

PRESS RELEASE

January 30, 2006

Al Qaeda Detainee's Mysterious Release



Moroccan Spoke Of Aiding Bin Laden During 2001 Escape

By Craig Whitlock
Washington Post Foreign Service

RABAT, Morocco -- For more than a decade, Osama bin Laden had few soldiers more devoted than Abdallah Tabarak. A former Moroccan transit worker, Tabarak served as a bodyguard for the al Qaeda leader, worked on his farm in Sudan and helped run a gemstone smuggling racket in Afghanistan, court records here show.

During the battle of Tora Bora in December 2001, when al Qaeda leaders were pinned down by U.S. forces, Tabarak sacrificed himself to engineer their escape. He headed toward the Pakistani border while making calls on Osama bin Laden's satellite phone as bin Laden and the others fled in the other direction.

Tabarak was captured and taken to the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he was classified as such a high-value prisoner that the Pentagon repeatedly denied requests by the International Committee of the Red Cross to see him. Then, after spending almost three years at the base, he was suddenly released.

Today, the al Qaeda loyalist known locally as the "emir" of Guantanamo walks the streets of his old neighborhood near Casablanca, more or less a free man. In a decision that neither the Pentagon nor Moroccan officials will explain publicly, Tabarak was transferred to Morocco in August 2004 and released from police custody four months later.

Tabarak's odyssey from Afghanistan to Guantanamo and back to his native land illustrates the grit and at times fanatical determination of one bin Laden recruit. Yet his story also shows how little is known publicly about al Qaeda figures who were captured after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and the Pentagon. Major gaps remain in his account, and terrorism experts and intelligence officials continue to debate whether he was a member of al Qaeda's inner circle or its rank and file.

His case also highlights mysteries of U.S. priorities in deciding who to keep and who to let go. As the Pentagon gears up to hold its first military tribunals at Guantanamo after four years of preparations, it has released a prisoner it called a key operative. At the same time, it retains under heavy guard men whose background and significance are never discussed.

Eighteen months after he left Guantanamo, Tabarak, 50, still faces minor criminal offenses in Rabat, the capital, such as passport forgery and conspiracy. But his attorney predicts that it's only a matter of time before the case is dropped and all allegations of terrorist activities are dismissed.

The attorney, Abdelfattah Zahrach, said his client's importance as an al Qaeda figure has been exaggerated, although he acknowledged that Tabarak knew bin Laden and worked for one of his companies.

"He was in bin Laden's environment, but he didn't play an operational role," Zahrach said. "Do you think that if he was really the bodyguard of bin Laden that the Americans would have let him come back to Morocco?"

A Family Affair

A review of Moroccan court documents, including records of his interrogations by Moroccan investigators, shows the U.S. military had good reason to consider Tabarak a valuable catch. In addition to his firsthand knowledge of how bin Laden survived Tora Bora, he had worked for the al Qaeda leader since 1989 and was often at his side as he built the terrorist network from bases in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan.

According to the documents, details of which other foreign intelligence officials confirmed, Tabarak served as a jack-of-all-trades for members of the inner circle. For several years, he received his orders and a regular salary from Saeed Masri, an al Qaeda financier, military training camp leader and relative of bin Laden.

Tabarak also dedicated his family to the cause. One daughter, Asia, married a top al Qaeda operations commander, Abu Feraj Libi, who was captured in Pakistan in May 2005 and is blamed for assassination plots against Pakistan's president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

A son, Omar, fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 2001 and was captured by Afghan allies of the Americans. When he was released in a prisoner swap, bin Laden threw a feast to celebrate, according to Tabarak's statements to interrogators.

Defense Department officials declined to say why Tabarak was released from Guantanamo, in August 2004, when he and four other Moroccan detainees were handed over to authorities in Rabat. "The decision to transfer or release a detainee is based on many factors, including whether the detainee is of further intelligence value to the United States and whether the detainee is believed to pose a continuing threat to the United States if released," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. J.D. Gordon, a Pentagon spokesman.

According to interviews in Rabat with people who are familiar with Tabarak's case, however, Moroccan officials had pressed the U.S. military for many months to hand over Tabarak, arguing that they would have a better chance of persuading him to reveal secrets about al Qaeda.

Moroccan interrogators visited Tabarak and other Moroccan detainees at Guantanamo on two occasions and urged them to cooperate, according to his attorney and two fellow prisoners. "They came to see us and brought us coffee and sandwiches," said Mohammed Mazouz, one of the Moroccans who was later released with Tabarak. "But the Americans, they would just abuse us."

During a courtroom appearance in Rabat last year, Tabarak looked gaunt and wore a black baseball cap low on his forehead. After consenting to an interview through his attorney, he changed his mind at the last minute; guards in the courthouse audibly warned him not to speak with an American reporter.

In interviews with Arab journalists, Tabarak has given conflicting accounts, sometimes denying membership in al Qaeda or ties to bin Laden. But interrogation records show that he has described in detail to authorities a long and intimate connection with the network.

He left Morocco in 1989, he has said, on the advice of a mentor from a Casablanca mosque who urged him to become involved with Islamic fighters who were battling the communist-backed Afghan government.

After first making a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, Tabarak recounted, he traveled to Pakistan, a staging area for guerrillas fighting in Afghanistan, and joined bin Laden's network. He received military training at two camps near Khost, Afghanistan, and met with bin Laden at a guest house in the Pakistani city of Peshawar.

Tabarak told his interrogators that he received the equivalent of \$250 a month to help funnel foreign fighters into Afghanistan. When Pakistani authorities decided to crack down on outsiders in their country, he followed bin Laden to Sudan. There he worked on a farm raising cattle, served as a bodyguard and performed other tasks.

By the time bin Laden returned to Afghanistan in 1996, Tabarak was taking on more important roles. He said he worked for a while in a "precious stones" smuggling operation that raised money for al Qaeda. Eventually, he joined bin Laden's personal security detail, accompanying the Saudi on trips across the country to meet with other figures from al Qaeda and the Taliban movement.

Escape From Tora Bora

Tabarak said he had no warning of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks but helped protect bin Laden after U.S. forces went to war in Afghanistan the following month. He said he spent 20 days hiding with bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders in Tora Bora, in rugged mountainous terrain near the Pakistani border, as U.S. forces and their Afghan militia proxies closed in.

According to Moroccan and other foreign intelligence officials, Tabarak sacrificed himself so the others could escape. He took bin Laden's satellite phone, which the al Qaeda leader apparently assumed was being tracked by U.S. spy technology, and walked toward the Pakistani border as the al Qaeda leadership fled in the opposite direction. The ruse worked, although Tabarak and others were captured.

"I escaped as part of a group that included mostly Saudis and Yemenis towards Pakistan, until we were arrested by Pakistani authorities at a border crossing point and then afterwards handed over to American authorities," he told Moroccan interrogators in August 2004.

Zahrach, Tabarak's attorney, confirmed that his client was caught near the border and handed over to the U.S. military. But he denied Tabarak helped bin Laden escape from Tora Bora. He dismissed the interrogation reports as forgeries. He said Moroccan officials have no evidence for their allegations but are too embarrassed to admit it.

"They have to charge him with something in Morocco to prevent him from talking," Zahrach said. "They have to keep him tied up in court and keep him under pressure." Tabarak's next scheduled court appearance is Friday in Rabat. Officials with the Moroccan Communications Ministry declined to comment on the case.

Mohammed Darif, a Moroccan terrorism analyst and political science professor, said Moroccan intelligence officials have overstated Tabarak's role in al Qaeda. He said bin Laden relied almost exclusively on fellow Saudis and tribal relatives from Yemen to provide for his personal safety and was unlikely to accept an uneducated, poor Moroccan into his inner circle.

"People who have known him all along say that Tabarak was a serious player but that perhaps his reputation is a little overblown," said Darif, who interviewed Tabarak after his release from Guantanamo. "He may have been a loyal worker, but he's not sophisticated. When you talk to him, you see pretty clearly that the guy does not have a strong personality."

But other intelligence sources in Europe and the Middle East suggest that his behavior at Guantanamo is further confirmation of his importance. There, they say, he developed a reputation as a tough-minded leader among the detainees. Moroccan officials have described him as an "emir" of the camp who resisted his American interrogators and catalyzed hunger strikes among prisoners.

Defense Department memos obtained by The Washington Post in 2004 show that Guantanamo officials repeatedly prevented inspectors from the International Committee of the Red Cross from seeing Tabarak.

Although the Red Cross was supposed to have access to all persons in military custody, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller told Red Cross inspectors on Oct. 9, 2003, that they could not visit Tabarak or three other detainees "because of military necessity," according to the memos. On a follow-up visit Feb. 2, 2004, Miller informed Red Cross officials that they could see anyone at the base, except Tabarak. Miller once again cited "military necessity." A Defense Department spokesman declined to comment on the memos.

Tabarak has told his attorney and other detainees that he was kept in an isolation cell during most of his stay at Guantanamo. For about one year, he said, he was interrogated only while blindfolded, so he could not see his captors or even know for certain if he was in Cuba or another country.

Staff writer Scott Higham and researcher Julie Tate in Washington contributed to this report.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=11957>

SOURCE: Washington Post

February 01, 2006

Descriptions of Techniques Allegedly Authorized by the CIA

Forced standing and sleep deprivation

- Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin described in his memoirs being subjected to sleep deprivation in a Soviet prison in the 1940's: "In the head of the interrogated prisoner a haze begins to form. His spirit is wearied to death, his legs are unsteady, and he has one sole desire: to sleep, to sleep just a little, not to get up, to lie, to rest, to forget. . . . Anyone who has experienced this desire knows that not even hunger or thirst are comparable with it. . . . I came across prisoners who signed what they were ordered to sign, only to get what the interrogator promised them. He did not promise them their liberty. He promised them -- if they signed -- uninterrupted sleep!"
- The Washington Times reported last year that "some of the most feared forms of torture" cited by survivors of the North Korean gulag "were surprisingly mundane: Guards would force inmates to stand perfectly still for hours at a time, or make them perform exhausting repetitive exercises such as standing up and sitting down until they collapsed from fatigue." ("Nightmares from the North; Korean son recounts life in dictatorship," Benjamin Hu, The Washington Times, April 30, 2004.)
- In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksander Solzhenitsen describes Soviet interrogations including cases of forced standing and sleep deprivation: "Then there is the method of simply compelling a prisoner to stand there." Among other techniques used to break prisoners was forcing them to stay in a fixed position for an extended period of time: "In the Novochoerkassk NKVK, Yelena Strutinskaya was forced to remain seated on a stool in the corridor for six days in such a way that she did not lean against anything, did not sleep, did not fall off, and did not get up from it." Solzhenitsen also describes sleep deprivation being used on a prisoner named Anna Skripnikova in 1952: "[The] Chief of the Investigative Department of the Ordzhonikidze State Security Administration, said to her: "The prison doctor reports you have a blood pressure of 240/120. That's too low, you bitch! We're going to drive it up to 340 so you'll kick the bucket, you viper, and with no black and blue marks; no beatings; no broken bones. We'll just not let you sleep.' And if, back in her cell, after a night spent in interrogation, she closed her eyes during the day, the jailer broke in and shouted: 'Open your eyes or I'll haul you off that cot by the legs and tie you to the wall standing up.'" Elsewhere, Solzhenitsen writes: "Sleeplessness . . . befogs the reason, undermines the will, and the human being ceases to be himself, to be his own 'I.'"
- In 1951, William N. Oatis was taken into Czech custody on charges of espionage while working as bureau chief for the Associated Press in Prague. He was innocent, but signed a false confession after being held and interrogated for six days. He was kept awake for over 42 hours, after which he signed the confession. He described his ordeal in *Life Magazine*. "[After 40 hours of sleep deprivation:] The room was whirling. I could not seem to make my eyes—or my brain—focus. I wanted time to think. I knew that this was a great and perhaps fatal step: if I signed, I would be confessing to something I had not done. I wanted to consider what I might be doing to myself by signing this document—and what I might be doing by refusing to sign it. But there was something else I wanted more. That was sleep. I had been awake 42 hours. Through that time, almost without letup, I had been questioned, browbeaten, and berated. I was limp with fatigue. My eyes kept falling shut, my mind kept blanking out. My future might lie in the balance, but the future must take care of itself. Tomorrow was another day. Tonight was what bore me down. I must end it somehow. There seemed only want way to do that, and that was to sign the confession. So I signed it. The 42 hours had finished me. I had gone to embassy people for help in my unofficial reporting, a procedure followed by journalists everywhere, but now I had confessed the opposite. I had signed a paper saying I went to the embassy to deliver information rather than to obtain it. I had not chosen to abandon the truth -- the choice had been made for me. . . ."
- In *The Great Terror*, a book about the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule, author Robert Conquest describes detainees being subjected to forced standing and sleep deprivation: "Interrogation usually took place at night and with the accused just roused -- often only fifteen minutes after going to sleep. The glaring lights at the interrogation had a disorientating effect." Conquest quotes a Czech prisoner, Evzen Loebel, who described "having to be on his feet eighteen hours a day, sixteen of which were devoted to interrogation. During the six-hour sleep period, the warder pounded on the door every ten minutes, upon which he had to jump to attention and report, 'Detainee No. 1473 reports: strength one detainee, everything in order.' He was, that is, 'awakened thirty or forty times a night.' If the banging did not wake him, a kick from the warder would. After two or three weeks, his feet were swollen and every inch of his body ached at the slightest touch; even washing became a torture."
- In *Gulag: A History*, another Soviet history by Anne Applebaum describes the "'standing test' -- prisoners were told to stand, facing the wall, without moving. . . . One, Engraver P., over fifty years of age and heavily built, had stood for six and a half days. He was not given food or drink and was not allowed to sleep." Applebaum continues: "Most commonly, however, prisoners were simply deprived of sleep: this deceptively simple form of torture--which seemed to require no special advance approval--was known to prisoners as being put 'on the conveyor,' and it could last for many days or weeks. The method was simple: prisoners were interrogated all night, and afterward forbidden to sleep

during the day.”

Exposure to cold

- Robert Conquest, the author of the *Great Terror*, cited above, quotes a Polish prisoner held in a Soviet camp in 1945, talking about the effects of sleep deprivation and hunger: “Cold, hunger, the bright light and especially sleeplessness. The cold is not terrific. But when the victim is weakened by hunger and sleeplessness, then the six or seven degrees above the freezing point make him tremble all the time. . . . After two or three weeks, I was in a semi-conscious state. After fifty or sixty interrogations with cold and hunger and almost no sleep, a man becomes like an automaton -- his eyes are bright, his legs swollen, his hands trembling. In this state, he is often convinced he is guilty.”
- Applebaum writes: “Those who remained stubborn and refused to confess . . . could be placed in a specially harsh punishment cell, very hot or very cold, as was the memoirist Hava Volovich, who was also being deprived of sleep by her interrogator at the time: ‘I will never forget that first experience of prison cold. I can’t describe it; I’m not capable of it. I was pulled one way by sleep, the other by cold.’”

Waterboarding

- “Waterboarding,” in which interrogators immerse or pour water over a detainee’s face until he believes he will suffocate or drown, is intended to cause a victim to believe he is about to die, and therefore amounts to a mock execution. It was used extensively in Central and South America in the 1970s and 1980s and has been called “torture” by several domestic and human rights courts.
- The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, in Chile, issued a report in November, 2004 describing the use of the “submarino” in the early 1970s. One account reads: “Man, detained in September 1973: . . . [T]hey put cotton in both eyes, then adhesive tape on top, and a black hood tied at the neck, they tied my feet and hands tightly and they plunged me in one of those 250 liter barrels of oil which contained ammonia, urine, excrement, and sea water; they submerged me like this until my breath couldn’t hold out, nor my lungs, and they kept repeating this again and again, along with blows and questions, this was what they called, in [the world of] torture, the famous submarine.”

U.S. State Department Criticism of Techniques Across the World

The U.S. State Department has condemned as torture or other inhuman treatment many of the techniques that have allegedly been used by the CIA in Iraq, Afghanistan, and at secret detention sites in other countries. Listed below are some of the countries criticized for using these interrogation methods during 2000, 2001, and 2002 in the State Department’s annual “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.”

Country and Methods Used

Burma: According to State Department country reports, the Burmese military government “routinely subjected detainees to hard interrogation techniques designed to intimidate and disorient.” The techniques listed include being forced to squat or remain in uncomfortable periods for long periods of time, and, according to the 2000 and 2001 country reports, sleep and food deprivation and prolonged questioning under bright lights.

Egypt: The country reports cited the stripping and blindfolding of prisoners among the principal methods of torture used by Egyptian authorities.

Eritrea: The State Department reported that the Eritrean government “committed serious human rights abuses” and torture techniques including being subjected to prolonged sun exposure in high temperatures and tying of hands and feet for extended periods.

Iran: According to country reports, common methods of torture used against political opponents in Iran were sleep deprivation and “suspension for long periods in contorted positions.”

Iraq: Iraqi security services under Saddam Hussein regularly used food and water deprivation as a form of torture, according to the country reports.

Jordan: The State Department reported that Jordanian police and security forces were alleged to engage in acts of torture, including the use of sleep deprivation and solitary confinement.

Israel: In the country reports, the State Department wrote that Israeli human rights groups reported that Israeli defense forces continued to use methods of interrogation prohibited by a 1999 decision by Israel’s High Court. Prior to this decision, security officers were permitted to use “moderate and physical and psychological pressure” during questioning. One example of the “pressure” used was violent shaking. The State Department stated that these practices “often led to excesses.”

Libya: According to the State Department, Libyan authorities commonly chained detainees to walls for hours and deprived them of food and water.

Pakistan: In the country reports, the State Department noted that prolonged isolation and denial of food or sleep were common torture methods.

Saudi Arabia: The State Department noted that Saudi Arabian officials, primarily from the Ministry of the Interior, used sleep deprivation as an interrogation tactic.

Tunisia: In the country reports, the State Department said that tactics such as food and sleep deprivation or confinement to a tiny, unlit cell were commonly used in Tunisia.

Turkey: The State Department stated that torture is a regular practice in Turkey. According to the 2001 country report, some of the methods of torture employed by Turkish security forces included prolonged standing and isolation.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=11984>

SOURCE: Human Rights Watch

February 02, 2006

Dossary's Lawyers Face Guantanamo Clamp

By KANWAL TARIQ HAMEEED

MANAMA

A BAHRAINI detainee at Guantanamo Bay is under 24-hour surveillance and is not even allowed to pick up paper as a result of 10 suicide attempts since his incarceration, lawyers told the GDN. Prison authorities are now claiming there is a connection between lawyers' visits and Juma Al Dossary's suicide attempts, said legal team head Joshua Colangelo-Bryan.

As a result, lawyers representing three Bahrainis held at the facility were barred from seeing him more than once during a three-day visit that ended on Sunday.

However, Mr Colangelo-Bryan accused the US government of trying to find excuses to prevent them from meeting their client.

The lawyers are now worried that the US military will place further restrictions upon their already limited access.

"We were only allowed to see Juma on one day - despite the fact that the military had earlier approved a schedule where we would see him every day," said Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

"We were told that certain authorities at Guantanamo did not want us to see him at all because they thought there might be a connection between my visits and his suicide attempts.

"This was ridiculous because according to the military, Juma tried to kill himself seven times before I ever met him.

"I pointed out that of the 10 suicide attempts the government has acknowledged, I was about 2,000 miles from Guantanamo for nine of those attempts.

"Nonetheless, we were only allowed to see Juma on the final day.

Military personnel apparently told Mr Colangelo-Bryan that the surveillance is maintained "out of concern that he (Al Dossary) will try to hurt himself".

However, he thinks it is just a ploy to restrict Al Dossary's access to a lawyer.

"The military has fought against having lawyers at the base from the very beginning," said Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

"In fact Guantanamo was selected as a location because it was thought that no court would ever intervene there.

"The military is very aware of the publicity surrounding Juma and certainly wants to minimise that."

Al Dossary was previously in a wheelchair following a suicide attempt that left him unable to walk unaided.

However, Mr Colangelo-Bryan said he did not require a wheelchair during the lawyers' most recent visit and did not appear to be participating the current hunger strike.

However, he added that he was still "acutely concerned" about Al Dossary, who seemed to be in a "desperate" condition.

Mr Colangelo-Bryan, who works for the New York-based Dorsey and Whitney law firm, was joined by his colleague Christopher Karagheuzoff at Guantanamo Bay from Friday to Sunday.

They also visited their two other Bahraini clients at Guantanamo Bay - Salah Abdul Rasool Al Blooshi and Essa Abdulla Al Murbati.

Most information taken during the visit is still classified by the US government, but the lawyers are still concerned about the well-being of all three.

However, Al Blooshi appeared to be in better physical condition than during their previous visit.

"Salah appears to be in reasonably good physical shape unlike during our last visit - he did not have a cast on his arm," said Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

But he was concerned about the physical condition of Al Murbati, who was previously hospitalised at the camp as a result of participating in hunger strikes for more than three months.

"I was told that he's not in the hospital anymore and I saw him in Camp Echo," said Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

"He appears still to be very thin and I'm certainly quite concerned about his physical health.

Meanwhile, the legal team is continuing the court battle over a newly passed law, which has frozen the progress of cases filed on behalf of the trio in US Federal Courts.

"We are in the process of submitting papers or arguments to the court in Washington regarding the effect of the new law and then we will just have to continue waiting for the decision," added Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

"I told each of our clients about the law recently passed that is designed to restrict their rights, but in order to try and give them some sense of hope I said that the government of Bahrain would continue to fight for them irrespective of the new law."

The lawyers now hope to make a visit to Bahrain within the next two months after postponing a planned trip in the second half of last month so they could visit their clients.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=11998>

SOURCE: Gulf Daily News

Two Yemenis Dying in Guantanamo

Washington, Feb 1 (Prensa Latina) Two Yemenite hunger strikers at the US military base in Guantanamo are dying despite their jailers' efforts to forcefully feed them, claim their attorneys.

Abu Bakah al-Shamrani and Abu Anas are extremely weak. "Al-Shamrani just weighs 32 kilos", says the Group Reprieve.

The group claims that Camp Echo, made up of isolated cells, is an institution where inmates are "forcefully fed" but they are so deteriorated that they are moved around in wheel chairs.

A military source said last December that the protesters were 84 but human right groups claim many more.

Lt. Col. Jeremy Martin says the Army considers a prisoner on strike when he refuses nine consecutive meals. 76 detainees began the hunger strike last August to protest their indefinite imprisonment.

Around 550 to 750 prisoners labeled "enemy combatants" have been withheld at the illegal US naval base in Guantanamo, east Cuba, for more than three years without access to an attorney.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=11995>

SOURCE: Prensa Latina

Walking to Guantánamo

Peace marchers aim to keep the abuse of 'enemy combatants' visible

By Frida Berrigan

The march to Guantánamo

It was tough getting used to being a spectacle, but that is exactly what we were--a motley gaggle of gringos walking through Cuba in short pants and matching gray T-shirts that read "Witness Against Torture: A March to Visit the Prisoners at Guantánamo." Wearing straw hats and sunglasses, we trailed clouds of sunscreen and bug spray.

Our journey did not start on a Cuban road. We had met and prepared for months to get to this point. Our conversations started as an exploration of ways to resist the "war on terrorism" and respond to the suffering of its victims--and ways to do that as Christians in the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement. Dorothy Day, one of its founders, is famous for having called privileged Catholics out of their church pews and into the streets, where they put the works of mercy--feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, visiting the prisoners--into action. Day also emphasized resisting what she called the "filthy rotten system" of war and injustice that keeps people poor and homeless.

When men imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay Naval Station went on a hunger strike this summer, we knew what to do: walk from Santiago--Cuba's second largest city--to the U.S. base with the intention of visiting the prisoners. We figured we were only taking up an invitation President Bush made to European Union leaders last year in response to allegations of torture and human rights abuses there. "You're welcome to go down yourselves ... and tak[e] a look at the conditions," Bush said.

By walking, we would deal transparently and openly with the Cuban government and we would draw strength from the rich history of nonviolent marches for social and political change--from Gandhi's salt march to the Selma-Montgomery March to the Continental Peace March.

Of course, it was illegal for us to go to Cuba and Cubans themselves cannot march in protest without permission from their government. But it is no coincidence that the torture and abuse at the U.S. prison camp are hidden in a far corner of a foreign territory. The site was chosen with the cynical expectation that the prisoners would be beyond the reach of international law and investigation. Behind borders, and fences and oceans, their suffering would also be muted and remote. So, we went.

Our walk began in Santiago de Cuba on December 7 and over five days we walked about 70 miles, camping on the side of the road at night. Sometimes we walked in silence, meditating on the stories of prisoners in Guantánamo. I walked, thinking about Mohamed and Murat.

Mohamed el Gharani was 14 when he was arrested in an October 2001 raid on a religious school in Pakistan. Transferred to Guantánamo a few months later, he was subjected to routine and terrible abuse. According to his lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith, the Chad-born teenager had been singled out for mistreatment because he vocally objected to being called "nigger." Mohamed is not the only juvenile imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay. Eight more teenagers are detained and five others have been released.

Murat Kurnaz was born to a Turkish family in Bremen, Germany. After September 11, 2001, he traveled to learn more about Islam in Pakistan, where he was arrested. He was eventually sent to Guantánamo where he remains in legal limbo. As the son of "guest-workers," Kurnaz does not have German citizenship, even though he was born there. For a long time, Turkish officials maintained that Kurnaz was German and not their problem. Even after conceding their responsibility, Ankara has not pressured Washington to release Kurnaz. His mother begs "for a sign that my son is alive, that he is being treated justly, that he has not been tortured."

After reflecting on the nightmares Mohammed and Murat have lived for more than four years now, I would resurface to marvel at the beauty of the countryside. As we walked, Cubans shared greetings, encouragement and most often incredulous exclamations like "a Guantánamo, caminando? A pied? Es bien lejos!" "Walking to Guantánamo? On foot? It is really far!"

On Sunday, December 11, after a long day's walk on a busy road, we came to La Glorieta, a dusty little town near the end of our journey--the Cuban military checkpoint. The road forked and we were not sure which way to go. To the right, we could see the road blocked by a gate guarded by uniformed men. With Cuban television cameras rolling and the whole town out to watch us go by, we regrouped, forming two lines for our walk to the checkpoint.

I tried to be solemn as we approached the gate, but it seemed rude not to acknowledge all the people who had gathered. But as we got closer, I grew more serious. We planned to make a formal request to the Cuban military to be allowed to proceed through their checkpoint to the military territory it protected so we could hold our vigil closer to the American security perimeter.

It was an enormous and improbable request. The U.S. base at Guantánamo is a source of anger and fear for the Cuban people and their government. The United States annexed the 45-square-mile territory during the Spanish-American War and has held it ever since. Even if the Cuban military allowed us through their gate, there was still a mined no man's land between us and the American naval base.

As we got closer to the gate to make our formal request, we saw a big sign next to the gate that says "Jao Sal." It was a salt refining complex, not the military checkpoint. Oops. The serious, intrepid American activists who had come so far had to parade through the whole town again as we tried to find the real military checkpoint.

A half-mile farther down the road, we found a sturdy fence guarded by soldiers, men and women dressed in dark camouflage, their faces hidden below brimmed hats. We walked to the line of soldiers and read out loud an account of the hunger strike at Guantánamo from *The Independent*. We requested entry to address the crimes of our own government. The captain firmly refused to allow us through, but invited us to cross the white line separating civilian and military territory "as a gesture of solidarity with your cause."

Inside the huge base, which straddles both sides of the Guantánamo bay, is Cuba's only McDonald's, a state-of-the-art recreation and sports facilities for American soldiers and their families, two airstrips, and a desalinization plant, because Cuba had cut off the base's water supply. Somewhere in this far-flung slice of stripmall Americana are Camp Delta, Camp Echo, Camp Iguana and Camp V, where Murat, Mohammed and 500 other men are imprisoned.

We set up our camp along the Cuba fence, five miles from the prison, closer than Mohamed's father or Murat's mother have been to their sons in years. The dust and scrub brush next to the fence was our home for the next four days as we prayed and fasted. There, I thought of the scores of men on hunger strike. The only way to draw attention to their plight is to deepen their own suffering. Our fast was not a hunger strike, but it was long enough that cravings for food turned to actual hunger, and hunger turned into a peculiar light-headedness and clarity. It was long enough to realize that hunger is a violent act against biology, to reflect on the depth of powerlessness and despair--as well as the intensity of will and defiance--that informs the decision to fast to death. The authorities at Guantánamo reported that on Christmas the number of men refusing to eat had doubled to 84.

Our principal aim in going to Guantánamo--walking, vigiling and fasting--was to let the prisoners know that they were not alone. Despite the reflexive fear Americans have been inculcated to have toward the so-called "worst of the worst" held in Guantánamo, coverage of our witness in the U.S. press was positive and extensive. Our march and fast received widespread attention in the international press, including Arabic language outlets. All of that, combined with a network of lawyers representing prisoners who brought news of our proximity and solidarity to the men, means they knew we had tried, and are still trying.

While we await notice from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, the agency responsible for violations of the ban on travel to Cuba, we will not be idle. On March 1, those of us who marched to Guantánamo are

organizing an action in Washington, D.C., to make the prison and its victims visible to those who are responsible for the torture and abuse. We continue to meet and plan, working to build a campaign to close Guantánamo, free those prisoners who are innocent of any crime and bring the United States back into accordance with international law. Join us.

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<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=11985>

SOURCE: Inthesetimes.com

February 03, 2006

“U.S. Soldiers Tear Up The Qur’an in Guantanamo”

Media reports, specially a story that was ran by the NEWSWEEK last year about the desecration of the Qur’an at GUANTANAMO sparked outrage and uproar among the Muslim countries and Muslim communities worldwide. It was worse than ABU GHRAIB scandal involving torturing and abusing Iraqi detainees at the hands of the U.S. occupation troops.

The abuse scandal was a physical and psychological torture of a few Muslims, whereas the Qur’an desecration came as a spiritual, emotional and psychological torture of Muslims all over the world.

True that the NEWSWEEK magazine backed away from the report detailing how the U.S. interrogators desecrated copies of the holy Qur’an at the GUANTANAMO Bay naval base, blamed for sparking fierce demonstrations and protests in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim countries, numerous analysts explained that this was a cover up and another American attempt to eschew accountability.

Also some of the detainees who had been released from the U.S. naval base at GUANTANAMO affirmed that American interrogators did desecrate the Qur’an and that in some incidents they flushed it into the toilet and sometimes they tore up its pages to break the detainees and force them to speak.

Recently Der Spiegel had an interview with Nadja Dizdarevic, 31, a Bosnian Muslim, representing Guantanamo detainees at Amnesty International, a human rights group. Nadja is the wife of one of the ex-GUANTANAMO detainees, Boudella al-Hajj, who was captured by the U.S. in 2002 for allegedly planning attacks on the British and U.S. embassies in Sarajevo.

Amnesty, who has branded the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay a human rights failure; calling it "the gulag of our time" plans to release testimony by eight former GITMO detainees detailing scandalous conditions at the U.S. detention center.

Al Hajj and five other Bosnians of Algerian descent were acquitted of terror charges by a Bosnian court in 2002 due to lack of evidence, Dizdarevic said, adding that the Bosnian security forces later handed the group over to masked men who placed hoods on their heads- Dizdarevic suggests that they were CIA agents. Five days later the detainees arrived in Guantanamo.

Dizdarevic said that American lawyers representing her husband and the group were able to meet the detainees a few times, during which the men weren't able to say much openly because their visitors' rights will be withdrawn if they do.

Those who complain to their lawyers regarding the harsh conditions at the camp face punishment.

“It's the same scenes we know from IRAQ or AFGHANISTAN. Dogs are laid on the bodies of naked prisoners, an unimaginable humiliation for devout Muslims. At night they are exposed to bright light or deafening music. The guards herd the prisoners into a hangar where the temperature is below freezing and straight after that put them into a room as hot as a sauna. Beatings are mainly aimed at the genitals and all this is filmed with video cameras. The favourite

toy of the guards is the Qur'an; they throw copies of it into toilets or tear them up," Der Spiegel quoted Dizdarevic as saying.

Dizdarevic also referred to what's been described in news reports as underground interrogation cells like those in Turkey. She added that in Camp Iguana, another section of GUANTANAMO camp; U.S. soldiers hold young people aged 10 to 16, and that they're often beaten.

The U.S. holds about 500 suspects in GUANTANAMO from about 40 countries. So far about 200 detainees have been released, though some have been jailed in their countries; and many have been held for three years without charge.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12007>

SOURCE: AlJazeera.com

Fabricated Justice: A Missive From Guantanamo Bay

By Katherine Newell Bierman

I have reached Guantanamo Bay naval base, but I am as cut off from the men imprisoned here as if I were still in Washington. The Pentagon has allowed Human Rights Watch to observe military commission proceedings, but we can't talk to any detainees, nor can the media or anyone else who might report publicly what they say.

Four years ago the first detainees stumbled, blindfolded, in their orange jumpsuits from the aircraft that brought them from Afghanistan to Cuba. They didn't know what awaited them; nor did we.

In the beginning, the Bush administration claimed the detainees were the "the worst of the worst." But we still don't know who they all are. A few hundred have been released because they either never fought the U.S. troops, or, if they had picked up a rifle to defend Afghanistan from a U.S. invasion, did not present an ongoing threat.

Today, around 500 detainees remain at the base. There is no way of knowing how many are the "enemy combatants" described by President W. Bush. The administrative proceedings the Pentagon concocted to justify their detention don't inspire confidence. Cases were reviewed with the presumption that the detainees were enemy combatants, and none were given the lawyers or the means to prove otherwise.

The Pentagon insists the laws of war give it the right to hold everyone at Guantanamo until the end of the "war against terrorism" - which will be never. That leaves out men picked up for fighting in an international conflict in Afghanistan that is now over, who should be freed; and those captured far from any battlefield who should be brought before the criminal courts if suspected of crimes.

Four years ago, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told the world: "The detainees will not be subjected to physical or mental abuse or cruel treatment." Now we know that the culture of abuse photographed at Abu Ghraib "migrated" from Guantanamo. We know from released detainees and FBI personnel, from military memoranda and orders issued, that the Bush administration, having cast aside the Geneva Conventions, also dismissed the Convention against Torture, the U.S. Army interrogation manual and the longstanding U.S. military tradition against using torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against its prisoners.

With a green light from Rumsfeld, interrogators at Guantanamo bombarded their captives with excruciatingly loud music; forced them into contorted positions for long periods; denied them sleep for days; made them howl like dogs and wear women's underwear on their heads; left them curled up on the floor with their hair pulled out in despair.
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb>

The Bush administration jettisoned any notion of justice just as quickly. Two months after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Bush authorized military commissions to provide summary justice, unburdened by the protections of the court-martial system.

The military commissions might look like genuine legal proceedings. But their rules are Kafkaesque, made up as the Pentagon went along, despite the efforts of military lawyers who take seriously their responsibility to the rule of law. Military prosecutors have no obligation to disclose exculpatory information and can introduce evidence obtained by torture. They can shut the accused out of the hearings when sensitive material is presented and defense lawyers can't reveal that material, even when their clients' lives are at stake.

When the U.S. Supreme Court last year acknowledged the jurisdiction of federal courts over the detainees, no longer was Guantanamo a lawless land subject only to the president's will. But Congress dimmed that light: the Graham-

Levin-Kyl amendment passed last month so restricts the detainees' access to federal courts as to be almost meaningless.

There is still time for the administration to do the right thing at Guantanamo. It should release detainees it has no legal authority to hold; it should provide courts-martial or criminal trials to detainees believed to have committed crimes; and it should allow the detainees to speak to outsiders who could tell their stories to the world.

Sitting here at Guantanamo, it seems a long time since Donald Rumsfeld said the detentions were responsible, humane and legal. Today we can only wonder how anyone ever believed him.

Katherine Newell Bierman is the counter-terrorism counsel for the United States Program at Human Rights Watch. She wrote this commentary for THE DAILY STAR.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12006>

SOURCE: The Daily Star