



Message from the Acting Director: "Zero Dark Thirty"

Statement to Employees from Acting Director Michael Morell: "Zero Dark Thirty"

December 21, 2012

I would not normally comment on a Hollywood film, but I think it important to put *Zero Dark Thirty*, which deals with one of the most significant achievements in our history, into some context. The film, which premiered this week, addresses the successful hunt for Usama Bin Ladin that was the focus of incredibly dedicated men and women across our Agency, Intelligence Community, and military partners for many years. But in doing so, the film takes significant artistic license, while portraying itself as being historically accurate.

What I want you to know is that *Zero Dark Thirty* is a dramatization, not a realistic portrayal of the facts. CIA interacted with the filmmakers through our Office of Public Affairs but, as is true with any entertainment project with which we interact, we do not control the final product.

It would not be practical for me to walk through all the fiction in the film, but let me highlight a few aspects that particularly underscore the extent to which the film departs from reality.

- First, the hunt for Usama Bin Ladin was a decade-long effort that depended on the selfless commitment of hundreds of officers. The filmmakers attributed the actions of our entire Agency—and the broader Intelligence Community—to just a few individuals. This may make for more compelling entertainment, but it does not reflect the facts. The success of the May 1st 2011 operation was a team effort—and a very large team at that.
- Second, the film creates the strong impression that the enhanced interrogation techniques that were part of our former detention and interrogation program were the key to finding Bin Ladin. That impression is false. As we have said before, the truth is that multiple streams of intelligence led CIA analysts to conclude that Bin Ladin was hiding in Abbottabad. Some came from detainees subjected to enhanced techniques, but there were many other sources as well. And, importantly, whether enhanced interrogation techniques were the only timely and effective way to obtain information from those detainees, as the film suggests, is a matter of debate that cannot and never will be definitively resolved.
- Third, the film takes considerable liberties in its depiction of CIA personnel and their actions, including some who died while serving our country. We cannot allow a Hollywood film to cloud our memory of them.

Commentators will have much to say about this film in the weeks ahead. Through it all, I want you to remember that *Zero Dark Thirty* is not a documentary. What you should also remember is that the Bin Ladin operation was a landmark achievement by our country, by our military, by our Intelligence Community, and by our Agency.

Michael Morell

Posted: Dec 21, 2012 03:08 PM
Last Updated: Dec 21, 2012 03:59 PM
Last Reviewed: Dec 21, 2012 03:08 PM