

WikiLeaks Guantánamo release offers an opportunity for truth-telling

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The 779 classified Detainee Assessment Briefs (DABs) that WikiLeaks began releasing on April 24 offer an unprecedented opportunity for us to finally confront the flimsy evidence our government has compiled about hundreds of men to support their past or present indefinite detention at Guantánamo.

First, contrary to the stories the Bush administration told to frighten the public about “the worst of the worst,” the DABs include files on men and boys who were sent to Guantánamo by mistake, proving the claims of Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell at the time, and others that there were no competent battlefield tribunals to prevent innocent bystanders from being sent to the prison.

While the documents portray the prison as an interrogation facility, some interrogations focused on gathering information unrelated to terrorism. For example, a taxi driver was detained and interrogated for his knowledge of streets in his area, and Sami al-Hajj, who remained in the prison for more than 6 years, was questioned about his employer, Aljazeera.

The interrogators’ reliance on prison informants supports the notion that Guantánamo was a lie factory. We have known for years about the interrogators’ harsh tactics such as its sleep deprivation technique known as the “frequent flyer program,” stress positions, and extreme temperatures, which extracted false confessions and fabricated stories. From the documents, we also have learned the extent to which interrogators relied on eight prison informants, who informed on more than 200 detainees. Some informants were tortured or otherwise coerced. The testimony of Yasim Basardah, who informed on 124 other detainees, remained in the detainees’ records through 2008, several years after interrogators doubted his trustworthiness.

A technique that some journalists have used to evaluate the documents’ believability has been to compare prisoners’ DABs with federal judges’ rulings on their habeas corpus petitions. The case of Fouad al-Rabia is a good example. [Al-Rabia’s DAB](#) [1] calls him an Al Qaeda operative and funder; [Judge Colleen Kollar Kotelly ordered al-Rabia’s release](#) [2] after reviewing his habeas corpus petition and finding his testimony had been extracted via the “frequent flyer program” of sleep deprivation and other forms of coercion, and furthermore, that his interrogators did not believe the confessions were true. Read [Tom Gjelten’s NPR story](#) [3] comparing the two documents. Mr. al-Rabia, who had been a Kuwaiti airline pilot, remained in Guantánamo Bay prison for eight years, initially due to others’ false testimony, and later due to his own coerced false confessions.

While the DABs are quite free with their accusations against detainees, they carefully withhold information that would cast doubt on their credibility. Nowhere in the DABs will you find key information about the interrogators’ tactics to extract information, such as threats or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Nor do they mention the identities of the bounty hunters who turned the majority of the men over to the U.S. military, the stories they concocted about the men in order to collect their rewards, and how much money they were paid.

Well-meaning writers as well as Bush administration supporters have reported on the large number of “high risk” and “medium risk” detainees at Guantánamo. In fact, as blogger [Andy Worthington](#) [4] and [Center for Constitutional Rights](#) [5] (CCR) attorney Shayana Kadidal pointed out in a recent conference call on the WikiLeaks Guantánamo document release (read [call transcript](#) [6]), most detainees’ DABs give them a medium- or high-risk rating. Suggestions that releasing detainees



designated as “high-risk” endangers Americans are misleading. Among the “high risk” detainees who have either been cleared or already released are a Uighur detainee named Ahmad Muhammad Yaqub; U.K. citizens and residents Moazzam Begg, Omar Deghayes, Ruhel Ahmed, Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal, Richard Belmar, and Binyam Mohamed, all of whom are back in the U.K.; German citizen Murat Kurnaz; and Algerian Lakhdar Boumediene, who is now living in France.

Keep in mind that the DABs do not represent the current administration’s assessment of the remaining detainees’ potential threats. They are the Bush administration’s final word before the Obama administration assembled a multi-agency task force to review all available evidence and prepare its own assessments. Now that the DABs are out, CCR is calling on the Obama administration to release the 2009 task force determinations. Read the statement of CCR Executive Director Vincent Warren [here](#) [7].

Although the lawyers for the detainees would seem to be best qualified to point out the flaws in the DABs, and how the false information was extracted from their clients, they cannot do so. They are forbidden from discussing publicly the DABs or any classified government documents to which they are privy, including some of their own notes from meetings with their detainee clients, as a condition of their security clearances. We owe it to them and to their clients to do all we can to speak loudly and to write forcefully in order to expose government falsehoods about Guantánamo and its inmates.

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[2] <http://www.pillsburylaw.com/siteFiles/News/1259B22146574C540A8871C2C3131CA2.pdf>

[3]

http://www.wnyc.org/npr_articles/2011/apr/28/judges-question-evidence-on-guantanamo-detainees/

[4] <http://www.andyworthington.co.uk/2011/04/27/the-hidden-horrors-of-wikileaks-guantanamo-files/>

[5] <http://www.ccrjustice.org/>

[6] <https://www.nogitmos.org/wikileaksquantanamodetaineeassessmentbriefs>

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