

By Andy Worthington

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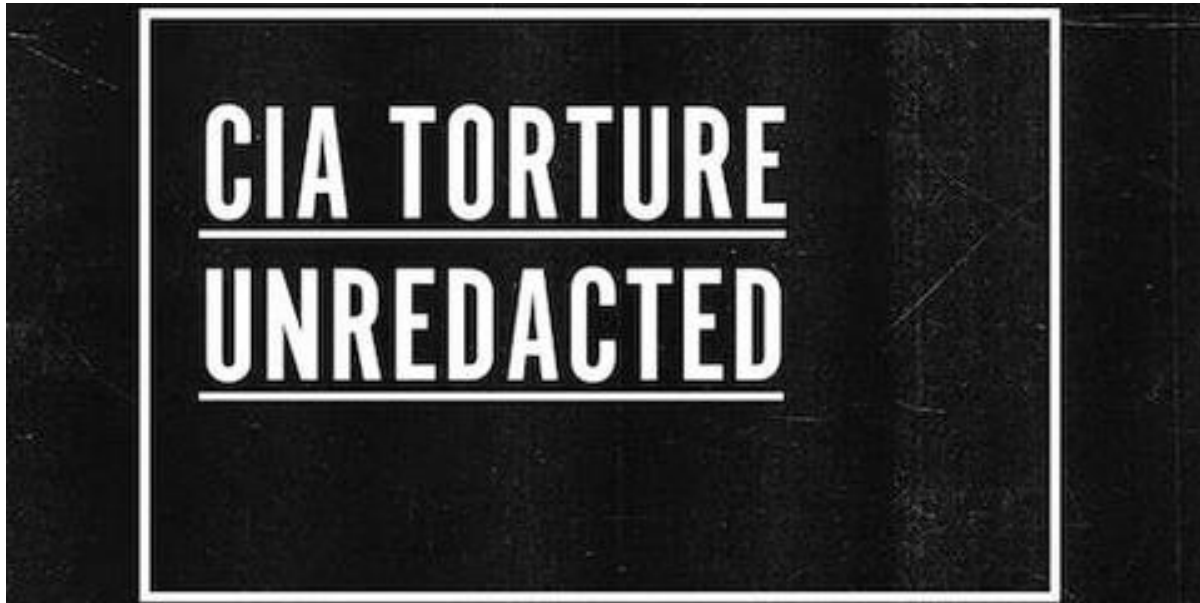


Image from the cover of the new report, "CIA Torture Unredacted," launched in London on July 10, 2019.

Congratulations to Sam Raphael and Ruth Blakeley of [The Rendition Project](https://therenditionproject.org), Crofton Black of the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](https://bureauofinvestigativejournalism.org), and all those who worked with them, for the publication of "[CIA Torture Unredacted](#)", their 400-page report on the CIA's post-9/11 torture program, which was launched in London on Wednesday, and [is available online, in its entirety, here](#) — and [see here for a chapter by chapter breakdown](#).

The report is the culmination of nine years' work, which began in 2010 with funding from the U.K.-based [Economic and Social Research Council](#), and which led, in May 2013, to the launch of The Rendition Project website, which, as Ian Cobain and James Ball explained for the [Guardian](#), "mapped the U.S. government's global kidnap and secret detention programme, shedding unprecedented light on one of the most controversial secret operations of recent years."

At the time of its initial launch in 2013, The Rendition Project drew on previous work conducted by researchers for a variety of NGOs and international bodies, which included [an influential report for the Council of Europe](#) about secret prisons and rendition in Europe, published by Swiss Senator Dick Marty in 2007, [a detailed analysis of the secret detention programme for a U.N. study](#) in 2010, for which I was the lead author, and in which, as [I described it in an Al-Jazeera article in 2014](#), "I sought to ascertain the identities of the 94 'ghost prisoners' in CIA custody — including 28 subjected to 'enhanced interrogation' — who were referred to in [a memo from 2005](#) by [U.S. government] lawyer Steven G. Bradbury that was released by the Obama administration in April 2009. Another major report, by [the Constitution Project](#), was published in 2013.

The next step in the long road to the truth about the CIA torture program — and one day, we hope, accountability for those who organized and ran it — came in December 2014, with the publication of [the 500-page executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report about the CIA torture program](#).

The Senate Intelligence Committee's full report — 6,700 pages in total, which cost \$40m and involved an analysis of more than six million pages of classified documents — has never been released, but the executive summary was — and remains — a devastatingly powerful criticism of the brutality and pointlessness of the program.

In it, the committee made clear, as I explained in the Al-Jazeera article mentioned above, that "torture was 'not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation from detainees,' that the CIA made 'inaccurate claims' about the 'effectiveness' of the programme in an attempt to justify it and that it led to friction with other agencies that endangered national security, as well as providing false statements that led to costly and worthless wild goose chases."

I also pointed out that the committee concluded that the interrogations "were brutal and far worse than the CIA represented to policymakers and others," that "non-approved techniques were used widely," that "[a]t least 17 detainees were subjected to CIA enhanced interrogation techniques without authorization from CIA headquarters," and that "multiple detainees were subjected to techniques that were applied in ways that diverged from the specific authorization, or were subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques by interrogators who had not been authorized to use them."

The committee, as I also pointed out, was also critical of the central role played by two contract psychologists — James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen — from the US military's SERE program, which taught US military personnel how to resist torture in enemy hands. Mitchell and Jessen [were paid \\$81m](#) to implement the program, even though neither of them "had any experience as an interrogator, nor did either have specialized knowledge of Al-Qaeda, a background in counterterrorism, or any relevant cultural or linguistic expertise."

Significantly, for those researching the victims of the torture program, the report also confirmed that Steven Bradbury's figures were wrong, and that the CIA "detained at least 119 individuals, of whom at least 39 were subjected to the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques." Moreover, of these 119 "at least 26 were wrongfully held and did not meet the detention standard" in the secret Bush administration memorandum that established the program in September 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks.

It was at this point that Sam Raphael, Crofton Black and Ruth Blakeley reconvened, using the list of the 119 individuals as the basis for their work over the last four years, in which they sought, in particular, to "unredact" the many redactions in the executive summary of the torture report that, as Black explained this week in [an article for the Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#), "could identify specific times and places where abuses had occurred," and which the committee was "compelled by the Obama administration, and by the CIA itself, to censor."

"This is important," he added, "because without being able to tie illegal activities to specific times and places, the quest for redress is hamstrung, and meaningful accountability — legal, public, historical — remains a mirage."

Black explained how the CIA's prisoner list had "a date of custody (redacted) and a record of how many days they were held (also partly redacted)," and that their work over the last four years involved "reconstructing this list to reveal the hidden dates," some of which, as Sam Raphael noted at Wednesday's launch, was easier than anyone would have imagined, because the CIA didn't use justified text, and so it was relatively easy to work out how many letters or numbers had been blacked-out.

However, most of the work involved cross-referencing with other sources. As Black explained, "Figuring out a date often meant that we could match it to a flight record; matching to a flight record meant that we could determine where a prisoner was brought from or sent to. As we cross-correlated thousands of data points — from declassified government documents, footnotes in the Senate report, aviation data, records of corporate outsourcing of rendition flights, legal cases, media reporting and NGO investigations — the contours of the CIA's programme of secret detention and torture began to emerge more clearly. Rather than just understanding certain individual histories, we could begin to discern the entire scope of the programme's development."

Black also explained:

When the Senate Committee released their report, fewer than half the names on the list of prisoners were known. We reported in 2015 that [only 36](#) of those held by the CIA had been taken on to Guantánamo Bay, while the fate of many of the others remained a mystery. Seized in secret, held in secret, they were then disposed of in secret — some back to their homes, some into continued custody in other countries, again often in secret.

Since then, we've been able to establish the histories — at least to some extent — of around 100 prisoners. We've traced over 60 operations to transport them to and from prison sites. We've uncovered who was held in Afghanistan, and revealed more fully than before who was sent to the European black sites, in Poland, Romania and Lithuania. We've also brought to light further details of how deeply implicated the U.K. was in the overall running of the CIA's torture network.

Last year, some of our findings were cited in two judgments at the European Court of Human

Rights, which held that Romania and Lithuania had assisted the U.S. in illegally holding prisoners incommunicado on their territory. Elsewhere, our work has assisted legal teams, police inquiries and citizen accountability projects.

"CIA Torture Unredacted" is the most comprehensive public account of one of the most disturbing elements of the 'War on Terror': a global programme of systematic disappearance and torture, carried out by the world's most powerful liberal democratic states in contravention of laws which they purport to uphold. In the face of continued obstruction and denial by the governments involved, we hope that it will stand as a central reference point for all those interested in accountability, truth and the rule of law.

We hope so too.