

Revealed: the brutality of the US reign of terror in Iraq

By [Global Research](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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Shocking image of torture in Iraq from 2004



Many have been tortured in “new” Iraq



Another image of torture in Iraq

Abu Ghraib was no one-off. Simon Assaf reports on the documents that reveal systematic torture by secret US military units in Iraq and elsewhere – and the attempts to cover it up

Newly declassified documents have exposed widespread and systematic torture in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay by a shadowy US military unit operating as part of a “Special Access Programme”. This secret unit is funded directly by the US Congress.

The documents have been obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). They reveal a cover-up of the activities of Task Force 626, comprising CIA agents and special forces involved in torture.

One set of papers refers to an investigation by the US Criminal Investigation Command into the abuse of a detainee at Baghdad international airport, a facility reserved for “high value” prisoners.

The victim’s name is blanked out, but he is referred to as the son of one of Saddam

Hussein's bodyguards captured in the city of Tikrit on 5 January 2004.

The documents reveal how the man was stripped naked, doused with water and made to stand in front of a freezing air conditioning unit. He was repeatedly beaten until he passed out, revived and beaten again.

The investigation was cut short because of the involvement of the Special Access Programme. The investigator informed his superiors that any further enquiry was useless, since Task Force 626 members had faked names, shredded medical records and wiped their computers.

The agent tells his superior, "Hell, even if we reopened it [the case], we wouldn't get any more information than we already have."

The same document confirms allegations that the US army is operating secret torture chambers and was part of a widescale cover-up after the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal broke.

One investigator admits in a June 2004 e-mail that his caseload in Iraq was "exploding with high visibility cases". Yet only a few low ranking soldiers have been prosecuted.

Other e-mails detail the type of intimidation used to halt investigations. A memo from vice admiral Lowell Jacoby, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, describes how agents who complained about abuses were threatened, had their car keys confiscated and their e-mails monitored.

The memo, written on 25 June 2004 and headed "alleged detainee abuse by TF 626", describes how investigators were ordered "not to talk to anyone in the US" or leave their base "even to get a haircut".

The ACLU has forced the US government to declassify the documents under freedom of information legislation. They have secured over 35,000 documents so far.

The latest batch, some 9,000 documents, include e-mails, heavily censored legal records and testimonies of soldiers and civilians. Many of the documents describe in harrowing detail widespread use of sadistic torture and casual violence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

The documents also reveal huge tensions between government agencies, as departments and individuals tried to expose the scale of torture and abuse.

One e-mail in May 2004 from "on-scene commander, Baghdad" ordered FBI agents to ignore instructions from senior White House officials to use military dogs, sleep deprivation, stress positions and sensory deprivation during interrogation.

An e-mail from an FBI agent in Guantanamo Bay, released by the ACLU last year, warns superiors that interrogators from the department of defence were posing as FBI agents and torturing victims in order to discredit the agency.

The new documents confirm the widespread operations of Task Force 626 and another shadow unit, Task Force 20.

Earlier documents refer to Task Force 20 members “sodomising” an elderly Iraqi woman with a stick. The investigation into the allegation was abandoned.

Documents released last year include accounts of “about 90 incidents” of abuse by Task Force 626 at al-Azimiyah palace in Baghdad.

In statements, a civilian reports abuse of male and female detainees, including forced sodomy, electric shocks, cigarette burns and beatings.

One report reveals that CIA interrogators in Task Force 626 are involved in the torture of “ghost prisoners” – Iraqis held in secret facilities.

One document describes how they beat a detainee to death then dumped his body in a taxi, instructing the driver to “take it to a morgue”.

These documents have shed more light on the cover-up of torture after the revelations at Abu Ghraib. In February last year the ACLU discovered documents that confirm “house cleaning” after the prison scandal broke.

Hundreds of pictures and videos from Afghanistan were destroyed to avoid “another public outrage”.

Among the images are ones purported to be of US soldiers posing during the mock execution of captives in southern Afghanistan.

Declassified documents also reveal the extent of “Qur’an abuse” in Guantanamo Bay, and incidents where torture victims were forced to wrap themselves in Israeli flags.

The ACLU is attempting to obtain more documents declassified and believes the US government is holding back documents that prove the continued use of torture and secret prisons.

Soldier’s testimony: ‘We just drove off looking for more people to kill’

Many of the new documents include testimonies by soldiers and civilians describing abuse they have witnessed in Iraq.

Among the documents is a statement by an army private describing how his platoon attacked a village after soldiers joked that their sergeant was a coward.

The sergeant decided to prove himself by setting an ambush for an Iraqi civilian.

“Right before a mission one night [the sergeant] went up to his gunner and asked him if he wanted to test the MK-19 [multiple grenade launcher] on someone tonight.

“We usually just drive around and look for people with AKs [rifles] and confiscate them. We have always been able to drive up to them and take the weapon from them with no shots fired.

“That night on a mission we saw an Iraqi civilian walking towards us on the other side of the canal. So we decided to set up an ambush and kill him.

“We waited until he was next to us on the other side of the canal and opened fire on him. He

never took his rifle off his shoulder.

“He just ran away from us into a field for cover. In the countryside in Iraq all people have guns for protection.

“After the man ran into the field we waited close to a minute and there was never any fire returned. That’s when my platoon sergeant told his gunner to spray the field with MK-19 [grenade] rounds.

“The gunner put about four to five rounds into the field. Still there was no return fire. But next door to the field was a house.

Screaming

“[The climate] is so hot that everybody sleeps outside. After the MK-19 explosions all you heard was women and children screaming.

“My platoon sergeant told my gunner to get his eyes [night vision equipment] on the house. There were two men, four to six women and about ten children. My platoon sergeant asked my gunner if there were any weapons and he said ‘no’, that the two men were just trying to get [the women and children] all inside.

Then a single shot came off in the distance well over 500 meters away. My platoon sergeant said ‘fuck it’ and ‘light them up’.

His gunner shot about three to four MK-19 rounds into the front yard and everyone else shot M16 [assault rifles]. It lasted about ten seconds.

“Then we just stopped and saw that the two men were injured. One of them had his arm blown off.

“All the people at the house were panicking. Some ran into the woods, some into the house, and a couple next door into another house. We just sat there and watched them.

“Finally an [Iraqi civilian vehicle] drove by and loaded a bunch of injured people and drove off. And so did we, looking for more people to kill.”

The soldier recounts how captured Iraqis would be “hog tied” to the front of their Humvee military vehicles.

Captive

“We would put the [captive] on top of the Humvees with the gunner until one tried to throw up. After that we would hog tie them and stuff them in between the hood and the brush guard.

“I asked, ‘At least tie his leg to the brush guard so he doesn’t fall off’ and my [superior] would say, ‘Who cares? If he falls off we just run him over and it’s one less to worry about’.”

The private describes in his statement how his platoon was involved in looting the homes of Iraqis.

The platoon would follow expensive cars to their homes. Soldiers would then search the

home and “steal stuff from the houses or POWs [prisoners], such as bricks of money, Iraqi army medals, uniforms, pictures of Saddam... all the way down to cigarette lighters”.

Despite the private’s seven page testimony, none of the other soldiers in his platoon were prepared to back him up. The rest of the report is composed of denials.

The report concludes that no action would be taken and all charges were dismissed.

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