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CIA detainee Ammar al-Baluchi was used as a training prop to teach torture techniques

A newly declassified 2008 document from the CIA's inspector general reveals that one of the detainees currently held at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility was used as a living prop at a black site in Afghanistan to teach trainees the infamous enhanced interrogation techniques adopted by the administration of George W. Bush.

Ammar al-Baluchi, a Kuwaiti citizen, was rendered into US detention in 2003 from Pakistani custody and taken to a CIA torture facility known as the Salt Pit north of Kabul. According to the declassified document, the CIA was aware that rendering al-Baluchi was illegal because he was no longer a terrorist threat.

Proving that the Bush-Cheney administration's pseudo-legal justifications for torture were themselves a sham, Baluchi was initially subjected to two torture techniques that were not on the approved list. The first was the use of a stick behind the knees in a stress position, and the other involved leaning back while kneeling and dousing with ice water.

One of the approved torture techniques being taught by the CIA and used repeatedly on Baluchi was "walling." The CIA inspector general's report says the torture trainees lined up to take turns smashing Baluchi head against a plywood wall.



Camp X-Ray at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on January 11, 2002. (DoD photo by Petty Officer 1st class Shane T. McCoy, U.S. Navy)

According to the results of an MRI of Baluchi's head carried out in 2018, a neuropsychologist found "abnormalities indicating moderate to severe brain damage" in areas affecting memory formation and retrieval, as well as behavioral regulation. The analysis found that the "abnormalities observed were consistent with traumatic brain injury."

The walling of Baluchi involved placing his heels against a specially designed plywood wall "which had flexibility to it" and putting a rolled up towel around his neck. The heavily redacted report states, "The interrogators would then grab the ends of the towel in front of and below the detainees face and shove [Baluchi] backwards into the wall, never letting go of the towel." While Baluchi was "naked for the proceedings," the goal of the interrogators was to "bounce" him off the wall.

While the report states that there was no time limit for the walling sessions, "typically a session did not last for more than two hours at a time," they went for as long as necessary for training purposes.

The declassified report also says that the treatment of Baluchi was not to extract information from him because the trainees were only interested in completing an interrogation course and becoming certified. As a former trainee told the CIA investigators, "all the interrogation students lined up to 'wall' Ammar so that [the instructor] could certify them on their ability to use the technique."

The report says that the interrogation of Baluchi at the Salt Pit did not yield any useful intelligence because the interrogators “focused more on whether Ammar was ‘compliant’ than on the quality of the information he was providing.” It says the CIA’s logic in justifying the detention is “fuzzy and circular.”

Baluchi, who is said to be the nephew of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, has been at Guantanamo Bay since 2006. The reason the CIA document has been released is because Baluchi’s lawyers are requesting an independent medical examination of him. He is one of five detainees, including Mohammed, whose appearance before a military tribunal on charges of participating in the 9/11 plot is moving forward after 10 years of pretrial delays.

After his time at the Salt Pit, Baluchi was tortured for three more years at a total of six CIA black sites. In December 2005, Human Rights Watch listed him as a “ghost detainee” held in the CIA prison system. According to a report in the *WashingtonPost* in July 2014, officials reported Baluchi “was tortured and forcibly dunked into a tub filled with ice water. CIA interrogators forcibly kept his head under water while he struggled to breathe and beat him repeatedly with a truncheon-like object hitting him and smashing his head against a wall.”

Baluchi has been accused of facilitating the 9/11 hijackers by transferring money from the United Arab Emirates to the US at the request of his uncle, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. He is also charged with acting as a courier for Osama Bin Laden and plotting to crash a plane packed with explosives into the US consulate in Karachi. Baluchi lived and worked for a computer technology business in the UAE from 1999 to 2001.

One of Baluchi’s lawyers, Alka Pradhan, told *TheGuardian*, “If the CIA had not hidden their own conclusions about the illegality of Ammar’s torture for this long, the US government would not have been able to bring charges against Ammar because we now know that the torture inflicted on Ammar led to lasting brain damage in the form of a traumatic brain injury and other debilitating illnesses that cannot be treated at Guantánamo Bay.”

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