

# An icon of lawlessness

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**W**hat happened to 54-year-old Muhammad Sagheer, who returned alive from the concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay with a grand total of one hundred US dollars as compensation for his ordeal, is horrible enough, but his testimony merely provides a small window to the real nature of crimes being committed by the Bush administration in that outpost of tyranny in Cuba and elsewhere in the world.

Sagheer, a member of the non-political Tableeghi Jamat of Pakistan was picked up in Afghanistan while on a customary round of preaching, transported from Kunduz to Mazar-e-Sharif by truck along with 250 other prisoners, all blindfolded, handcuffed and chained; after six weeks of detention, they were packed into airtight containers by U.S. Forces and local Afghan soldiers for transport to the Shabargan Jail, 75 miles west of Mazar-e-Sharif. During this trip, more than 50 men died from suffocation, and lack of food and water.

The death of several thousand men during such trips and their subsequent dumping in the desert by Afghan drivers under the direct supervision and orders of the U.S. military forces had been previously documented in *Masacres in Mazar*, a film by Irish director

Jamie Doran, screened in June 2002 in Europe.

At Shabargan Jail in Kandahar, where Sagheer was detained for two weeks along with more than 3000 other men, prisoners were thrashed, deprived of water, made to lie in the dirt at midnight and deprived of sleep for long periods of time. Their hair, mustaches and beards were shaved off; they were not allowed to pray. But all of this was nothing compared to what happened to Sagheer when he was airlifted by helicopter from Shabargan Jail to the U.S.-occupied Bagram airbase in Kandahar, where a secret CIA interrogation center is located. Here he was shackled and put on a U.S. military plane for transport to Guantanamo Bay. During the flight his lips were sealed, eyes covered, hands and feet were chained. He was given nothing but an apple and a piece of bread during the 24-hour flight.

At Guantanamo Bay, he was identified with an ID bracelet labeled "Delta" for Guantanamo which he still retains. He was placed in a chain-link cage with a cement pad for sleeping. His 6 x 6 x 7 foot cage was out in the open; he was fully chained and locked inside the cage. Thus began a year of torture and humiliation during which he was starved, forced to drink urine, not allowed to speak, and forced by guards to take pills which drugged him and made him senseless. At times alcohol

was added to drinks given to him, he was forced to eat unlawful meat, not allowed to pray and during an intense period of interrogation, blood was drawn from his body, sometimes as much as 1000 cc at a time. After a hunger strike, prisoners were given copies of the Qur'aan, but the next time the interrogators brought dogs; often the US soldiers and their dogs would desecrate the Book of Allah.

Sagheer was twice detained in solitary confinement, first for eight and then for sixteen days, in a special darkened cell where cold air was blown through the cell, chilling him. He was interrogated more than 19 times about his links to Taliban or al-Qaeda. After nearly a year, a U.S. General informed him and a few other prisoners that they had been found innocent and would soon be released. After a few days, Sagheer was taken into a room, fingerprinted, photographed and informed that he would be compensated for his detention. But he remained in shackles and chains for 12 more days.

Finally, he and three other men were taken to an airport and loaded on a U.S. military plane for transport to Pakistan. Again, during the 24-hour flight he was given just a sandwich and an apple. The day before Ramadan 2002, he arrived at Bagram airport in Afghanistan, and was flown to Islamabad arriving in Pakistan on October 27, 2002. He was turned over to the CIA and intelligence

agencies which then held him for five days and promised \$2000 as compensation. Five days later, the CIA and Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) took him to Peshawar where he was held for two more days and given \$100 as compensation for being illegally detained by the U.S. Government for nearly one year. On November 4, 2002, he was released in Peshawar to local authorities who returned him to his family in the town of Phattan in the mountains of Kohistan.

If Sagheer's account of his experiences in American custody makes the Soviet Gulags pale in comparison, two reports recently released by Amnesty International make it abundantly clear that the responsibility for the continuous violation of international charters and agreements cannot be put on the shoulders of a few individual American soldiers; it must be borne by the highest cadre of the Bush administration.

Amnesty's report, "Guantanamo and beyond: The continuing pursuit of unchecked executive power", released on May 13, 2005, together with an earlier report, "Guantanamo Bay: An icon of lawlessness", identifies numerous individual cases of gross violation of international charters and agreements. It states that "over a year after the Abu Ghraib torture scandal broke, and as evidence of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by US

forces in the 'war on terror' continues to mount, not one US agent has been charged with war crimes or torture under US law. In over 70 per cent of announced official actions taken in response to substantiated allegations of abuse, the punishment has been non-judicial or administrative. While a small number of mainly low-ranking soldiers have been subjected to courts-martial, members of the administration, who from the outset have claimed that the USA treats all detainees humanely and that any abuses have been the actions of a few aberrant soldiers, have remained free of independent investigation despite possible criminal responsibility in abuses. (US) Congress has failed to initiate an independent commission of inquiry, as Amnesty International has sought."

The real question is: Why is the Bush administration behaving in such a manner? Why has it institutionalised a policy of torture and terror in contravention to international treaties and agreements signed by the United States? The extent of violence and the nature of brutalities being committed by the Bush administration suggest some deep-seated hatred against Islam and Muslims to be the real cause of this sub-human behaviour, a hatred that has destroyed the last iota of humanity in men and women who are committing these horrible crimes in detention centers around the world.