

**Extraordinary Rendition
The new interrogators
Case Study VI**

**Privatised
Interrogation**

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Dozens of people converged this summer in the high desert town of El Paso, Texas, en route to spending six months in Iraqi prisons. They were going not as prisoners, but as their interrogators, walking a legalistic tightrope stretched across the Geneva Conventions. Just for signing up, they got a \$2,000 check from a company that is rapidly becoming one of the key employers in the world of intelligence: Lockheed Martin, the world's biggest military company, based in Bethesda, Maryland.

Before deployment to Iraq, they assemble in Building 503 on Pleasanton Road to mingle with the soldiers and government civilian workers at the welcome briefing that takes place every Sunday. There they get a government-issued duffel bag, filled with basic items for working in the war in the Middle East: cargo pants, tactical shirts, Kevlar helmets and Land Warrior chemical masks. After a week of orientation and medical processing, they fly to Tampa, Florida, and onto their final work destinations – Iraq's infamous prisons including Abu Ghraib, Camp Cropper, a prison at Baghdad International Airport, and Camp Whitehorse, near Nasariyah.

Known in the intelligence community as '97 Echoes' (97E is the official classification number for the interrogator course taught at military colleges including Fort Huachuca, Arizona), these contractors will work side-by-side with military interrogators conducting question-and-answer sessions using 17 officially sanctioned techniques, ranging from 'love of comrades' to 'fear up harsh.' Their subjects will be the tens of thousands of men thrown into United States-run military jails on suspicion of links to terrorism.

The rules that govern all interrogators, both contract and military, are currently open to broad interpretation. Today there is much legal wrangling about where to draw the line between harsh treatment and torture. An amendment to the latest military spending bill introduced by

Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican, explicitly bars the use of torture on anyone in United States custody. His amendment was approved by 90 to 9 votes in the United States Senate. McCain was fighting off Vice President Dick Cheney's suggestion that Central Intelligence Agency counter-terrorism agents working overseas be exempted from the torture ban.

Jobs for this new breed of interrogators typically begin with a phone call or e-mail to retired Lieutenant Colonel Marc Michaelis, in the quaint old flour milling town of Ellicott City, on the banks of the Patapsco River in Maryland, about an hour's drive from Washington DC. Michaelis, who is the main point of contact for new interrogators, came to Lockheed in February after it acquired his former employer Sytex in a \$462 million takeover. Sytex was founded in 1988 by Sydney Martin, a management graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who dabbles in collecting old Danish and Irish coins. In its first year, the Pennsylvania-based company earned \$1,500. By 2004, according to Congressional Quarterly, Sytex was providing 'personnel and technology solutions to government customers including the Pentagon's Northern Command, the Army's Intelligence and Security Command, and the Department of Homeland Security.' Its revenues had reached \$425 million.

The bottom line was undoubtedly improved by the boom in hiring contract interrogators that began just weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. Armed with new Pentagon contracts, Michaelis advertised job openings for 120 new 'intelligence analysts' ranging from Arab linguists to counter-intelligence and information warfare specialists. The private contractors would work at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and at the United States Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida.

At the same time, Lockheed Martin, then a completely different company, was also interested in entering this lucrative new business of intelligence contracting. It bought up Affiliated Computer Services (ACS), a small company with a General Services Administration (GSA) technology contract issued in Kansas City, Missouri. In November 2002, Lockheed used General Services Administration to employ private interrogators at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The contract was then transferred to a Department of Interior office in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

The issue of private contractors in interrogation did not come to light until mid-2004, when a military investigation revealed that several interrogators at the Abu Ghraib prison were civilian employees of CACI (formerly Consolidated Analysis Centers, Inc). The contract to the Virginia-based company was also issued by the Department of Interior's Sierra Vista, Arizona office, located a stone's throw from the headquarters of the Army's main interrogation school.

(CACI did not actually bid on the original contract, but like Lockheed in Guantánamo, it had bought another company – Premier Technology Group – which did. The Fairfax, Virginia-based firm provided interrogators to the Pentagon in August 2003 under a General Services Administration contract for information technology services.)

One of the interrogators, Steven Stefanowicz, was accused of involvement in

the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal that broke in May 2004. It was soon revealed that Stefanowicz, who was trained as a satellite image analyst, had received no formal training in military interrogation, which involves instruction in the Geneva Conventions on human rights.

A subsequent report in July 2004, by Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, on behalf of the Army Inspector General, found that a third of the interrogators supplied in Iraq by CACI had not been trained in military interrogation methods and policies. The same report mentioned that of the four contract interrogators employed by Sytex in Bagram, Afghanistan, only two had received military interrogation training, and the other two, who were former police officers, had not.

It also emerged that no one knew what laws applied to private contractors who engaged in torture in Iraq, or whether they were in fact accountable to any legal authority or disciplinary procedures. When the media began to question the role of the private contractors and the legality of their presence under unrelated information technology contracts from non-military agencies, the Pentagon swiftly issued sole-source ('no bid') military contracts to CACI and Lockheed.

That CACI contract expired at the end of September 2005. But before the company opted not to renew its contract, the company was already working with Sytex as a sub-contractor to supply new personnel to interrogate prisoners.

No new contractor in either Iraq or Afghanistan has been officially announced to date, but Major Matthew McLaughlin, a spokesperson for United States Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, told CorpWatch: 'The Army is the executive agent for contracting all interrogator type services for the Department of Defence. They work their contracts (writ large) from an office which operates out of Fort Belvoir, Virginia.'

Sytex, and thus Lockheed after the takeover, appears to have subsequently emerged as one of the biggest recruiters of private interrogators. In June alone, Sytex advertised for 11 new interrogators for Iraq, and in July the company sought 23 interrogators for Afghanistan. It has also been seeking experienced report writers and programme managers who have worked in military interrogations in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, former Yugoslavia, or the Persian Gulf War.

Advertisements on several websites frequented by current and former military personnel offered a \$70,000 to \$90,000 salary, a \$2,000 sign-up bonus, \$1,000 for a mid-tour break, and a \$2,000 bonus for completing the normal six month deployment. Those returning for a second tour get double bonuses at the beginning and end of their stints. In return, the employees are expected to work as necessary – up to 14 hours a day, 7 days a week. (The companies, however, get to bill the military up to \$200 an hour for this work, according to Cherif Bassiouni, the former United Nations Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan.)

'Sytex is one of our best customers,' says Bill Golden, a former military intelligence analyst with 20 years Army experience, who now runs IntelligenceCareers.com, one of the biggest intelligence employment websites in

the business. 'They are the main company hiring 97E workers today.'

Golden attributes the current boom in private contract interrogators to poor military planning over the last decade. 'The military worked as hard as it could to create a brain drain by moving qualified intelligence people into other jobs, who then quit. As a result by September 11, 2001, there was no one left who had a clue. Now they are rushing to catch up and create 9,000 new specialists, but it takes at least five years to become really experienced. What we have now is a nursery full of babies in the army.'

Yet even by 2003, just 237 new interrogators were graduated from the intelligence school at Fort Huachuca. Today, a Virginia-based company, Anteon, has contracted with the base to provide private instructors to increase the number of qualified interrogators completing intelligence courses to 1,000 a year in 2006.

The scope of contracts for companies like Anteon and Sytex are difficult to determine because they have never been made public. Asked about the details of the interrogation contracts, Lockheed declined to comment. Joseph Wagovich, a spokesman for the company's information technology division that includes Sytex, initially told CorpWatch that the company had only a minor role in the interrogation business and that the company had wrapped up its interrogation contract on Guantánamo. But he confirmed that Lockheed was still supplying other kinds of 'intelligence analysts' on the Cuban base.

Sytex itself also likes to keep a low profile. 'Most of the law enforcement organisations, as well as the other surreptitious organisations we may be supporting, would just as soon not see their names in print,' Ralph Palmieri Junior, the company's Chief Operating Officer, told Congressional Quarterly in 2004.

Even without all the specifics, it is clear that Lockheed is supplying the US war in Iraq with a vast range of both personnel and *matériel*. In addition to providing interrogators, it is currently seeking retired Army majors or lieutenant colonels to develop short- and long-range planning at the biggest US base in Iraq: Camp Anaconda, in Balad, northern Iraq. Also being courted for work in Iraq are 'red switch' experts to run the military's secure communications systems.

On the *matériel* side, Lockheed's Keyhole and Lacrosse satellites beam images from the war back to the military; its U-2 and the SR-71 Blackbird spy planes, F-16, F/A-22 jet fighters, and F-117 stealth attack fighters were used to 'shock and awe' the Iraqis at the start of the US invasion; and ground troops employed its Hellfire air-to-ground missiles and the Javelin portable missiles in the invasion of Fallujah last year.

The company's reach and influence go far beyond the military. A *New York Times* profile of the company in 2004 opened with the sentence: 'Lockheed Martin doesn't run the United States. But it does help run a breathtakingly big part of it.' 'Over the last decade, Lockheed, the nation's largest military contractor, has built a formidable information-technology empire that now stretches from the Pentagon to the Post Office. It sorts your mail and totals your taxes. It cuts Social Security checks and counts the United States census. It runs space flights and monitors air traffic. To make all that happen, Lockheed writes more computer

code than Microsoft,' writes Tim Weiner.

The national security reporter for *The New York Times* explains how Lockheed gets its business: 'Men who have worked, lobbied and lawyered for Lockheed hold the posts of secretary of the Navy, secretary of transportation, director of the national nuclear weapons complex, and director of the national spy satellite agency.'

'Giving one company this much power in matters of war and peace is as dangerous as it is undemocratic,' says Bill Hartung, senior fellow at the World Policy Institute in New York. 'Lockheed Martin is now positioned to profit from every level of the war on terror from targeting to intervention, and from occupation to interrogation.'

Apart from the monopoly on war-related contracts to one single corporation, the increased outsourcing of interrogation to private contractors raises questions of accountability and of enforcement of regulations designed for the military.

Human rights groups are openly critical of this new trend. 'The Army's use of contract interrogators has to date been a failed experiment,' Deborah Pearlstein told CorpWatch. 'Based on the Pentagon's own investigations and other reports that are already public, it seems clear that contractors are less well trained, less well controlled, and harder to hold accountable for things that go wrong than are regular troops.' Pearlstein, who is the director of the US Law and Security Program at Human Rights First (formerly Lawyers Committee on Human Rights), warned that 'unless and until contract interrogators can be brought at the very least up to the standards of training and discipline expected of our uniformed soldiers, the United States may well be better off without their services.'

Former interrogators have a more nuanced opinion. 'The problem is not the use of civilian contractors,' one former Army interrogator with over ten years of field experience, wrote in an e-mail to CorpWatch. 'What is necessary is an active means of supervision and oversight on ALL of our assets in the field... not just the civilian ones. If you take a look at many of the investigations of the military intelligence activities, you will find just as many uniformed individuals breaking the law as contractors. I am more interested in providing proper guidance, training, supervision and oversight to ALL of our intelligence people.'

But Susan Burke, a lawyer for Iraqi prisoners who say they were tortured at Abu Ghraib, challenges the legality of using private contractors for interrogation. 'Interrogation has always been considered an inherently governmental function for obvious reasons. It is irresponsible and dangerous to use contractors in such settings given that there is a long history of repeated human rights abuses by contractors.' The Philadelphia attorney charges that the use of private contractors is illegal. 'The United States Congress has passed laws (the Federal Acquisition Regulations) that prevent the executive branch from delegating "inherently governmental functions" to private parties.'