



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 5, 2016

Study Shows Guantanamo Intelligence Gathering Is “Ineffective”

The military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has been in operation since January 2002. It exists for the purpose of detaining and interrogating suspected terrorists captured by the United States. According to former detainees who have been released without charges, much of that “interrogation” includes torture, sexual degradation, the forced administration of drugs, and religious persecution. Their claims have been supported by leaked documents and photographs. U.S. leaders, including Presidents Bush and Obama, claim the treatment of Guantanamo detainees is both necessary and effective and is therefore justified.



Setting aside the infantile notions that the end can justify the means and might really does make right, the reality is that the intelligence gathering at Guantanamo is nearly worthless. Emanuel Deutschmann, who authored a [recently updated study](#) based on the documents leaked by Private Bradley Manning and published by [WikiLeaks](#) in 2010, [says that](#):

On February 23, 2016, almost a decade after his first promise to close it, President Obama began a final attempt to shut down the US military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. His chances of success are moderate, not least since Republican presidential candidates and members of Congress immediately rejected the plan. Florida Senator Marco Rubio for instance stated that: “Not only are we not going to close Guantánamo, when I am president, if we capture a terrorist alive, they [...] are going to Guantánamo, and we are going to find out everything they know.”

This idea, compelling as it may sound to some, is unrealistic, as a new study based on leaked Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) documents reveals: although the large majority (85 percent) of Guantánamo detainees was explicitly brought to Cuba “to provide information,” almost two thirds did not reveal any information about fellow detainees whatsoever. Whether this was because they actually did not have any relevant information (which would mean that they were erroneously deported to Cuba) or because they managed to keep silent despite the application of torture (which would mean that the interrogation methods applied by JTF-GTMO were inefficient), one thing is clear: measured by what the US administration expected to learn from its prisoners, intelligence-gathering at Guantánamo was deficient.

The study “examines the behavior” of “765 detainees” and looks at the areas of “collaboration and disobedience and how [the behavior of the detainees in these areas] influences their chances of getting a release recommendation.” The findings are far from encouraging.

As Deutschmann says in his analysis of the report:



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For 84 percent of the detainees, the single explicit reason for transfer to Guantánamo was “to provide information.” About 7 percent of the detainees were brought to Guantánamo because of an alleged affiliation with Al-Qaeda or similar incriminating circumstances. In 2 percent of the cases, the reason was an alleged affiliation with Al-Qaeda and the provision of information. Only 12 detainees (less than 2 percent) were transported to Guantánamo “to face prosecution for terrorist activities against the US.”

With such a high percentage of detainees imprisoned at Guantanamo for the single purpose of providing information, it could reasonably be expected that such information could and would be obtained. Instead, the opposite is true. Perhaps the least surprising aspect of this is that torturing people may make them speak, but it will not make them speak the truth.

Instead, since “by revealing information, detainees don’t improve their own chances of getting release recommendations” but they do “impair [the chance of release] of the detainees they implicate,” most detainees simply make false claims against detainees from other nations with whom they do not share cultural, religious, or philosophical similarities. Those detainees repay the favor by making false accusations in return. The end result is a worthless pile of false data.

Even though the officials at Guantanamo are aware of this “he-said-she-said” game of misinformation, they still base release recommendations on the accusations:

For a detainee with medium intelligence value, for example, the probability of getting a release recommendation drops dramatically from 82 percent to 32 percent and further to 10 percent as the number of incriminating statements made about him increases from 0 to 10 to 20. These numbers illustrate that while having no impact on their own chances to get release recommendations, the Guantánamo detainees profoundly influence the fate of others.

Further, “most prisoners don’t make incriminating statements despite the fact that they were expected to have information and connections to terrorist groups and notwithstanding the fact that US interrogators [admittedly used torture](#) to make people talk at Guantánamo,” according to Deutschmann. He ends his analysis by stating what should be obvious:

Thus, the current plans of Republican presidential candidates to send new suspected “terrorists” to Guantánamo “to find out everything they know” is unrealistic and misleading. Guantánamo and its selection and interrogation methods have not only cost American taxpayers millions of dollars and seriously harmed America’s moral reputation in the world; they have also proven to be quite ineffective with regards to intelligence-gathering. It is time to finally close Guantánamo down.

Torture is wrong even if it is effective, but just to put in the for-what-it’s-worth column, it is not effective. And Deutschmann is right that it has both “cost American taxpayers millions of dollars and seriously harmed America’s moral reputation in the world.” Since America cannot afford either, it is high time to change our tactics.



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