**CIA torture report: enhanced interrogation helped us catch Osama bin Laden**

**Senate investigators and the CIA are at loggerheads over whether breakthroughs in the manhunt for al-Qaeda's leader came from detainees under "enhanced interrogation"**

The CIA and Senate investigators were locked in dispute on Wednesday over whether "enhanced interrogation” provided vital information in the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

Even before the commando raid that finally killed bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011, the CIA had planned to cite the manhunt as proof of the effectiveness of techniques that President Barack Obama later described as “torture”.

In particular, the CIA said that al-Qaeda captives who broke under interrogation disclosed the name of bin Laden’s courier, Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti. By tracking this individual, the CIA was able to locate bin Laden’s own hideout in the Pakistani town of Abbottabad.

A statement from the CIA said that information "obtained from detainees played a role, in combination with other streams of intelligence, in finding Osama bin Laden".

In particular "detainees in CIA custody" gave up intelligence that "fundamentally changed" the CIA's assessment of Abu Ahmed's "potential importance to our hunt for bin Laden".

The CIA added that the first confirmation of Abu Ahmed's status as bin Laden's courier came from a prisoner, Ammar al-Baluchi, under "enhanced interrogation".

As a result, the CIA chose to "re-question other detainees" on Abu Ahmed’s role and to "review previous reporting in light of this information".

But the Senate report disputes this version of events, describing it as “not fully congruent with CIA records”.

The investigators found that the CIA was “targeting" Abu Ahmed as early as 2002 - and “prior to any reporting from CIA detainees”.

US intelligence had Abu Ahmed’s phone number by 1 January 2002 and confirmation that the number really belonged to him came in March when it was discovered inside an address book belonging to Abu Zubaydah, an al-Qaeda kingpin who was captured in Pakistan.

The following month, US intelligence learnt that one of bin Laden’s sons, Sa’ad, had called Abu Ahmed’s phone. Later in 2002, Abu Ahmed himself used this number to call a phone linked to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The CIA also had Abu Ahmed’s email address from July 2002 onwards and “multiple reports” on his “close association” with bin Laden and his “frequent travel to see” the al-Qaeda leader.

All of this information was available before the first mention of Abu Ahmed by detainees in CIA custody in 2003.

The most important intelligence came from Hassan Ghul, an al-Qaeda figure who was captured in northern Iraq. In January 2004, he provided vital information that linked Abu Ahmed firmly to bin Laden.

However, the Senate found that Ghul cooperated with his interrogators without being subjected to any form of coercion. “He opened up right away and was cooperative from the outset,” said a CIA officer, adding that Ghul “sang like a tweetie bird”.

During two days of questioning, Ghul yielded enough information for 21 separate intelligence reports. He talked of Abu Ahmed’s work as bin Laden’s courier and speculated – entirely accurately, as it turned out – that the al-Qaeda leader must be in Pakistan.

Despite this cooperation, however, the interrogators were convinced that Ghul was still withholding information. They duly transferred him to a “black site” where he was subjected to 59 hours of sleep deprivation and other torture techniques in order to see whether he would yield anything more.

But the report states that the vital information about Abu Ahmed came before the CIA resorted to “enhanced interrogation”.