



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **Why Did They Torture Jose Padilla?**

**by John Grant**

There's a rancid odor escaping from the cracks in the Jose Padilla case. Padilla is the American citizen arrested in Chicago and declared by President Bush to be an "enemy combatant." He was then kept for nearly two years in a South Carolina brig without access to a lawyer, family, or friends.

The courts finally forced the Bush administration to release Padilla into the justice system, and he is now imprisoned in Miami awaiting trial on charges that have nothing to do with what he was arrested for — an alleged plot to use a dirty bomb in the United States. It is claimed he had al-Qaeda connections.

What makes this case so insidious is that, according to a psychiatrist who examined him over a 22-hour period, the treatment Padilla received in the South Carolina brig was such that he now "lacks the capacity to assist in his own defense." In other words, a U.S. citizen was secretly worked over for 21 months to the point he is unable to think well enough to engage with his lawyer.

What needs to be pointed out is that the procedures that broke down Padilla's mental equilibrium weren't dreamed up by his jailers in South Carolina. According to Alfred McCoy in a new book called *A Question of Torture*, they are the result of decades and billions of dollars of taxpayer-funded research.

"From 1950 to 1962," McCoy writes,

the CIA became involved in torture through a massive mind-control effort, with psychological warfare and secret research into human consciousness that reached a cost of a billion dollars annually — a veritable Manhattan Project of the mind.

This research amounted to "the first real revolution in the cruel science of pain in more than three centuries." This "black budget" research has never stopped and elements of it were rushed into practice after 9/11.

No need for thumbscrews, racks, phone-crank generators to the genitals, or Black & Decker drills. This was “no-touch torture,” using extreme isolation and sensory deprivation to create confusion while establishing in the subject’s mind the sense that any pain is self-inflicted, that he had chosen the course that led to the pain he was suffering. All it required was extended periods of time and the total elimination of all stimulation and human contact other than that of the jailer and the interrogator.

Padilla spent 21 months in a South Carolina brig especially redesigned after 9/11 to handle interrogation cases like his. A 10-cell wing was devoted solely to Padilla. The windows of his cell were blackened, and he wasn’t allowed a clock or calendar.

McCoy says the no-touch torture chamber

has the theatricality of a set with special lighting, sound effects, props, and backdrops, all designed with a perverse stagecraft to evoke an aura of fear.... The psychological component of torture becomes a kind of total theater, a constructed unreality of lies and inversion, in a plot that ends inexorably with the victim’s self-betrayal and destruction....

“As a result of his experiences during his detention and interrogation,” the *New York Times* quoted psychiatrist Dr. Angela Hegarty as saying, Padilla “has impairments in reasoning ... complicated by the neuropsychiatric effects of prolonged isolation.”

Why did the administration decide to dishonor the Constitution and do this to a U.S. citizen arrested on American soil?

Clearly, it hoped to ferret out leads to more arrests. But if Padilla’s lawyers have their way, the psychological torture will actually exonerate him of even the new, vague charges that have nothing to do with what he was originally arrested for. As all experts on torture agree, torture is not as useful in getting true information as it is useful in getting confessions or responses interrogators want. The upcoming trial should be interesting.

A persistent conspiracy theory floating around the Web has Jose Padilla as John Doe #2 of the Oklahoma City bombing. Due to an uncanny likeness between Padilla and the police drawings of Doe #2 and some overlaps with the perpetrators of the bombing, this theory as an explanation of the government’s extraordinary treatment of Padilla lingers in the mix. (A Google search of “Jose Padilla John Doe #2” turns up 60,000+ hits.)

For whatever reason, the U.S. government did this to one of its own citizens, and whether or not he is guilty of anything, what was done to Padilla should give us all pause. We are now learning that post-9/11 fear resulted in a number of horrendously wrong-headed actions, such as the invasion of Iraq that led to that nation’s civil breakdown. The Padilla case is about the psychological breakdown of a single man, but it should send a shudder down the spine of every freedom-loving American.

*John Grant is a writer and filmmaker living in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. This article originally appeared in the December 12, 2006, issue of The Philadelphia Inquirer. Used with permission of The Philadelphia Inquirer. Copyright © 2006. All rights reserved. Send him [email](#).*

**This article was originally published in the February 2007 edition of *Freedom Daily*.**