

Red Cross Report: US Interrogation Techniques tantamount to Torture

By [Sherwood Ross](#)

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CIA interrogation techniques approved by President Bush are described in a confidential Red Cross report as “tantamount to torture,” according to a report in “The New Yorker” magazine.

After being denied access for five years to terror suspects, the Red Cross last year interviewed 15 detainees after their transfer to Guantanamo. One of them was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the Al Qaeda leader thought to be the primary architect of the Sept. 11 attacks. “Congressional and other Washington sources familiar with the report said that it harshly criticized the C.I.A.’s practices,” author Jane Mayer writes in an article titled “The Black Sites” in the August 13 issue.

“One of the sources said that the Red Cross described the agency’s detention and interrogation methods as tantamount to torture, and declared that American officials responsible for the abusive treatment could have committed serious crimes,” Mayer writes. This includes “grave breaches” of the Geneva Conventions, and violation of the U.S. Torture Act of 1994.

Prisoner Mohammed, for example, was told by his American captors, “We’re not going to kill you. But we’re going to take you to the very brink of your death and back.” Mohammed was held initially either at a secret underground CIA detention site near Kabul International Airport known as the “Dark Prison” or in a former brick factory north of the city known as the “Salt Pit,” then later moved to an undisclosed site allegedly in Poland. Mohammed was captured in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and turned over to the CIA on March 4, 2003.

Mohammed is said to have told the Red Cross he was kept naked in a cell for days, questioned by female handlers, attached to a dog leash and shoved so that he was forcibly banged into the walls, and suspended from the ceiling by his arms with his toes barely touching the ground.

Furthermore, Mohammed said, he was chained naked to a metal ring in his cell for prolonged periods in a painful crouch, kept in alternately suffocating heat and painful cold and doused with ice water, practices that violates Geneva Conventions. According to a source familiar with the Red Cross report, Mohammed in Poland was shackled naked except for a pair of goggles and earmuffs, and waterboarded five times.

Two former CIA officers friendly with one of Mohammed’s interrogators said he was waterboarded just once and, Mayer writes, “needed only to be shown the drowning equipment again before he ‘broke.’” One of his interrogators suffers “horrible nightmares” from his participation in the procedure, *The New Yorker* article says.

Mayer reports, “Some detainees held by the C.I.A. claimed that their cells were bombarded with deafening sound twenty-four hours a day for weeks, and even months.” One of these, Binyam Mohamed, now in Guantanamo, told his lawyer Clive Stafford Smith, that speakers blared ear-splitting rap anthems into his cell while he was handcuffed or “ghoulish laughter” that was “like the soundtrack from a horror film.” Mohamed told his lawyer, “Plenty lost

their minds. I could hear people knocking their heads against the walls and doors, screaming their heads off.” Another CIA practice, according to a former prisoner, was to lock a man in a foul-smelling suitcase for long periods of time. That prisoner, Khaled el-Masri, the German car salesman seized in 2003 on dubious evidence and released the next year, said in the Salt Pit at Kabul his interrogators shouted at him, “You’re in a country where there’s no rule of law. You might be buried here.” Another prisoner told the Red Cross, he was kept for a prolonged period in a cage called the “dog box” which was so small that he could not stand. Ramzi Kassem, a professor at Yale Law School, said his Yemeni client Sanad al-Kazimi, now in Guantanamo, told him that while in the Dark Prison he was suspended by his arms for long periods, causing his legs to swell painfully, and was beaten with electric cables. The hanging position is designed, among other things, to prevent detainees from being able to sleep.

According to Alfred McCoy, a University of Wisconsin history professor, “long-time standing” was a common interrogation technique of the Soviet K.G.B. In his recently published “A Question of Torture” he writes the Soviets found making a victim stand for 18 to 24 hours can produce “excruciating pain, as ankles double in size, skin becomes tense and intensely painful, blisters erupt oozing watery serum, heart rates soar, kidneys shut down, and delusions deepen.”

The brutal treatment of the alleged terrorists at the hands of the CIA has cast doubt on whether any of them could be convicted in a court of law. Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst, told reporter Mayer, “What are you going to do with K.S.M. (Khalid Sheikh Mohammed) in the long run? It’s a very good question. I don’t think anyone has an answer. If you took him to any real American court, I think any judge would say there is no admissible evidence. It would be thrown out.”

Sherwood Ross is an American writer who has worked in the civil rights movement and reported for major dailies and wire services. Reach him at sherwoodr1@yahoo.com

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