

# GUANTÁNAMO BAY DETENTION CAMP: TORTURE

**IMPACT:** A majority of those imprisoned at the Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp were subjected to various forms of physical and psychological abuse—techniques that were developed by two American psychologists contracted by the CIA to develop its torture program. The torture included but was not limited to waterboarding, sexual harassment and abuse, physical abuse, and sleep deprivation. Those formerly imprisoned still experience physical and psychological distress and trauma as a result of their treatment in Guantánamo Bay. A 2014 U.S. Senate intelligence [report](#) found the torture program was ineffective in its stated goal of obtaining military intelligence.

- In **2002, the Central Intelligence Agency awarded a contract in the amount of over \$180 million to Mitchell, Jessen and Associates to develop the CIA’s so-called “enhanced interrogation” program.** Mitchell, Jessen, and Associates was **founded in 2002 by American psychologists Bruce Jessen and James Mitchell**, who would become known as the “[architects](#)” of the CIA torture program. Despite the fact that they had [no experience](#) in interrogations and no expertise on al-Qaeda, they began working with the CIA in developing the program in 2002. **The contract was terminated in 2009 under the Obama Administration, by which point Mitchell, Jessen and Associates had received \$81 million.** In testimony delivered during the pretrial hearings for five men currently on trial in Guantánamo Bay, **Mitchell expressed no remorse for his participation.** Following testimony by Jessen and Mitchell, journalist [Carol Rosenberg](#) concluded, “They showed that the interrogation program was more a test lab for unproven techniques than a well-regulated system, with rules made up or broken on the fly and its day-to-day operations afflicted by internal rivalries.”
- Other interrogators at Guantánamo Bay prison have faced scrutiny for their actions both in and outside of the prison. **Lieutenant Richard Zuley, a Chicago police detective in the Navy Reserve, worked as a Guantánamo interrogator starting in late 2005.** According to a report in the [Guardian](#), even before arriving at Guantánamo Zuley was praised for his ability to obtain confessions from subjects. **During his career with the Chicago Police Department, Zuley conducted police interrogations primarily on Black Chicagoans.** These **interrogations involved the use of torture techniques similar to those he would later use at Guantánamo Bay:** prolonged shackling, threats against the detained person’s family members, and coerced confessions. He attempted to obtain confessions and convictions regardless of the consequences, a philosophy shared at Guantánamo Bay. Zuley’s interrogation of [Mohamedou Ould Slahi](#) was [described](#) by a former Guantánamo Bay official as illegal, immoral, ineffective, and unconstitutional, and it eventually led to numerous false confessions by Slahi. In Chicago, [several people](#) have come forward to claim that their confessions or convictions were a result of Zuley’s torture.
- The **current director of the CIA, Gina Haspel, was briefly the head of the CIA blacksite in Thailand and may have also briefly been in charge of a blacksite at Guantánamo Bay military prison itself.** According to some reports, **Abdel al-Rahim al-Hashiri was waterboarded three times during the time Haspel was the base commander in Thailand. She was also involved in a CIA order to destroy ninety-two videotapes revealing the torture of men in U.S. custody.** While her nomination was controversial (over one hundred retired military officers released a [letter](#) calling her unfit for the position due to her role in the torture program), she was [confirmed](#) in 2018 and currently leads the agency.
- While the majority of the men in Guantánamo Bay were never kept in blacksites, they were subjected to torture and severe abuses at Guantánamo Bay military prison. **The Red Cross, the United Nations, the**

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**Center for Constitutional Rights, and a member of the military commissions council set up by the Bush administration have all concluded that the men imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay were tortured by the U.S. military.** This torture included sexual harassment and threats of rape, threats with dogs, extended solitary confinement, light and sound manipulation, exposure to extreme temperatures, sleep deprivation, physical abuse such as beatings or being put into “stress positions,” forced shaving, and religious abuse such as mocking the call to prayer and abuse of the Qur’an. **Many of the individuals who have since been released report that they still experience physical and mental distress and trauma** as a result of their treatment in Guantánamo Bay, including permanent headaches, nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.

- The **United States government explicitly sanctioned this torture in the infamous 2002 “torture memos,”** drafted by **John Yoo, the deputy assistant attorney general for the Bush administration** at the time. These memos attempted to give legal justification to the torture program and argued that, while the techniques used “may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, they do not produce pain or suffering of the necessary intensity to meet the definition of torture.” Pain severe enough to be considered torture would be “equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function or even death.” **Additionally, in 2002 Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld began the process of greatly expanding the approved list of interrogation techniques in the Army Field Manual.** Although Navy lawyers argued that the new techniques were abusive and illegal, Rumsfeld officially approved most of the new techniques in April of 2003.
- The men and boys imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay have frequently engaged in hunger strikes in order to protest their detention and treatment. **Many of the prisoners on hunger strike were subjected to forced-feeding, a procedure in which a rubber tube is threaded through a person’s nose and into their stomach in order to convey nutrients.** In late 2005 Guantánamo authorities began using restraint chairs to hold men they force-fed. The chairs bound the individual’s hands, feet, forehead, and chest. Those who were subjected to these feedings report that they are extremely painful, traumatic, have caused bleeding, vomiting, and fainting, and were sometimes used as punishment for taking part in hunger strikes.
- Both the **American Medical Association and the World Medical Association have strongly condemned force-feeding as cruel, degrading, inhumane treatment, and a violation of human rights.** According to the medical code of ethics, as long as the strikers are medically competent and informed of the possible consequences of their actions, they have the right to strike. Force-feeding them is a violation of their physical autonomy. Risks of force-feeding include infection, pneumonia, collapsed lungs, heart failure, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Many supporters of the torture program argue that it was ethically permissible because it produced military intelligence that may have saved lives. However, **there is a widespread consensus among intelligence officials, military officers, and neuroscientists that torture does not provide credible or valuable intelligence.** In the case of the Guantánamo Bay military prison and the blacksites, the **2014 Senate Intelligence Committee Study found that the torture program was not effective in this regard, and that the CIA’s claims about its effectiveness rested on lies and exaggerations.** After reviewing twenty frequently presented examples of the program’s successes, the report found that all were “wrong in fundamental respects.” Furthermore, journalists have argued that inaccurate coerced evidence obtained during this program, and from torture in Egypt that occurred as part of the U.S. rendition program, was used to help justify the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.