

# New evidence of US torture in Iraq and Afghanistan

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New evidence of US mistreatment and torture of detainees and civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan has emerged in government documents obtained by both the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Associated Press. The documents also reveal a pattern of cover-up by the military in connection with the abuse.

US Army documents obtained and released by the ACLU contain previously undisclosed allegations of abuse, including a report that a severely beaten detainee was forced to drop his claims of mistreatment as a condition for being released from custody. Other cases reported by the civil liberties group include evidence of indiscriminate assaults by members of the US Special Forces as well as regular Army soldiers on Iraqi and Afghan civilians.

The documents were made public after a federal court ordered the Defense Department and other government agencies to comply with a year-old request filed by the ACLU and other civil liberties organizations under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The ACLU has previously charged the Defense Department with unlawfully withholding documents pertaining to the treatment of detainees, including photographic evidence. Although the Pentagon has turned over 21,600 pages of documents in the last two months, 16,600 were already available on the Internet.

ACLU staff attorney Jameel Jaffer stated: “The Defense Department continues to stonewall and to withhold thousands of documents inappropriately. Astoundingly, it seems to be the Defense Department’s view that the public simply does not have a right to know what the department’s policies were or who put them in place.” Those documents the government has handed over provide graphic evidence of abuse committed in violation of international law.

According to an ACLU press release, one file, released February 18, stated that “an Iraqi detainee claimed that Americans in civilian clothing beat him in the head and stomach, dislocated his arms, ‘stepped on [his] nose until it [broke],’ stuck an unloaded pistol in his mouth and fired the trigger, choked him with a rope and beat his leg with a

baseball bat.” Medical reports corroborated the detainee’s account.

According to the file, soldiers confirmed that plainclothes interrogators from “Task Force 20”—a military group made up of various special operations forces and intelligence operatives—had interrogated this detainee. However, after reporting the abuse, the detainee was told to sign a statement withdrawing his charges or else be held in detention indefinitely. He agreed to drop his claims.

In the end, despite the medical report on his injuries, as well as testimony from other soldiers on his abuse, the criminal file was closed on the grounds that the investigation had “failed to prove or disprove” the offenses against the detainee.

Another file handed over to the ACLU on February 18 documents abuse of detainees in Afghanistan, where US soldiers posed for photographs of mock executions with detainees who were bound and hooded. Some of the photos were reportedly destroyed in an effort to avoid “another public outrage” after the scandal broke about abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

The mock-executions incident came to light after the discovery of a CD during a July 2004 cleanup of an Army office in Afghanistan. Digital images on the disc appeared to show abuse of detainees in and around Fire Base Tycze in southern Afghanistan.

According to the ACLU: “The pictures showed uniformed soldiers pointing pistols and M-4 rifles at the heads and backs of bound and hooded detainees, and other abuses such as holding a detainee’s head against the wall of a cage.” One sergeant also reported seeing images on Army computers of detainees being “kicked, hit or inhumanely treated while in US custody.” An Army Specialist admitted that photographs depicting similar instances of abuse and torture had been destroyed after the firestorm over the photos from Abu Ghraib.

ACLU attorney Jaffer commented, “These files provide more evidence, if any were needed, that abuse was not limited to Abu Ghraib” and that “the government failed to

investigate many of these abuses until the Abu Ghraib photographs came to light.”

The search of the Afghanistan office also uncovered photos of “an activity called PUC’ing (Person Under Control), a ritualistic activity done on birthdays, reenlistments, and similar events, by fellow platoon members.” The photos showed hooded US soldiers lying on the ground, bound hand and foot, while other soldiers drenched them with water. Such sadistic rituals are apparently carried out to prepare troops for the handling of detainees designated as requiring extra “control.”

Also revealed in the investigative files released to the ACLU are cases of abuse of civilians by US occupation troops in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Senior Psychological Operations (PsyOps) officers were witness to assaults by Special Forces during May 2004 raids on the Afghan villages of Gurjay and Sukhagen. These abuses included “hitting and kicking villagers in the head, chest, back and stomach, and threatening to shoot them,” according to the ACLU. An investigation into these abuses was closed because the victims in the villages reportedly could not be interviewed.

In Iraq, an investigation found probable cause that two US soldiers committed assault “when they punched and kicked a civilian whom they picked up at a roadblock, while a sergeant took pictures and videotaped part of the abuse.” The soldiers then reportedly transported the man to an Iraqi prison, where Iraqi police kicked the detainee in the ribs before they left him there. An Army commander’s report was pending in September 2004, but no punishment was recorded in the file.

ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero commented on these latest revelations: “The torture of detainees is too widespread and systemic to be dismissed as the rogue actions of a few misguided individuals. The American public deserves to know which high-level government officials are ultimately responsible for the torture conducted in our name.”

The Associated Press published a February 18 report providing details on the November 2003 death of a prisoner at Abu Ghraib. The US murder of Manadel al-Jamadi was exposed last year when grinning US soldiers were photographed alongside his corpse at the prison facility, giving a thumbs-up gesture over his bruised and puffy face, his body packed in ice.

While the US military had said at the time that the death was a homicide, the circumstances surrounding his death had not been revealed. According to the reports reviewed by AP, al-Jamadi died as a result of “Palestinian hanging,” in which an individual is suspended by the wrists, with hands cuffed behind the back. The group Physicians for Human Rights

condemned the position as “clear and simple torture.”

Al-Jamadi was one of a number of “ghost” detainees held in secrecy by the CIA at Abu Ghraib. Navy SEALs detained him as a suspect in the October 27, 2003, bombing of Red Cross offices in Baghdad. According to court documents and testimony, AP reports, “the SEALs punched, kicked and struck al-Jamadi with their rifles before handing him over the CIA early on Nov. 4. By 7 a.m., al-Jamadi was dead.”

The SEALs, accompanied by a CIA interrogator and translator, brought al-Jamadi to the prison with a green plastic bag over his head and his wrists tightly bound. He died in a prison shower room during a half-hour interrogation, according to the documents obtained by AP, which consist of statements from Army prison guards to investigators with the military and the CIA’s Inspector General’s office.

Army guards had been called to the shower room to reposition the prisoner, after an interrogator reported that he had not been “cooperating.” According to a summary of an interview with Sgt. Jeffery Frost, one of the guards, al-Jamadi’s arms were stretched out behind him in such a way that he was surprised they “didn’t pop out of their sockets.”

According to the AP story: “As the guards released the shackles and lowered al-Jamadi, blood gushed from his mouth ‘as if a faucet had been turned on,’ according to the interview summary.” A military pathologist found several broken ribs and concluded the prisoner died from pressure to the chest and difficulty breathing, and ruled the death a homicide.

Nine Navy SEALs and one sailor have been charged by Navy prosecutors with abusing al-Jamadi and other detainees. All but two have received non-judicial punishment, one is scheduled for a court-martial in March, and another is awaiting a hearing before the Navy’s top SEAL.



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