

Torture and Madness at Guantánamo Bay

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When the “trial” of Salim Ahmed Hamdan begins at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, the prisoner may be incapable of working on his defense. Why? According to his lawyers, [Hamdan](#) has essentially been driven insane by solitary confinement in a tiny cell where he spends at least 22 hours a day, goes to the bathroom and eats all his meals. His defense team says he is suicidal, hears voices, has flashbacks, talks to himself and says the restrictions of Guantánamo “boil his mind.” (William Glaberson, “Guantánamo Drives Prisoners Insane, Lawyers Say,” *International Herald Tribune*, April 26, 2008)

Facing life imprisonment on charges of “material support for terrorism,” Hamdan is accused by Bushist military inquisitors of “aiding and abetting” terrorist attacks around the world by virtue of having once been employed as bin Laden’s chauffeur and sometime bodyguard.

Hamdan’s lawyers have asked a military judge to stop the “trial” from going forward until their client is placed in less restrictive conditions.

During a preliminary hearing Tuesday, Hamdan attacked the proceedings and asked to address the military’s trial judge, Navy captain Keith Allred, [The Washington Post](#) reports.

Hamdan told the judge he would boycott the proceedings and bar his appointed defense team from representing him, on grounds that the military commission process is a sham concocted by Washington. He railed against the lack of humanitarian rights at Guantanamo Bay, the lack of access to the news media and to human rights groups.

*“I would like the law, I would like justice. Nothing else. Just try me with the law and with justice,” Hamdan said through an interpreter, a smile creeping onto his face. “I will tell you at the end, thank you.” (Josh White, “Guantanamo Detainee Rejects Court Procedure,” *The Washington Post*, April 30, 2008, Page A04)*

Conditions at the Guantánamo gulag are more desolate and isolating than those on many death rows and maximum-security prisons in the U.S. Insanity-producing isolation however, is precisely the point. Part and parcel of their illegal detention by their Pentagon and CIA masters, Guantánamo detainees, when they are not subjected to “enhanced interrogations” (torture) are confined in 8’ by 12’ pens completely cut-off from the outside world.

As if to drive home the point, Hamdan’s attorneys describe how the alleged “terrorist” has

received but two phone calls from his family and no visits — *in six years*.

Hamdan's case is significant in that the U.S. Supreme Court, hardly a bastion of weak-kneed liberals and al-Qaeda appeasers, used an earlier case to strike down the Bush regime's first military commission system in 2006.

According to attorneys for the detainees, under the regimen established by retired Major General Geoffrey Miller of Abu Ghraib "fame," the effects of intense isolation have transformed the prison camp into a "highly fortified mental ward," Glaberson writes.

But just for kicks, what do the "masters" of psychological torture, the [CIA](#), have to say on the topic of isolation-induced regression in the "resistant source"?

There are a number of non-coercive techniques for inducing regression. All depend upon the interrogator's control of the environment and, as always, a proper matching of method to source. Some interrogatees can be repressed by persistent manipulation of time, by retarding and advancing clocks and serving meals at odd times — ten minutes or ten hours after the last food was given. Day and night are jumbled. Interrogation sessions are similarly unpatterned the subject may be brought back for more questioning just a few minutes after being dismissed for the night. ... A subject who is cut off from the world he knows seeks to recreate it, in some measure, in the new and strange environment. He may try to keep track of time, to live in the familiar past, to cling to old concepts of loyalty, to establish — with one or more interrogators — interpersonal relations resembling those that he has had earlier with other people, and to build other bridges back to the known. Thwarting his attempts to do so is likely to drive him deeper and deeper into himself, until he is no longer able to control his responses in adult fashion. (KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogations, C. Techniques of Non-Coercive Interrogation of Resistant Sources, Regression, July 1963)

But what of the "resistant source" who has been subjected to years of a harsh regime of reverse-engineered SERE tactics, exploited by "skilled" interrogators and their sorcerers' apprentices, the mercenary or military psychologists who do Washington's bidding?

According to Glaberson, prosecutors have argued that the manner in which Hamdan is being held does not constitute solitary confinement in part because "'detainees can communicate through the walls'."

But psychoanalyst Stephen Soldz, a fierce critic of the Bush administration's torture regime and of the collaborative role played by psychologists in U.S.-sponsored war crimes, is harsh in his condemnation. Soldz [writes](#),

The literary genre of prison memoirs from Stalinist concentration camps among others is full of accounts of people able to "communicate through walls." Never before have I heard a claim as brazen as that this flaw in the system of total isolation did not make being locked up alone for years on end in an 8' by 12' cell for 22 hours a day "solitary confinement."

This article does not even mention the existence of another "camp," the super-secret Camp 7 the existence of which was only admitted by the military to the Associated Press last February. While details about conditions at Camp 7 are

unavailable, we can only assume that they are even more brutal than those at Camps 5 and 6 that are described in this [International Herald Tribune] article. (Stephen Soldz, "Isolation driving Guantánamo detainees insane? Will APA act?" *Psyche, Science, and Society*, April 26, 2008)

Let's be clear: extreme isolation, sensory deprivation and other horrors are not incidental to the Guantánamo "experience." On the contrary, such abominable methods are central to the America's torture program. This point was driven home last November when Wikileaks published the primary operating manual for running the U.S. detention facility at [Guantánamo Bay](#). It reads, in part:

a. Phase One Behavior Management Plan (First thirty days or as directed by JIG [Joint Intelligence Group]). The purpose of the Behavior Management Plan is to enhance and exploit the disorientation and disorganization felt by a newly arrived detainee in the interrogation process. It concentrates on isolating the detainee and fostering dependence of the detainee on his interrogator. During the first two weeks at Camp Delta, classify the detainees as Level 5 and house in a Maximum Security Unit (MSU) Block. ...

b. Phase Two Behavior Management Plan. The two-week period following Phase 1 will continue the process of isolating the detainee and fostering dependence on the interrogator. Until the JIG Commander changes his classification, the detainee will remain a Level 5 with the following:

- (1) Continued MSU
- (2) Koran, prayer beads and prayer cap distributed by interrogator
- (3) Contacts decided by interrogator
- (4) Interrogator decides when to move the detainee to general population.

Forty-five years after the CIA's KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation manual was first disseminated throughout the U.S. intelligence "community" one can only conclude, as did Salim Ahmed Hamdan, when he [addressed](#) judge Allred Monday: "My question is, the animal has rights or not? But the human being doesn't have rights?"

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