

# Guantanamo: US Government forced to reveal that it recorded forcefeeding

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Through court order, it has been revealed that the US military has been keeping videotapes of the force-feeding of inmates at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. On Wednesday, a civilian federal judge allowed videos taken of one prisoner, which also documents the prisoner being forced into the feeding chamber, to be viewed by his defense lawyer.

For this one detainee, Abu Wa'el Dhiab, there exist 136 videos of him being forced out of his cell and brought to a room where a feeding tube is pushed down his nose and into his stomach. Jon Eisenberg, one of Dhiab's attorneys, told the *Guardian* that for other detainees "There are hundreds of force feedings on tape, maybe even thousands." Eisenberg added that the videos were kept secret "to keep some really horrible abuse under wraps."

In February 2013, a hunger strike began at Guantanamo Bay to protest the blatantly illegal and sadistic situation of the inmates. Detainees are being held indefinitely, without being charged or tried. Many have been held for 12 years or more, even after being cleared. They are continuously the subject of torture, abuse, and humiliation.

President Barack Obama has done nothing to carry out his promise to close the camp. According to the Center for Constitutional Justice's website, "there is no excuse ... under current law, he has the power to make [the camp's closure] a reality." As a sign of the detainees' fate, in 2013, the diplomatic office in charge of resettling them and closing the camp was shut down and its staff reassigned.

The overwhelming majority of prisoners have taken part in the hunger strike, which continues to this day. In 2013, detainees' lawyers said 130 out of the then 166 remaining detainees joined the protest.

Faced with worldwide outrage over the conditions of

the striking inmates, particularly as reports of force-feeding came in, the US Government attempted to create a media blackout in an effort to control, to the best of its ability, the flow of information in and out of the camp.

It is within this context that the Obama Administration denied the existence of video footage of inmates' force-feeding, despite detainee testimony describing the filming. If the Obama Administration acknowledged its existence, the government would have been caught between either being publicly exposed as deliberately withholding footage and hiding the truth, or being forced to expose the actual recorded horror of the practice. Either would have escalated the political crisis over Guantanamo.

Dhiab described the experience of force-feeding in court papers filed on Tuesday. "Sometimes the way the MP [military policeman] holds the head chokes me, and with all the nerves in the nose the tube passing the nose is like torture."

Dhiab also reported that while the authorities videotape much of the practice, they refuse to videotape the most torturous sessions. "Then, especially when the MP is holding the neck, when they try to force the tube through the throat it often catches and they cannot push it through. At times like these, I ask them to videotape. And they refuse."

The *Guardian* used five detainees' testimony to put together a chilling animation that tries to convey the experience of inmates.

One inmate described the force-feeding, "I will never forget the first time they passed the feeding tube up my nose. I can't describe how painful it is to be force-fed this way. As it was thrust in, it made me feel like throwing up. It was agony in my chest, throat, and stomach. They put you on a chair, reminds me of an

execution chair. Your legs and shoulders are tied with belts. If the tube goes in the wrong way, the liquid might go into your lungs.”

Another, Samir Naji al-Hasan Moqbel, described his experience, “I was sick in the prison hospital and refused to be fed. A squad of eight military police officers in riot gear burst in. They tied my hands and feet to the bed, they forcibly inserted an IV into my hand. I spent 26 hours in this state. Later they began feeding me by nasal catheter. The food rushed into my stomach too quickly. I asked him to reduce the speed. He not only refused but tried to turn it up. After he finished his work he roughly pulled the tube from my nose.” The *Guardian* notes that Moqbel also had an IV inserted into his penis.

The Pentagon and the military command overseeing Guantanamo detention deny that force-feeding is punitive torture. According to the US Government, there is no hunger strike; it says instead that detainees are “not eating on a regular basis.” Prisoners report that there is a rotation of who is force-fed to keep the numbers at any given time low, obscuring the extent of the ongoing hunger strike. Currently, the US Government is imprisoning 154 detainees at Guantanamo.



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