

By Andy Worthington

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155 men are [still held at Guantánamo](#) , and yet, despite the fact that most of these prisoners have been held for 12 years without charge or trial, many of them are completely unknown to the general public.

A case in point is Emad Hassan, a Yemeni prisoner whose representation has recently been taken on by [Reprive](#) , the London-based legal action charity whose founder and director is Clive Stafford Smith. Reprive recently received a letter from Emad, after it was unclassified by the Pentagon censorship board that evaluates all correspondence between prisoners and their lawyers — and the hand-written notes of any meetings that take place — and decides whether it can be made available to the public.

When the cleared letter was released, Reprieve secured publication of it in the [Middle East Monitor](#), where it was published to mark the 12th opening of the prison on January 11. In the hope of securing a wider audience for Emad's words, I'm cross-posting it below, not only to let people know about Emad's particular story — to humanize another of the men so cynically dismissed as “the worst of the worst” by the Bush administration — but also because of his detailed description of how hunger strikers at Guantánamo are being abused by the authorities.

First, though, allow me to introduce Emad, who is one of the 55 Yemeni prisoners in Guantánamo who were [cleared for release](#) in 2010 by the high-level, inter-agency Guantánamo Review Task Force that President Obama established when he took office in January 2009. After a Nigerian man, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried and failed to blow up a plane bound for Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, with a bomb in his underwear, and after it was discovered that he had been recruited in Yemen, President Obama [imposed a ban](#) on releasing any Yemenis from Guantánamo, despite the recommendation of his task force. This ban stood until May last year, when, in response to the prison-wide hunger strike at Guantánamo that began last February and attracted worldwide criticism of President Obama's inaction, the president responded by [finally dropping the ban](#), although no Yemenis have been released in the last nine months.

The Yemenis' release was also blocked by Congress, which imposed general restrictions on the release of prisoners, particularly from 2010 onwards. These restrictions were only finally [eased in December](#), in amended legislation that was introduced by the Senate Armed Services Committee, under the leadership of Sen. Carl Levin, but although these changes are important, it should be noted that, all along, President Obama [had the power to override Congress](#) if he regarded it as being “in the national security interests of the United States,” and, as he has repeatedly demonstrated in his eloquent speeches, it is demonstrably clear that the ongoing existence of Guantánamo is *not* “in the national security interests of the United States.”

Emad Hassan, then, is one of the Yemenis who needs to be released to break this absurd and unjust refusal of the US government to release Yemenis that its own Presidential task force said should be released, but who is he?

I have previously written about him, in my book [The Guantánamo Files](#) , and also as one of 15 prisoners seized in a house raid in Faisalabad, Pakistan, on the same night that another house raid led to the capture of

[Abu Zubaydah](#)

, who was mistakenly identified as a senior figure in al-Qaeda, and for whom the CIA's torture program was specifically developed.

Most of the men in the house in which Hassan was seized have maintained, throughout their long imprisonment, that it was a student house, providing accommodation to young men studying at the nearby Salafia University. Moreover, in May 2009, in the District Court in Washington D.C., as I explained in an article entitled, "[Judge Condemns 'Mosaic' Of Guantánamo Intelligence, And Unreliable Witnesses](#)

“:

Judge Gladys Kessler, ruling on the habeas corpus petition of one of the men, Alla Ali Bin Ali Ahmed, savaged the government for drawing on the testimony of witnesses whose unreliability was acknowledged by the authorities, and for attempting to create a “mosaic” of intelligence that was thoroughly unconvincing, and she also made a point of stating, “It is likely, based on evidence in the record, that at least a majority of the [redacted] guests were indeed students, living at a guest house that was located close to a university.”

Many of the men seized in the house raid have since been released (see [here](#) , [here](#) , [here](#) and [here](#) ).

As I also explained in [an article in 2010](#) :

In Guantánamo, Hassan has repeatedly stated that he never set foot in Afghanistan (until the US took him there after his capture), and that he was near the end of a seven-month trip to the university to study the Koran when he was seized. He has also explained that, while in Pakistani custody, “the person who was in charge came and told us we didn't have anything to worry about,” and that “our sheet was clean.”

As I also explained, it may be that Hassan “aroused the wrath of the authorities in Guantánamo because of his refusal to accept the conditions in which he and the other prisoners are held,” and noted:

In 2006, one of his lawyers, Douglas Cox, [explained](#) how he was “regarded as a leader by other detainees,” and how he “went on a hunger strike. A few months into it, military doctors started force-feeding him by inserting a tube through his nose. The process was so painful that Hassan felt he couldn’t take it anymore. He didn’t want to quit, though, because he thought he would be letting down the other detainees.” Weight records released by the Pentagon show that, although Hassan only weighted 113 pounds on arrival at Guantánamo, his weight dropped at one point in December 2005 to a skeletal 85 pounds (

[PDF](#)  
).

What I didn’t know, until recently, when I spoke to Clive Stafford Smith about Emad Hassan, and read [Reprieve’s profile of him](#), is that he has been on a persistent hunger strike since 2007 (I identified two other long-term hunger strikers [here](#) ).

As Reprieve explained:

Hunger strikes are a universally regarded form of peaceful protest. Yet the Guantánamo authorities do not share this view – they have compared their response to strikers to adapting to new warfare tactics. Strikers are punished for their disobedience, violently removed from their cells, strapped to a chair and have tubes shoved up their noses through which a nutritional supplement is pumped. This has led to dire health problems for Emad. He has severe pancreatitis and one of his nasal passages has completely closed up. In his own words:

“Sometimes I sit in the chair and vomit. Nobody says anything. Even if they turned their backs I would understand. I’m looking for humans. All I ask for is basic human rights.”

I also learned from Reprieve that Emad had initially traveled from Yemen to Pakistan to study

“as he was not able to access specialised higher education in Yemen.” Reprieve described him as “an intellectual with a passion for poetry, ranging from the great Sufi poets like Rumi, to English poets such as Wilfred Owen.”

As Reprieve also explained, during an interrogation that followed his capture, Emad “was asked if he knew Al-Qaeda and he responded: ‘Yes, I know Al Qa’idah well.’ He was talking about a small village [near where he grew up in Yemen](#) . But this didn’t matter.”

As Reprieve also noted, since December the prison authorities have “[stopped providing any information](#) on hunger strikers in a bid to stop attention to their cause,” although [Shaker Aamer](#) , the last British resident in the prison, recently reported that 35 men are currently on a hunger strike, and 17 of them are being force-fed.

Emad is one of them. As Reprieve explained, he “would like nothing more than to be released, as promised, back to the arms of his loving family. But because the US considers Yemen to be a dangerous a place to send former Guantánamo detainees, he is being punished for his nationality. Emad has said that he will continue on his peaceful protest until he and his fellow cleared men can go home where they belong.”

It is time for the cleared Yemenis — the 55 cleared for release by the task force, and a 56th man, [recently cleared for release by a Periodic Review Board](#) — to be sent home, without further delays and obstruction.

Emad Hassan’s letter is posted below:

**The Guantánamo Experiment: A letter from Emad Hassan to mark the 12th anniversary of the opening of the prison**  
**Middle East Monitor, January 10, 2014**

Here we are in Guantánamo as we come to the 12th anniversary of this terrible place. The

treatment here is often described by the public relations officer as next door to perfect. Indeed, now I am into my seventh year of being force fed, it's quite a Club Med holiday camp!

We heard some good news about President Obama wanting to send people home, but we do not want to hang our hopes on it. Hope is like a mirage; you can see it, but can't touch it.

It does not really need to be said, but it is a grave violation of professional ethics for doctors to participate in torture or cruel treatment. Surely health care professionals should not condone any deliberate infliction of pain and suffering on detainees? This would seem to be a fairly basic proposition.

Yet who is better than a doctor to cause excruciating pain without damaging the body? There is a wide divergence here between the morality of a doctor's role and the reality of his actions. It is very, very sad. When a surgeon no longer uses his scalpel to cure a disease, he becomes no better than a butcher.

In 2005, when the doctors were still human beings, the hunger strikers didn't worry about their health because there was level of trust with the medical team. One of the doctors refused to go along with force feeding, because he believed that his medical ethics were more important than the order of a military colonel. But then things changed. The military only recruited doctors who agreed, before they arrived here, that a military order was more important than morality. The new wave of doctors allowed the military officers to instruct them on how to conduct the medical procedure of force feeding.

As a child, I was taught to disdain German doctors for what they did in World War II, experimenting on prisoners. Yet here the doctors now experiment to try to find the best way to force us to bend to the military's will: is it more effective for them to make the force feeding process more painful, by forcing the liquid down my nose faster and by pulling the 110 centimeter tube out of my nostril after every feed? Or, is it more effective to refuse my request for a blanket to keep me warm, now that my weight has fallen so low? They experiment all the time, and this is virgin territory for experimental science, since no other doctor would be allowed to force feed a prisoner at all.

But in recent days, sad to say, I have seen the truly ugly faces of those doctors, nurses, and

other medical staffers. I have been subjected to a novel regime for 36 days. This new system is not an occasionally “uncomfortable procedure,” as the public relations has described it. No, it has been a HORRIFIC, BARBAROUS TORTURE. I am not even sure I can find the words to tell you truly what it is like ...

It is difficult to take it anymore. First they force the 110 centimeter tube in me. They cannot do it in the right nostril any more, as that is now firmly closed up. So they have to force it up the left nostril. It is very painful these days, but that is no bar to medical practice. They used to leave the tube in so that we did not have to undergo this pain, but then a general said they wanted to make our peaceful protest less “convenient,” so they came up with the less “convenient” system of pulling the tube out each time.

That has been a technique since 2006, so it is nothing new. But the latest experiment is different. Now they begin with 1500cc of formula called TwoCal — four cans in the morning and four in the night, served up each time with 700cc of water. Once I finish each ‘meal,’ they fill the feed bag with 50cc of an anti-constipation medication and 450cc of water. As this scientific study shows — at least in the experience of this guinea pig, your correspondent — this method accelerates the stomach function and makes the hunger striker defecate on himself in the chair.

When this stage is complete, they add another 700cc of water — why? Have I not suffered enough? When I dared to ask this question, the medical professional answered sarcastically, “to wash the feeding bag.” This process is completed in 30-45 minutes, which is much faster than before, but then why allow the detainee to be fed slowly when you could cause much more pain by speeding up the process? Yet it is not over quickly, as they leave you in the torture chair for two hours, suffering. Then they pull the tube out of your nose again, ready to force it back in for the next session.

If I vomit on myself at any time during the procedure, they start the atrocity all over again, though they don’t necessarily let me wash off before it begins.

And that’s exactly what has been happening to me every day, twice daily. Except for last night — which will long burn alive in my memory. But I will write about it in the next message, God willing.

As you enjoy your holiday season, please spare a thought for those of us who continue to hold the embers, trying to keep the flame alive in Guantánamo Bay — even as the doctors try to break our peaceful hunger strike protest. And remember, if you will, that all we ask for is what President Obama keeps promising: freedom or a fair trial.

December 16th 2013

Emad Hassan (ISN 680, cleared for several years...)