

These experiences are also very likely to have a radicalising effect on them and their families, and as such we ought to consider torture a *threat*, not an aid, to national security. However, making tactical criticisms would detract from the fact that these acts are shameful and horrific attacks on the dignity, respect and well-being that all human beings deserve - such debasement wouldn't be acceptable even if it were tactically effective.

Although state authorities treated the Abu Ghraib situation as an aberration, these atrocities were carried out within the context of institutional roles in which individuals are socialised into authoritarian power dynamics and stripped of their humanity, no matter the harm and moral degradation that may ensue. Guantanamo remains open today in spite of President Obama's inaugural promise to close it. A concerted effort by the American population against it, alongside a radical critique of the institutional roles which allow for such debasement of human beings to occur is perhaps long overdue.

Further Reading: Witnesstorture.org

TAKE ACTION: Sign the Petition to Close Guantanamo: www.change.org/CloseGitmo

Sources:

1. <http://milexdata.sipri.org>
2. <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2340>
3. http://thejusticecampaign.org/?page_id=273
4. http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu/resources/library/documents-and-reports/tipton_report.pdf
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6. http://www.cgu.edu/pdf/files/sbos/costanzo_effects_of_interrogation.pdf

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St. John's Church
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STATE-SANCTIONED TORTURE



[Trigger warning: sexual violence, torture]

Although US power has declined over time, it still remains unchallenged in the international sphere, accounting for 39% of global military spending.¹ Such global dominance has given the United States a unique character - that is to say, it participates in activities which would be condemned if carried out by other states, including activities which are nominally condemned by the US itself. One example of this is state-sanctioned torture, carried out as part of the 'War on Terror'.

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Chapter 113c under Title 18 of the United States Code defines torture as an act, carried out by a person acting under the colour of law, which is intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering, (excluding that which is incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within their custody or physical control. 'Severe mental pain or suffering' refers to the prolonged mental harm resulting from the application or threatened application of severe physical pain or suffering; mind-altering substances or other procedures intended to profoundly disrupt the senses or personality; the threat of imminent death, and the threat that another person will be subjected to the same aforementioned treatment.²

According to these criteria then, it is clear that the American state has been engaging in torture. The activities undertaken in Guantanamo Bay are the most salient example of this. President Obama pledged to shut Guantanamo but January 2014 marked its 12th anniversary with no closure in sight.

Former inmates at Guantanamo have reported a variety of techniques used to induce severe mental or physical pain or suffering, including but not limited to sexual assault/humiliation, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, solitary confinement, mock executions, forced medication, the use of dogs to scare detainees, extreme temperatures, sensory bombardment, watching others being tortured, and other psychological techniques.³

As part of a composite statement regarding detention in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay with two other former inmates Shafiq Rasul and Asif Iqbal, Rhuhal Ahmed stated that
*'...the ERF [extreme reaction force] team would come into the cell, place us face down on the ground then putting our arms behind our backs and our legs bending backwards they would shackle us and hold us down restrained in that position whilst somebody from the medical corps pulled up my sleeve and injected me in the arm. They left the chains on me and then left. The injection seemed to have the effect of making me feel very drowsy.'*⁴

When discussing his interrogation, Asif described the conditions of one of the cells he was kept in: *'...I was moved to a cell further along the corridor. This cell had been occupied by a guy who had developed severe mental health problems and had smeared excrement everywhere. It was absolutely disgusting. I had no soap or anything and I was left in this cell. I could not sit anywhere. It stank. It was extremely hot.'*

Detainees at Guantanamo also reported being humiliated on the grounds of their religion, for example having had long slits cut down the front of their orange jumpsuits, so that when they knelt down and prayed, the suits would open up and expose their genitals. Moazzam Begg, a British detainee at Guantanamo, described being forcibly

stripped naked, and witnessing others being repeatedly beaten and eventually killed.⁵ Begg and the other inmates were not given any coherent explanation of what they were accused of, and were deprived of legal representation.

More than half of the 166 men at Guantánamo have been "Cleared for Release" by U.S. authorities. Amongst them is UK national Shaker Aamer whose release the UK government has called for. More than 130 men are on a hunger strike at Guantánamo that began in February 2013. Over 20 are being force-fed -- a process denounced by the Red Cross and international medical groups.

American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq engaged in further physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Former US Army reservist Charles Graner was photographed smiling and giving the thumbs up, while standing next to a group of naked prisoners who had been forced to clamber on top of one another and form a human pyramid. Afterwards, prisoners were lined up and forced to masturbate in front of their captors, while Lynndie England posed for the camera with a smile and gave the thumbs up. Other acts included pouring phosphoric acid over the prisoners, sodomising them with batons and phosphorescent tubes, and *Strappado* hanging.

These acts are not effective; when put under such extreme stress, detainees may say almost anything to stop the pain.⁶