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Ten Terrible Truths about the CIA Torture Memos, Part 3

by Andy Worthington

Andy Worthington, author of [The Guantánamo Files](#), analyzes ten particularly disturbing facts to emerge from the four memos, purporting to justify the use of torture by the CIA, which were issued by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) in August 2002 and May 2005, and released by the Obama administration last week.

6) The 94 “ghost prisoners”

Another disturbing revelation of Bradbury's memos was the disclosure of the number of prisoners held in secret CIA custody — 94 in total — and the additional note that the agency “has employed enhanced techniques to varying degrees in the interrogations of 28 of these detainees.” What's disturbing is not the number — CIA director [Michael Hayden admitted](#) in July 2007 that the CIA had detained fewer than 100 people at secret facilities abroad since 2002 — but the insight that this exact figure provides into the supremely secretive world of “extraordinary rendition” and secret prisons that exists beyond the cases of the 14 “high-value detainees” who were transferred to Guantánamo from secret CIA custody in September 2006.

It's unlikely that the Obama administration intended to highlight the case of these other prisoners — who can rightly be regarded as “America's Disappeared” — but it's clear that, although their existence was barely mentioned in the mainstream media, the revelation of this official figure will only lead to calls for the administration to explain what happened to the other 80 prisoners.

7) Hassan Ghul

Whether “guilty” or not, the treatment of these men remains one of the dirtiest secrets in the “war on terror.” Some (beyond the 14) may have also been transferred to Guantánamo, others are undoubtedly [still held in Bagram](#), and others have been returned to the custody of their home countries — or, perhaps, to be disposed of in third countries. In addition, as a result of [Obama's executive order](#), in January, compelling the CIA to close all secret prisons, it also seems probable

that, if any of the 80 were still in secret prisons at the time, they too have since been spirited away to the custody of other countries.

It's clear, however, that justifying the disposal of these men without any accountability whatsoever would be intolerable even if they were all confirmed terrorists, and is only made more chilling because the "evidence" against them has never been made available at all, and because of the possibility that, as has been so prevalent in the "war on terror," grievous mistakes were made, and innocent men, or men with no significant connection with terrorism, were also swept up in the indiscriminating global dragnet that the Bush administration created in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

A case in point, I believe, may be the only "ghost prisoner" mentioned by name in the Bradbury memos: "Gul," who is clearly Hassan Ghul, one of 39 suspected "ghost prisoners" mentioned in "Off the Record" ([PDF](#)), a report by several human rights groups that was issued in June 2007. Seized in northern Iraq in January 2004, Ghul was touted by the administration as a significant figure in al-Qaeda on his capture, and the memos revealed how particular techniques were applied to him because the interrogation team believed he "maintain[ed] a tough, Mujahidin fighter mentality and ha[d] conditioned himself for a physical interrogation."

Whether any of this was true or not is unknown. Although Ghul was listed as missing in "Off the Record," a British citizen, [Rangzieb Ahmed](#), who was convicted of terrorist offences in the UK in December 2008, after being tortured in Pakistani custody, reported to the British human rights group [Cageprisoners](#) that, after two and a half years in secret CIA prisons, Ghul was transferred to Pakistani custody, and occupied the cell next to him in a prison in a safe house in Pakistan until January 2007, when he was moved to another unknown location.

From this brief report, it is impossible to know if Ghul was transferred to Pakistani custody because the CIA had downplayed his significance, or even if the U.S. administration had mistaken him for someone else and wanted to get rid of him, or if the CIA was still involved with his imprisonment, but had simply moved him to a secret facility that was ostensibly under the control of the Pakistanis, as part of an ongoing process of shifting "black sites" into less noticeable locations. Either way, his story shines a much-needed light on a largely overlooked corner of the "war on terror," and its sudden resurfacing, in Steven Bradbury's torture memos, will only increase calls for further investigations into the whereabouts of "America's Disappeared."

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