
Volume 8
Number 3 *Volume 8, No. 3, Special Issue*
Fall 2015: Intelligence: Analysis,
Tradecraft, Training, Education, and
Practical Application

Article 8

The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation during Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 – April 2004. By Douglas A. Pryer, Fort Leavenworth: CGSC Foundation Press, 2009.

Kevin S. Gould

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Headquarters, Department of the Army

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss>
pp. 137-139

Recommended Citation

Gould, Kevin S.. "The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation during Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 – April 2004. By Douglas A. Pryer, Fort Leavenworth: CGSC Foundation Press, 2009.." *Journal of Strategic Security* 8, no. 3 (2015) : 137-139.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.8.3.1464>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol8/iss3/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation during Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 - April 2004. By Douglas A. Pryer, Fort Leavenworth: CGSC Foundation Press, 2009.

***The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation during Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 – April 2004.* By Douglas A. Pryer, Fort Leavenworth: CGSC Foundation Press, 2009.**

Major Douglas Pryer's study of the U.S. Army's interrogation operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM between May 2003 and April 2004 is the most difficult professional book I have ever read. The difficulty lies not in Pryer's style. *The Fight for the High Ground* is lucid and clear. Pryer's book details a descent into an amoral abyss by leaders from theater commanders to individual interrogators during OIF. Pryer shows that poor leadership fueled by weak ethical reasoning led to abusive, ineffective interrogation resulting in strategic damage to the United States. Pryer offers many illustrations of specific units and specific leaders who made bad decisions regarding interrogation operations. These leaders based their ethical reasoning on ends justifying any means necessary and combined this with a total disregard for the interrogation doctrine in place at the time. While Pryer illustrates many of the ambiguities in the 1992 *U.S. Army Field Manual 34-52*, he reserves his strongest criticism for leaders who authorized and encouraged practices that had no basis in doctrine, policy, or law and for which no soldiers were trained.

Pryer first discusses abusive practices used at Guantanamo Bay and in Afghanistan, where interrogators who graduated from the Survival Evasion Resistance Escape (SERE) course began to implement SERE interrogation techniques into their questioning sessions. These abusive practices migrated to Iraq when interrogators from Afghanistan or Guantanamo deployed there. He contrasts the unethical and abusive practices cited in the Church Report of August 2004 against the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 4th and 101st Airborne Divisions with the practices and results obtained by the interrogators of the 1st AD in Baghdad.

Despite command guidance from CJTF-7 to "take the gloves off" regarding interrogation, the senior leadership of the 1st Armored Division (1AD), beginning with its commanding general—Major General Martin Dempsey—enforced strict adherence to current interrogation doctrine and Geneva Convention protections for all detainees. So-called "enhanced interrogations" were never condoned within 1AD. Subordinate leaders from brigade commanders to interrogation team leaders followed and reinforced Major General Dempsey's guidance. These leaders realized that such practices degraded the moral standing of the United States, the credibility and moral character of the interrogator who practiced them, and were fundamentally

ineffective in obtaining reliable information. As a result, 1AD substantiated only five incidents of interrogation abuse during OIF I. Meanwhile, 1AD detainees provided a steady stream of valuable intelligence.

Pryer identifies a number of systemic improvements to HUMINT operations based on 1AD successes, including the expansion of the Counterintelligence/HUMINT/Interrogation (2X) staff section of the command intelligence directorate and the emphasis on document (and later media) exploitation. While other organizations recognized the necessity of expanding these capabilities, Major Pryer limits his focus to the units comprising the 1AD task force and contrasts their interrogation practices and results against the units cited in the Church Report.

Pryer identifies several areas in which the Army quickly adapted both its structure and its doctrine to the current operating environment. Some of the recommendations have been overtaken by events. The Department of Defense no longer employs contractor interrogators and both national and service interrogation policy is under constant refinement. Pryer focuses on shortfalls in ethical leadership and decision making regarding interrogation. He recommends improved and continuous training in both areas. Pryer identifies the crucial weakness in the ethical training paradigm as the current Army Values themselves. They are insufficient to deal with the complex ethical problems arising from war and better suited to "organizational efficacy" rather than a complex counterinsurgency.

Current advanced interrogator training courses offered by the Fort Huachuca-based HUMINT Training Joint Center of Excellence offer more expansive training on moral reasoning and the intersection of morality, ethics, and interrogation policy and doctrine. Leaders must still ensure the humane treatment of detainees and scrupulous adherence to published standards of interrogation practice at all echelons. This book will remind senior leaders and likely inform junior leaders how far we have come in the last nine years.

Pryer's arguments are sound, and on controversial topics such as the degree to which military police should cooperate with interrogators he presents numerous contrasting opinions offered during the 2003-2004 period. Pryer's assessment of improvements in practice and policy would be more complete if he had considered subsequent Army interrogation policy beyond the current Field Manual 2-22.3. Additionally, he could have also considered the main DoD policy implanting the current interrogation field manual—DoD Directive 3115.09, *Intelligence Interrogation, Detainee Debriefing, and Tactical*

Questioning, first published in 2005 and re-issued in 2008 and 2013. All HUMINT soldiers need to be conversant with this policy as well as the Army Field Manual on interrogation.

All HUMINT leaders from the collection team leader to the Military Intelligence brigade commander need to read *The Fight For The High Ground*. Furthermore, maneuver battalion and brigade leaders should read the book so they do not repeat these mistakes. The situations from this book should be incorporated as case studies for interrogation team leaders, HUMINT staff officers (2X), and S2s. The effects of Major General Dempsey's command guidance on detainee treatment should be studied by brigade and division commanders. Finally, future CGSC students should replicate Major Pryer's structure and study to cover additional units and phases of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns.

For an earlier review of Major Pryer's work, consult Dr. Pete Mansoor's review in the July-August 2010 edition of *Military Review*. COL Mansoor served as the 1st BCT/1AD commander during the period MAJ Pryer studied.

Kevin S. Gould is a HUMINT Staff Officer for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Headquarters, Department of the Army