

Newly released FBI files document widespread torture at Guantánamo

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The FBI has declassified under the Freedom of Information Act detailed documents regarding the torture of detainees at the infamous Guantánamo Bay facility. The documents were made public only after a protracted legal struggle by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to secure their release.

Reading these documents, one gets the sense not only that torture is sadistically and widely practiced at Guantánamo, but that a whole culture has developed around its employment.

On July 9, 2004, amid a number of press reports and an international public outcry over the deplorable conditions and practices at the camp, the FBI—which has personnel on assignment at the camp—began a secret internal investigation titled, “GTMO, Counterterrorism Division, Inspection Special Inquiry.” The Inspection Division (INSD) Special Inquiry tasked with the investigation sent out an email survey to all FBI personnel who had been active in Guantánamo.

The email instructed the agents to respond that either they had or had not witnessed “aggressive treatment, interrogations or interview techniques on GTMO [Guantánamo] detainees which was not consistent with Bureau interview policy/guidelines,” and indicated that those who responded that they had would be targeted for a follow-up interview. The 244 heavily-redacted pages released under the FOIA (which can be found here) contain the positive responses to the survey, some further correspondence, and notes from these interviews.

“On a couple of occasions,” wrote one agent, “I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position on the floor, with no chair, food, or water. Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18, 24 hours or more. On one occasion, the air conditioning

had been turned down so far and it was so cold in the room that the barefoot detainee was shaking with cold. When I asked the MPs what was going on, I was told that the interrogators from the day prior had ordered this treatment, and that he was not to be moved.

“On another occasion, the A/C had been turned off, making the temperature in the unventilated room well over 100 degrees [38 Celsius]. The detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his hair out throughout the night. On another occasion, not only was the temperature unbearably hot, but extremely loud rap music was being played in the room, and had been since the day before, with the detainee chained hand and foot in the fetal position on the floor.”

Another agent wrote that a man was once interrogated by a captain in the US Marine Corps who at one point “squatted over the Koran.” Later, “a German Shepherd was placed in front of [the detainee] while his handler commanded the dog to growl, bark, and show his teeth . . .

“Approximately two weeks after the aforementioned incident . . . [redacted] was observing one interrogation while [redacted] was observing another, when [redacted] entered the observation room. [redacted] was laughing and he told [redacted] and [redacted] he wanted to show them something . . . [redacted] later told [redacted] that [redacted] had taken him to an observation room where he observed a detainee with a full beard whose head had been wrapped in duct tape.”

The torture documented in these latest files ranges from the purely sadistic to the simply bizarre. One agent reported that he had heard another brag about forcing a detainee to “listen to satanic black metal music for hours and hours. Then the interrogator dressed as a Catholic Priest and baptized the detainee in

order to save him.”

In another incident, two FBI agents heard loud music coming from an interrogation room, and entered an adjoining observation room that looked in on the room in question. “The lights were off in the Interview/Interrogation room but there was a strobe light on with loud music inside and a clothed detainee sitting on the floor, and no one else in the room. An unknown white male in civilian clothing entered the observation we were in, and told us we should not be there.”

Another agent reported, “I witnessed a detainee seated in the middle of the floor while loud rap or heavy metal music was being played from a portable CD player. Two interrogators were standing above the detainee and continuously laughing and blowing cigar smoke in the detainee’s face.”

Still other agents reported that men were forcibly subjected to lap dances by female interrogators, shown pornographic photos, and sexually assaulted. One agent reported that he saw a detainee whose head had been covered with duct tape because he refused to stop chanting the Koran, and another man was made to wear the Israeli flag as a cape.

Of the 434 responses to the survey by FBI personnel, 26 were “positive”—i.e., they indicated that the agent in question had witnessed “aggressive treatment” not permitted under government guidelines. However, it is worthwhile to note that many forms of torture, such as “waterboarding” or simulated drowning, are in fact expressly permitted, and thereby would not make a list that only includes treatment that is “not consistent with Bureau interview policy/guidelines.”

For example, in one incident documented in the investigation, an FBI agent was preparing to interview a detainee when a representative of another government agency suggested that the detainee first be interrogated for 24 hours without a break. When the FBI agent objected, the other agent replied that this technique had been explicitly approved by “the Secretary”—i.e., Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

In another case, responding to the initial survey, one agent reported that she observed “treatment that was not only aggressive, but personally very upsetting . . .” A follow-up telephone interview, however, determined that the agent “had no knowledge of Department of Defense . . . authorization for the permitted use of

harsh/aggressive interrogation techniques.” In other words, the abuse she witnessed may have been completely legal.

Not surprisingly, the INSD investigation concluded that no FBI personnel had been directly involved in any illegal abuse, and will not result in any new criminal proceedings. However, the ACLU plans to use these documents in its ongoing case against Donald Rumsfeld.



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