts he has to watch are, and presents his disgust with those evil acts as the reasoning behind his utter lack of empathy with the men he questions. He fakes empathy remorselessly, but stomps down his kinder side when it tries to emerge and tell him to feel for people and believe in their humanity. Again I can't help but contrast his attitude with Soufan's; Soufan lost people he cared about deeply and personally to terrorism, walked into ghastly scenes of wreckage that made him cry, but brings none of the forced hatred to the table that Alexander does as a result of the videos he's seen. This isn't just a story of the ultimate success of the author in using noncoercive interrogation and personal courage and determination to catch a vicious terrorist. It's also a telling insight into what happens when we tell people they're not allowed to feel empathy. You can almost see the author forcing himself to think in lines of black and white, good and evil, even as he navigates far greyer areas. He saved many, many lives, but his work also took many lives, of the men who were executed after talking to him, and the people including children who died in missile strikes launched on the basis of information he obtained. He promised a suspect the life of his best friend would be protected. Zero effort was made to spare the man's life in the US attack, and the cooperating terrorist breaks down sobbing when he learns that his best friend has just been killed as a result of information he provided Alexander. There's great deal of emotional brutality, and

a great deal of missing the point. "We don't torture" isn't just an abstract ideal. It's a component of a bigger message: we, as the good guys, will not stoop to cruelty, brutality, emotional revenge, and other acts that feel wrong to decent men. Despite the evil of our enemies. And that's the point a good man misses here, quite possibly due to the military culture around him.

I needed to know how to get through a strong-self-willed and powerful leader for a novel I was writing about a first-century lawyer in the Roman Empire. It was exactly what I needed.

This book is a lively read about the experiences of an interrogator who does not believe in the effectiveness of "enhanced interrogation techniques" (aka torture). Alexander was effective at extracting more accurate data more quickly than other interrogators using more questionable techniques. Certainly the author has a point of view, but his years of experience in the field and his history of successful interrogations give him much more credibility than a bunch of blowhard chickenhawk politicians. Wherever you stand on the issues of national security and the importance of human rights, you should read this book. It is a quick read, and the information is well worth the time.

A real page turner. Outlined the dark arts of interrogation. I read this book to understand better how to ask questions that get at the real substance of the parties position. I would not recommend the book to learn the dark arts, but to know if someone is trying to use the dark arts against you.

first hand, great read

If I could give it 3.5 stars, I would - for me it was somewhere between "It's OK" and "I like it." I know you can't judge a book by its cover (or title for that matter), but considering the title alluded to "breaking" a terrorist, I was expecting it to be more thrilling or exciting. Instead, I found it to be somewhat anticlimactic. Not a bad read, all in all, but not what I expected.

Great read. It was unbiased and since it was so interesting I couldn't put it down.

Provides an intelligent argument for new school thinking (by now it's the new old school). I saw several parallels to my limited experiences in LE.

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