Britons release devastating account of torture and abuse by US forces at Guantanamo

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Three Britons freed from Guantanamo Bay in March have released a 115-page dossier accusing the US of carrying out torture and sexual degradation at the military concentration camp in Cuba.

Detention in Afghanistan and Guantanamo, launched in the US on Wednesday August 4 by the men's British lawyers, is a devastating account of the abuse experienced and witnessed by the three at the camp, which draws direct parallels with the torture of detainees by US forces at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

The International Red Cross told the *Guardian* newspaper that the allegations contained in the dossier could amount to war crimes.

Asef Iqbal (20), Ruhal Ahmed (23) and Shafiq Rasul (25)—all from Tipton in the West Midlands—spent two years in US custody without legal representation. The "Tipton Three" were among five Britons released from the camp earlier this year and flown back to the UK, where they were freed without charge. Four Britons remain amongst the 600 detainees still held in Guantanamo, as well as four British residents.

Outlining the practices employed by US forces in Guantanamo, lawyer Gareth Pierce said chillingly, "There was not a single method that was not used to break their will to make them confess to something they were not guilty of, and all three did."

And she accused the British authorities of complicity in the abuse, saying that the government had "displayed the hypocrisy of the public face in the UK saying we're doing all we can and the private face there in Guantanamo involved up to their elbows in the oppression."

All three men were detained in northern Afghanistan in November 2001 and sent to Guantanamo. Despite strongly protesting their innocence of any involvement in terrorism, Ahmed says that in Afghanistan, a British interrogator questioned him, whilst a US soldier held a gun to his head.

In preparation for their removal to Guantanamo, the trio were hooded and forced to strip. Rasul reports that he "could hear dogs barking nearby and soldiers shouting, 'get 'em boy'." Later he was taken "for a so-called cavity search ... told to bend over and then felt something shoved up my anus. I don't know what it was but it was very painful."

This was only a foretaste of the terror regime that awaited the three in Guantanamo. The allegations of mental and physical torture outlined in the dossier include:

* US forces subjecting inmates to repeated beatings, including punching and kicking. The trio states that such treatment was meted out even against mentally ill inmates. The dossier alleges that one prisoner was left with brain damage after soldiers beat him as punishment for attempting suicide.

* Inmates forcibly injected with drugs; shackled, hooded and forced to squat for hours or days; being kept naked in freezing air conditioning and deprived of sleep.

* Sexual humiliation including photographing prisoners naked and subjecting them to unwarranted and brutal anal searches. The dossier says that one inmate reported that he had been shown a video of hooded men—apparently detainees—being forced to sodomise one another.

* Psychological torture, including being held in isolation for weeks or months and threats to kill them. Iqbal says that at Guantanamo one US soldier told him, "You killed my family in the towers and now it's time to get you back".

* Religious harassment including the forced shaving

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of detainees beards and guards throwing inmates' Korans into toilets.

The dossier states that mental illness amongst Guantanamo inmates is rife as a consequence of their detention with any legal rights and that there have been "several hundred" suicide attempts. The three say that they were told by a guard that Moazzam Begg, a British citizen still imprisoned in Guantanamo, had been kept in isolation and "was in a very bad way". Another detainee, Jamil el-Banna, a Jordanian with refugee status in Britain, is said to be so traumatised that mentally, "he's finished".

And the dossier accuses Britain of colluding in the abuse at Guantanamo. British officials, who were always accompanied by MI5 officers and who acted like a "third interrogator", visited the trio on several occasions.

"It was very clear to all three that MI5 was content to benefit from the effect of the isolation, sleep deprivation and other forms of acutely painful and degrading treatment, including short shackling," the dossier states. "There was never any suggestion on the part of the British interrogators that this treatment was wrong."

Isolated, in pain and fearful for their lives, the three say they eventually falsely confessed to appearing in a video with Osama bin Laden and 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, even though Rasul was working in a Curry's electronics store in Britain at the time the tape was made.

The Pentagon has dismissed the dossiers allegations of abuse as a fabrication. Major Michael Shavers, Pentagon spokesman on Guantanamo Bay, said the US operated "a safe, humane and professional detention operation" at the camp.

Aided by the media, the US is attempting to bury overwhelming evidence that the physical and sexual torture revealed in the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib prison was part of an officially sanctioned policy that is integral to its criminal project of colonialist expansion.

On July 22, the Pentagon released a 321-page report that cleared US forces of any significant criminal activity in Abu Ghraib, stating, "the overwhelming majority of our leaders and soldiers understand the requirement to treat detainees humanely and are doing so".

The whitewash report stated that any incidents of abuse "should be viewed as what they are—unauthorised actions taken by a few individuals".

For their part, British officials have cynically claimed that they were unaware of any allegations of abuse at Guantanamo. This is despite the trio reporting that they gave numerous accounts of their ill-treatment to British officials both during their detention and afterwards.

On May 13, Shafiq Rasul and Asif Iqbal issued an "open letter" to President George W. Bush denouncing Washington's denials of torture in Guantanamo Bay and demanding full public access to all video and photographs taken during interrogation sessions at the camp.

Moreover, others released from Guantanamo have corroborated the Tipton Three's account. Lawyer Jacques Debray, acting on behalf of two French nationals recently freed from the military facility, said the descriptions of ill-treatment given by his clients was similar to that exposed at Abu Ghraib, whilst another former detainee, Swedish citizen Mehdi Ghezali, has gone public with his own account of torture and sexual humiliation.

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