

## MEET THE CIA'S NEW BAGHDAD STATION CHIEF

**APPOINTEE PLAYED KEY ROLE IN EARLY “TORTURE BY PROXY” TRANSFERS**

*Posted on Sunday, January 28, 2007. By [Ken Silverstein](#).*

Given the desperate situation in Iraq, the CIA's Baghdad station chief needs to be an exceptional manager who can marshal the agency's forces and work closely with the U.S. armed forces. Unfortunately, several sources have informed me that the CIA has nominated a man who has been widely criticized within the agency and seen as a bad fit for the role. Furthermore, I'm told, the new station chief is closely associated with detainee abuses, especially those involving “extraordinary renditions”—the practice of covertly delivering terrorist suspects to foreign intelligence agencies to be interrogated.

By law, I cannot tell you the name of the new station chief, so I will call him James. He is the son of a well-known and controversial figure who served at the agency during its early years. Sources with whom I spoke say James was stationed in Algeria in the early 1990s, after the military staged a coup to block a sweeping victory by Islamist forces in parliamentary elections (and thereby triggered a bloody civil war that lasted eleven years). During the mid-1990s, James served on an Iraq task force that sought to contain and destabilize Saddam Hussein's regime.

Later, James was posted to the CIA's Counterterrorism Center (CTC), where he served as chief of operations, effectively the number four position at the center. He oversaw Alec Station (the unit charged with hunting Osama bin Laden, which was disbanded late last year) as well as the CTC branch that directed renditions. Following the 9/11 attacks, James served as station chief in Kabul and then in Islamabad.

James is close to [Cofer Black](#), the CTC's director from 1999 to 2002 and currently [vice-chairman](#) for the private security contractor Blackwater. It was Black who [famously said](#), “After 9/11 the gloves came off,” and several people with whom I spoke said that James shares Black's enthusiasm for tough methods. James was a key advocate for the increased use of renditions after 9/11 and was a central figure in the rendering of Ibn al-Shaikh al-Libi, who was suspected of running a major Al Qaeda training camp. Al-Libi was picked up by Pakistani security forces in late 2001, following the fighting at Tora Bora in Afghanistan, and was turned over to the FBI for questioning. But James wanted the CIA to take charge of al-Libi, and so he pressed his case with then-CIA director George Tenet, with Black at the CTC, and, through them, with the White House. Despite the strong objections of the head of Bagram Air base and FBI director Robert Mueller, James got his way, and the CIA soon took charge of al-Libi. ([Newsweek](#) [has an account](#) of the fight between FBI and CIA, which I have confirmed independently.)

“[James] thought al-Libi was being uncooperative and he saw the FBI as an impediment to getting the information he wanted,” said one person with direct knowledge of the affair. “He had a sympathetic audience at the CIA and [also at] the White House, which spearheaded the rendition. But al-Libi was already cooperating with the FBI, only the White House didn't think [the Bureau] was being aggressive enough.”

The CIA transferred al-Libi to Egyptian intelligence, which is known for its “aggressive” tactics. The Egyptians got al-Libi to talk, but much of what he said, undoubtedly obtained under torture, was nonsense—including bogus information about collaboration between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein that soon found its way into then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's notorious address to the United Nations.

The appointment of James has the support of top CIA officials, including the current head of the agency's Near East Division (whom James once appointed to run Alec Station and who I'm told is soon to be the new Associate Deputy Director for Operations). But sources have told me that James has frequently been divisive and ineffective in previous positions.

One former official who knows James well described him as “a capable officer,” but, he said, “I heard he had been selected to go to Baghdad, and was shocked. He is a linear thinker, very cautious and uninspiring. His reputation and relationship with the military, especially the special-ops community, is very bad, based on substantive issues that arose during his time [in Afghanistan and Pakistan] post-9/11. He is the wrong guy to send, especially when General [David] Petraeus is headed out to take our final shot at turning Iraq around.”

Another former official called James a “smart guy” who had developed a good relationship with Afghan president Hamid Karzai, but described him as a terrible manager. “He's the last guy you want running a tense place like the station in Baghdad, because he creates a lot of tension himself,” he said.

This person—and two others with whom I spoke—was highly critical of James's role in renditions and said that he would certainly be subject to scrutiny if an investigation into that program is launched. “These guys believed that the memos written by [Albert] Gonzalez and lawyers at the CTC gave them the legal authority to do what they wanted,” he said. “But in my view that was just stuff we were writing to ourselves. No judge ever reviewed them to see if the tactics they approved were actually legal.”

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**Note:** I contacted the CIA for comment but was unable to reach the press office on Sunday. I'll update this story if I hear back.

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[Written By](#)  
[Silverstein, Ken](#)

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