

The Politics of Surviving Guantánamo

By [Global Research News](#)

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[WhoWhatWhy](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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Mohamedou Ould Slahi is [one of 780 detainees imprisoned in Guantánamo](#). Jailed since 2002, he fiercely maintains his innocence of any wrongdoing. To date, the U.S. has not charged him with any crime.

Many Guantánamo prisoners were taken into custody “without regard for whether they were truly enemy combatants, or in fact whether many of them were enemies at all,” according to Retired Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson, who served as a senior official in the State Department under the Bush Administration. His [declaration](#) in a D.C. federal court in spring 2010 explained:

It was politically impossible to release [those who were likely innocent]....The Defense Department would be left without any plausible explanation to the American people...The detention efforts at Guantánamo would be revealed as the incredibly confused operation that they were....The Office of Vice President Richard B. Cheney believed that if hundreds of innocent individuals had to suffer in order to detain a handful of hardcore terrorists, so be it.

Three years into his incarceration, Slahi wrote a diary recounting his experiences. After U.S. government censors blacked out more than 2,500 areas of text, writer and human rights activist Larry Siems edited the manuscript. Ten years later, the newly published *Guantánamo Diary* offers Slahi’s deeply personal account of the desperate life he and other detainees faced inside the U.S. prison.

The following excerpts focus on how Slahi and his fellow detainees reacted to the unrelenting pressure to admit to crimes they may not have committed, to implicate friends who may not have been involved and to, somehow, survive.

“I Trusted America’s Justice System Too Much”

I wrongly believed that the worst was over, and so I cared less about the time it would take the Americans to figure out that I was not the guy they [were] looking for.

I trusted the American justice system too much, and shared that trust with the detainees from European countries. We all had an idea about how the democratic system works. Other detainees, for instance those from the Middle East, didn’t believe it for a second and trust the American system. Their argument lay on the growing hostility of extremist Americans against Muslims and the Arabs.

With every day going by, the optimists lost ground. The interrogation methods worsened

considerably as time went by, and as you shall see, those responsible for GTMO broke all the principles upon which the U.S. was built....

Why Detainees Refused to Cooperate

...I had a good time in [REDACTED] the beginning, but things started to get ugly when some interrogators started to practice torture methods on some detainees....As far as I heard and saw, the only method practiced at first was the cold room, all night. I know a young Saudi man who was taken to interrogation every night and put back in his cell in the morning. I don't know the details of what exactly happened to him because he was very quiet, but my neighbors told me that he refused to talk to his interrogators.

[REDACTED] also told me that he was also put in the cold room two nights in a row because he refused to cooperate.

Most of the detainees by then were refusing to cooperate after they felt they had provided everything relevant to their cases. People were desperate and growing tired of being interrogated all the time, without hope of an end. I personally was relatively new and wanted to take my chances: maybe my fellow detainees were wrong! But I ended up bumping into the same brick wall as anybody else. Detainees grew worried about their situation and the absence of a due process of law, and things started to get worse with the use of the painful methods to extract information....

Deciding Not to Cooperate

..."I am not the guy you're looking for!" I said in French, and I repeated it in plain English.

[REDACTED] started. "I am sure you're against killing people. We're not looking for you. We're looking for those guys who are out there trying to hurt innocents." He said this while showing me a bunch of ghostly pictures. I refused to look at them, and whenever he tried to put them under my sight I looked somewhere else. I didn't even want to give him the satisfaction of having taken a look at them.

"Look, [REDACTED] is twenty-seven years-and [REDACTED] is a really bad person. Somebody like you needs to only talk for five minutes, and you're a free man," said [REDACTED].

He was everything but reasonable. When I contemplated his statement, I was like, God, a guy who is cooperating is gonna be locked up for 27 more years, after which he won't be able to enjoy any kind of life. What kind of harsh country is that? I am sorry to say that [REDACTED] statement wasn't worth an answer. He and [REDACTED] tried to reason with the help of the MI guy, but there was no convincing me to talk.

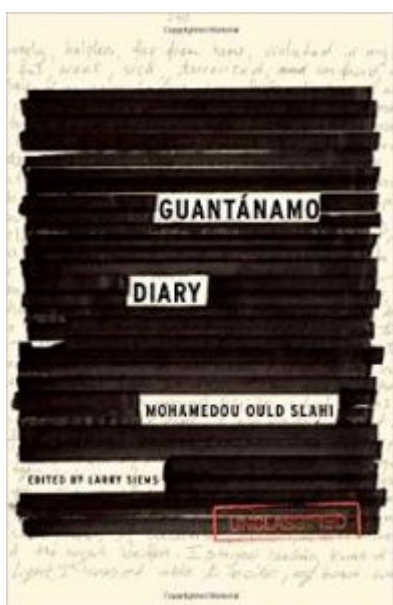
You could tell that the interrogators were getting used to detainees who refused to cooperate after having cooperated for a while. Just as I was learning from other detainees how not to cooperate, the interrogators were learning from each other how to deal with non-cooperating detainees. The session was closed and I was sent back to my cell.

I was satisfied with myself, since I now officially belonged to the majority, the non-cooperating detainees. I minded less being locked up unjustly for the rest of my life; what drove me crazy was to be expected to cooperate, too. You lock me up, I give you no information. And we are both cool....

Not Giving Interrogators Control

...I have never felt as violated in myself as I had since the DoD Team started to torture me to get me to admit things that I haven't done. You, Dear Reader, could never understand the extent of the physical, and much more the psychological, pain people in my situation suffered, no matter how hard you try to put yourself in another's shoes. Had I done what they accused me of, I would have relieved myself on day one. But the problem is that you cannot just admit to something you haven't done; you need to deliver the details, which you can't when you hadn't done anything. It's not just, "Yes, I did!" No, it doesn't work that way: you have to make up a complete story that makes sense to the dumbest dummies. One of the hardest things to do is to tell an untruthful story and maintain it, and that is exactly where I was stuck. Of course I didn't want to involve myself in devastating crimes I hadn't done—especially under the present circumstances, where the U.S. government was jumping on every Muslim and trying to pin any crime on him.

"We are going to do this with you every single day, day in, day out, unless you speak about [REDACTED] and admit to your crimes," said [REDACTED].



"You have to provide us a smoking gun about another friend of yours. Something like that would really help you," [REDACTED] said in a later session. "Why should you take all of this, if you can stop it?"

I decided to remain silent during torture and to speak whenever they relieved me. I realized that even asking my interrogators politely to use the bathroom, which was a dead basic right of mine, I gave my interrogators some kind of control they don't deserve. I knew it was not just about asking for [the] bathroom: it was more about humiliating me and getting me to tell them what they wanted to hear. Ultimately an interrogator is interested in gathering Intels, and typically the end justifies the means in that regard.

And that was another reason why I refused both to drink and to eat: so I didn't have to use the restroom. And it worked....

Falsely Incriminating Myself

...Now, thanks to the unbearable pain I was suffering, I had nothing to lose, and I allowed myself to say anything to satisfy my assailants. Session followed session since I called

██████████.

“People are very happy with what you’re saying,” said ██████████ after the first session. I answered all the questions he asked me with incriminating answers. I tried my best to make myself look as bad as I could, which is exactly the way you can make your interrogator happy. I made my mind up to spend the rest of my life in jail.

You see, most people can put up with being imprisoned unjustly, but nobody can bear agony day in and day out for the rest of his life....

Falsely Incriminating Others

... “I talked today with the Canadians and they told me they don’t believe your story about ██████████ being involved in drug smuggling into the U.S., but we know he is,” he told me once.

“I can only tell you what I know,” I said.

“But we want you to give evidence linking ██████████ to the Millennium Plot. Things like, he supports the Mujs or believes in Jihad are good, but not good enough to lock him up the rest of his life,” he told me.

“Oh yes, I will,” I said. He handed me a bunch of papers and I went back in my cell, Oh, my God, I am being so unjust to myself and my brothers, I kept thinking, and then repeating “Nothing’s gonna happen to us.... *They’ll* go to hell....Nothing’s gonna happen to us....*They’ll*....” I kept praying in my heart, and repeating my prayers. I took the pen and paper and wrote all kinds of incriminating lies about a poor person who was just seeking refuge in Canada and trying to make some money so he could start a family....

...I felt bad for everybody I hurt with my false testimonies. My only solaces were, one, that I didn’t hurt anybody as I did myself; two, that I had no choice; and three, I was confident that injustice will be defeated, it’s only a matter of time. Moreover, I would not blame anybody for lying about me when he gets tortured....

Groundhog Day Interrogating

...Has there ever, in all of recorded human history, been an interrogation that has gone on, day in and day out, for more than six years? There is nothing an interrogator could say to me that would be new; I’ve heard every variation. Each new interrogator would come up with the most ridiculous theories and lies, but you could tell they were all graduates of the same school: before an interrogator’s mouth opened I knew what he ██████████ was going to say and why he ██████████ was saying it.

“I am your new interrogator. I have very long experience doing this job. I was sent especially from Washington, D.C. to assess your case.”

“You are the most important detainee in this camp. If you cooperate with me, I am personally going to escort you to the airport. If you don’t cooperate, you’re gonna spend the rest of your life on this island.”

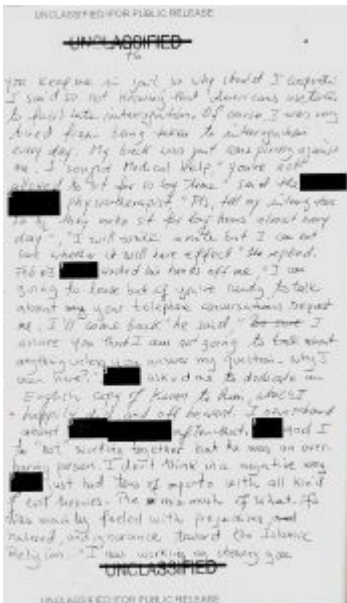
“You’re very smart. We don’t want to keep you in jail. We would rather capture the big fish and release the small fish, such as yourself.”

"You haven't driven a plane into a building; your involvement can be forgiven with just a five-minute talk. The U.S. is the greatest country in the world; we would rather forgive than punish."

"Many detainees have talked about you being the bad person. I personally don't believe them; however, I would like to hear your side of the story, so I can defend you appropriately."

"I have nothing against Islam, I even have many Muslim friends."

"I have helped many detainees to get out of this place; just by writing a positive report stating that you told the whole truth...."



And so on, in an endless recitation that all the interrogators recited when they met with their detainees. Most detainees couldn't help laughing when they had to hear this *Groundhog Day* nonsense; in fact it was the only entertainment we got in the interrogation booth. When his interrogator told him, "I know you are innocent," one of my fellow detainees laughed hard and responded, "I'd rather be a criminal and sitting home with my kids."

I believe anything loses its influence the more we repeat it. If you hear an expression like, "You are the worst criminal on the face of the earth" for the first time, you'll most likely get the hell scared out of you. But the fear diminishes the more times you hear it, and at some point it will have no effect at all. It may even sound like a daily compliment....

ICRC - U.S. - Detainee Politics

...Finally, in September 2004, ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] was allowed to visit after a long fight with the government. It was very odd to the ICRC that I had all of a sudden disappeared from the camp, as if the earth had swallowed me. All attempts by ICRC representatives to see me or just to know where I was were thoroughly flushed down the tube.

The ICRC had been very worried about my situation, but they couldn't come to me when I needed them the most. I cannot blame them; they certainly tried. In GTMO the [redacted] is integrally responsible for both detainees' happiness and their agony, in order to have total control over the detainees. redacted and his colleague

██████████ categorically refused to give the ICRC access to me. Only after ██████████ left was it possible for the ICRC to visit me.

“You are the last detainee we had to fight to see. We have been able to see all other detainees,” said ██████████.

██████████ tried to get me talking about what happened to me during the time they couldn’t have access to me. “We have an idea because we have talked to other detainees who were subject to abuse, but we need you to talk so we can help in stopping further acts of abuse.”

But I always hid the ill-treatment when the ICRC asked me about it because I was afraid of retaliation. That and the fact that the ICRC has no real pressure on the U.S. government; the ICRC tried, but the U.S. government didn’t change its path, even an inch. If they let the Red Cross see a detainee, it meant the operation against that detainee was over.

“We cannot act if you don’t tell us what happened to you,” they would urge me.

“I am sorry! I am only interested in sending and receiving mail, and I am grateful that you’re helping me to do so.”

██████████ brought a very high level ICRC ██████████ from Switzerland who has been working on my case; ██████████ tried to get me talking, but to no avail.

“We understand your worries. all we’re worried about is your well-being, and we respect your decision.”

Although sessions with the ICRC are supposedly private, I was interrogated about the conversations I had during that first session, and I truthfully told the interrogators what we had said. Later I told the ICRC about this practice, and after that nobody asked me what happened in our sessions.

We detainees knew that the meetings with ICRC were monitored; some detainees had been confronted with statements they had made to the ICRC and there was no way for the ██████████ to know them unless the meeting was monitored. Many detainees refused to talk to the ICRC, and suspected them to be interrogators disguised in ICRC clothes. I even know some interrogators who presented themselves as private journalists. But to me that was very naïve: for a detainee to mistake an interrogator for a journalist he would have to be an idiot, and there are better methods to get an idiot talking.

Such mischievous practices led to tensions between detainees and the ICRC. Some ICRC people were even cursed and spit on....

“Open a Torture and War Crimes Investigation”

... I have only written what I experienced, what I saw and what I learned first-hand. I have tried not to exaggerate, or to understate. I have tried to be as fair as possible, to the U.S. government, to my brothers, and to myself. I don’t expect people who don’t know me to believe me, but I expect them, at least, to give me the benefit of the doubt. And if Americans are willing to stand for what they believe in, I also expect public opinion to compel the U.S. government to open a torture and war crimes investigation. I am more than confident that I can prove every single thing I have written in this book if I am ever given the

opportunity to call witnesses in a proper judicial procedure, and if military personnel are not given the advantage of straightening their lies and destroying evidence against them....

...In the beginning, the U.S. government was happy with its secret operations, since it thought it had managed to gather all the evils of the world in GTMO, and had circumvented U.S. law and international treaties so that it could perform its revenge. But then it realized, after a lot of painful work, that it had gathered a bunch of non-combatants. Now the U.S. government is stuck with the problem, but it is not willing to be forthcoming and disclose the truth about the whole operation.

Everybody makes mistakes. I believe the U.S. government owes it to the American people to tell them the truth about what is happening in Guantánamo. So far, I have personally cost American taxpayers at least one million dollars, and the counter is ticking higher every day. The other detainees are costing more or less the same. Under these circumstances, Americans need and have the right to know what the hell is going on...

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