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TRANSCRIPT

Interviews With Detainees

Following are excerpts of interviews with former detainees held at a military jail at American air base in [Afghanistan](#).

HAYATULLAH, 33, pharmacist. Detained in July 2007; released in October.

ON HIS CAPTURE

In Kandahar City, it was 12:30 in the afternoon. I was in my pharmacy, where I was a pharmacist. I was there with my partner. The foreign forces came and took us away, my partner and I. When they came into my shop; they blindfolded my eyes, tied up my hands behind and put a hood on my head, and we were taken to somewhere. I have no idea where it was, but I think it was still in Kandahar; After two nights we were taken to [Bagram](#).

ON BAGRAM — ‘BLACK JAIL’

In Bagram, they took me to interrogations, and I kept asking them, ‘Why are we here, why am I detained, what was the reason?’ But they didn’t tell me why they had detained me.

After seven or eight months, they said, ‘Once in your house you invited [Taliban](#) as guests and fed them so that is why we took you.’

First, when they took me to Bagram. They took me to a place that was completely dark except for one bulb. It was hard to know whether it was night, day or afternoon, I had no idea when to pray because I could not tell the time. There are no windows. That was the Tor jail. I was there for 40 days.

At that Tor jail everybody was separate. Each in a concrete room. The walls and ceilings were concrete, but the detainees who had been there a long time told me it had been made of black wood before it was concrete and that’s why they called it the black jail. It’s difficult to know how many of us there were in that place. When you are taken to the interrogation office, you are blindfolded and there is a hood on your head. No one has permission to come to Tor jail. Neither the I.C.R.C. [International Committee of the Red Cross] or others.

Next to me, there was another person, and I heard his shouting for one week. It was close to me or next to me. I didn’t hear anything else. We were not beaten up while I was there.

They just banged the table and shouted at you while you were questioned. In every 24 hours, they questioned us twice. I didn’t know day and night. I never met the Taliban; I never invited them for dinner; I

didn't know them. They asked me, 'Where are the Taliban, where and how are they living, who supports them, how are they living?'

I told them if you just give me or show me a little proof that I have an involvement in any bad activities, show me, but they didn't show any proof or any documents or any evidence and they asked me, 'Why do you think I would bring you here,' and I told them, 'I think I have a long beard and wear turbans and for this reason you might have taken me and brought me here.'

They said, 'You are Haji Hayatullah.'

I said: 'I am Hayatullah, but I am just plain Hayatullah. I have never been to Hajj so I am not Haji.'

When I was in the Tor jail I was always thinking I would be released because I was innocent, I had done nothing, so I expected I would be released this month or the next month, then at first when I went to the big jail I thought I would go home. So I was expecting I would go home, and this expectation would give me strength.

ON HIS TRANSFER AND STAY IN MAIN BAGRAM PRISON

From Tor jail, they put me in a vehicle and drove me to somewhere else.

Then, I was transferred to big jail with the cages.

For everyone, they take away their clothes for medical checkup. They gave it back to me afterwards. They give you red-colored clothes to wear, and you wear that forever in the big jail. In the big jail, I.C.R.C. came one time every 40 days and they gave us identity cards with your name, your nationality and your province and they asked some questions why, where, how you were detained and they brought letters to your family.

When I came to the big jail, I.C.R.C. met me and I sent letters to my family.

It was three and a half months after the foreign forces took me that they found out I was in Bagram. Before that they were not aware where I was. When we write a letter, we get a response after maybe three months.

In each cage there was 20, 18, 19, 17. We were free to talk to each other, and everyone told their story about their life, and some people were just reading Holy Koran and other Pashto books. We were allowed to offer prayers and make ablutions.

ON THE MOOD AFTER LONG DETENTIONS

Mostly people just became frustrated, and some tried to commit suicide because they became so frustrated. There were certain cases of inmates trying to hang themselves. One man tried to once in our cage, and we told the American police, and they came and he was taken away for medication. The reason for suicide attempts was different for different inmates; some inmates were unstable and had depression, and others were people who had been there a long time.

The detainees often told them, "We are here for 3 months, for 7 months, for 2 years or 6 years, and you should bring us before a judge, you should review our case and bring us before the law, whether it is Islamic

or non-Islamic law, whether it is human rights law.

ON HIS VIEW OF THE AMERICANS

What can I say about how I feel about Americans? We understand that the Americans are here and have a specific task, and of course, there are people who are criminals and people who are innocent. It would be better if they take more precautions when they arrest someone. If a person is guilty, they should announce a punishment for them, and if innocent, they should release them.

And also we have Afghan courts, an Afghan judiciary — they should hear the case and decide. I spent 28 months in jail. It was difficult for me. They didn't present a single piece of evidence of a single wrong activity.

THE EFFECT ON HIS FAMILY

It had a very negative effect on my family. My father had a mental problem and he went back and forth to Kabul trying to find me, and my mother was weeping and weeping and now she is sick because of me. It was too difficult for my family. Because my father got anxious, got anxiety, now he can not sleep, he is always thinking about me, so now he is going to different doctors and they give him some medicines, but he has become weak.

I am sick now because I spent lots of time in Bagram because I was sitting in the cell, and I have a big ache and one leg is in pain when I'm walking, and sometimes I go to my pharmacy but I do not feel well.

I have four children, the eldest is 10 years old and youngest is 5. I hope I will return to a normal life. I am trying to.

GULHAM KHAN, 25, sheep delivery man. Detained in late October 2008; released in early September.

ON HIS CAPTURE

It was the last day of Ramadan last year when they picked me up. They picked me up by helicopter at a village in the desert outside Ghazni. It was late afternoon. It was 3:45 p.m. or 4:00. They picked me up with three helicopters. One landed, and the two others were overhead. Mostly they were wearing American uniforms and one had a beard.

They had no reason to pick me up. Many times I asked, 'Why did you bring me here?' but there was no answer. They never told me.

I was with my animals, my sheep, when they picked me up. That day my brother was working in the livestock bazaar in Ghazni, and he sent a laborer with some sheep from the bazaar, so I went into the desert outside my village to make sure the man found his way, and I met him and together we brought the sheep.

We were trying to live very cautiously here in our village. We don't want to bother anybody. We are just trying to make a living peacefully. In my family, there are 12 people; myself and my brother work in the animal business. The rest are wives, children and my mother.

The soldiers told me through an interpreter: 'Shut up, don't speak, otherwise we will shoot you here. We are Americans.'

They took me to another place, whether it was in Paktika Province, or the PRT in Ghazni, I don't know. I was in an isolation cell. That first place was a wooden room, no windows except a light bulb and just space enough for one person. There was no beating, no torture. They treated me well. It wasn't Afghan food. It was biscuits and beans in a plastic pocket.

ON BAGRAM — BLACK JAIL

Then I was moved to Bagram. For 37 days, I was in the black jail. It's a dreadful dark place without windows, and the only source of light is the electric bulb which is always on.

In Bagram, I was alone in a concrete room with no windows, no sun, but with a light bulb. When I was in the isolation cell their main question was, 'Are you Qari Idris?' And I said, 'I'm not Qari Idris.' So they kept asking me over and over, and I kept saying 'I'm Gulham.'

I said, 'This is my name; that is my father's name; you can ask the elders.'

But they kept asking me. All through the investigation they were telling me I was Qari Idris. God knows even right now why they held me. I was shocked when they first said I was Qari Idris. I haven't heard this name in my whole life.

The I.C.R.C. did not visit me, not until I was transferred to the other jail, the one with 20 other people in each cage.

ON HIS OVERALL MOOD IN JAIL

When I was in detention, I was neither sad nor angry. I was just trying to survive day to day. If I was angry what could I do? If I was sad what could I do? This is what God wants; it was my fate, my destiny.

ON THE MOOD IN THE MAIN BAGRAM PRISON

Well, no one knows who anyone is at the prison because the environment was so tense. No one dared to ask anyone else: 'Who are you? What's your name? What's your father's name?' We can't ask people where they are from. The reason we couldn't ask anyone in the cell was because everybody was furious and everybody was afraid of the man beside him, so if I dared to ask him, then the guy would think I was a spy. So that was why nobody asked.

ON HIS RELEASE

It was late evening, when they came to the cage, it was dark.

They came to the room and called my name and asked me to come out of the room and they said, 'We picked you up mistakenly by the wrong name.'

I said, 'This has been my argument for the past 10 months. I persistently told you I was not Qari Adris.'

They said, 'Please accept our apology, and we are sorry that we kept you here for this time.'

And that was it. They gave me nothing. They kept me for more than 10 months and gave me nothing back.

ON HIS VIEW OF THE AMERICANS

Well, I don't have any feeling towards the Americans now. I've been bothered and held for 10 months, and I was innocent. What I want them to do is help me to make a living. I can't earn one Afghani a day because in order to find money you have to have money. I want the Americans to give me money, to compensate me. They are powerful; they should do this.

THE EFFECT ON HIS FAMILY

My family spent lots of money while I was in detention. They traveled to Sharana, to Ghazni during the first three months when they didn't know where I was. An Afghan government official asked for 30,000 Afghanis, then 50,000 Afghanis to tell my brother where I was. For example, a soldier said to my brother, 'Give me 50,000 Afghanis, and I'll tell you where your brother is.' As we are nomadic people, we don't know a lot. We borrowed it and paid the money to the soldier, and then they never came back with the information. My brother also rented a car to go to Sharana to Ghazni, to Kabul and finally to Bagram. My brother spent 500,000 Pakistani rupees (about \$6,000).

Every day, the people we owe money to come to our house and knock on our door.

Sometimes when I get angry, I say to the people who ask us to pay them back: 'What should I do?, Should I give you my wife? Should I slaughter my children? What should I do?'

The animal business is not good. Actually I am waiting for someone to give me animals to take to their house. When I am fortunate I earn maybe 50 Pakistani rupees a day, that is when I take an animal home for someone. I am fortunate when I can find one customer, and it is an unfortunate day when I can not find even one.

HAMIDULLAH, 42, Kandahar. Also known as Haji Lala. A farmer forced to leave his land in rural Kandahar Province and move to the city, where he became a spare auto-parts dealer. Detained in June 2009; released in late October.

ON HIS CAPTURE

I was in my house with my family, and we had a guest. It was night; about 11:30 p.m. They raided the house and arrested me and my guest. They tied my hands and blindfolded me. A kind of hood was put on my head. It was five and a half months ago in early June.

They picked me up. They took me to the special forces base at the house of Mullah Omar. I didn't spend the night there. They took me in an armored car and then flew me to Kandahar Air Base, and I spent two nights there. They didn't talk to me while they were in my home or at Mullah Omar's or at Kandahar Air Base.

ON BAGRAM — BLACK JAIL

Then they put me in the Tor jail. I can't remember the number of days I spent there because it's hard to tell days from nights in the black jail, but I think every day they came twice to ask questions.

They took me to their own room to ask the questions. They beat up other people in the black jail, but not me. But the problem was that they didn't let me sleep. There was shouting noise so you couldn't sleep.

They gave me American food in the black jail, which is not good for us. I didn't eat it.

The black jail was the most dangerous and fearful place. It is a place where everybody is afraid. In the black jail, they can do anything to detainees. They don't let the I.C.R.C. officials or any other civilians see or communicate with the people they keep there.

I didn't see a person tortured with my eyes, but I heard the crying, the moaning of people when they were taking us to interrogation. When they took us they tied up our hands and blindfolded us and covered our ears. They took my clothes off in the black jail and Bagram twice. I don't know why, for what reason. But it was not good. It was in the presence of Americans and interpreters, and as Muslims this was not something allowed. They were just checking my body.

Only once I got to the black jail did they speak to me. They said, 'You are Faida Mohammed.'

I said, 'That's not me.'

They blamed me and said, 'You are making bombs, and are a facilitator of bomb-making and helping militants.'

I said: 'I have a shop. I sell spare parts of vehicles, of trucks and of cars. I am from Panjaoy south of Kandahar, and I have land, but due to fighting we had to leave our lands, and selling spare parts is our only way of earning a living.'

I told them, 'No, I did not know any Taliban.'

My nickname is Haji Lala, and that man Haji Faida Mohammed has the same nickname as mine. He was a Taliban commander before (when the Taliban controlled the government) But I don't know if he still is. During Taliban rule, he was a commander, but I don't know who he is or what he's doing. I never met him.

When I was in the black jail it was very difficult. I couldn't even think how I felt. If I wanted to go to the bathroom, I banged on the doors for hours and no one came. It was too difficult.

ON HIS TRANSFER AND DETENTION IN MAIN BAGRAM PRISON

When they took me out of the black jail, I was put in another room by myself. I was locked up for two or three days there. Then, they took me to a big room where there were maybe 20 people. There were two buildings for the big jail. One had 16 cages, and one had 18 cages. When we were taken for medical care, we could see those in the other cages. Each cage had 20 people. The black jail was separate.

In the cages, people were afraid to talk openly with each other. Some had a land dispute with their relatives so the relatives gave the Americans information that they had links to [Al Qaeda](#) or Taliban. We were not

open with each other. We had ablution facilities for prayer.

Once I came to the big cage, then only twice after that was I taken to an interrogation cage.

ON HIS MENTAL STATE

I didn't think I was going to be released because I knew some people were there for years, so I was completely frustrated.

ON HIS VIEW OF THE AMERICANS

Of the Americans, I have not good feelings or memories. As Afghans, when you are in your own home with your family and they raid and come in and blindfold you and drive away and put you in a jail and expose you — they took off my clothes — in an Afghan culture, this is very serious. If an Afghan did this to you, they should give you 20 women in compensation. They raided in my family, they damaged my house.

We are poor people. It's not a good sign. If they are in Afghanistan and want to have good relations, this is not helping.

I will never help them.

It is clear, the Taliban are getting stronger because of the injustice of the Americans who are putting innocent people in jail for a long time. People are now frustrated, and of course now people would help the Taliban. We are poor people; we are busy in our daily work to feed our children. We don't want any link to anyone, not to the Americans, not to the Taliban. We just want our daily work, our daily life.

For the last five months some of the detainees are protesting that they spent six years there. They should tell us why we are there. We should have trials.

THE EFFECT ON HIS FAMILY

For my whole family, it was disastrous because they were in trouble, because they knew the Americans were sometimes killing people and they thought they killed me because for two to three months they didn't know where I was.

I was in Bagram for a total of five and a half months. I didn't have any contact with my family so they stopped any meetings with families because of the protests. [During the period when Hamidullah was detained, inmates were staging a protest and refusing to do anything the guards told them to do.] When I got released I took a cellphone [at the Red Cross] and called my family .

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