



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on June 10, 2010

Physicians Group Condemns U.S. Biological Torture Experiments

Physicians for Human Rights filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) against the Central Intelligence Agency on June 9, claiming that the CIA violated federal law on "Human Subject Research and Experimentation."



The formal complaint followed up a [30-page report](#) by the organization released last weekend that made credible claims that the CIA's "enhanced interrogation" program had used medical professionals to document the best way to cause the maximum pain and mental strain on a detainee without leaving a physical mark. "CIA doctors analyzed data from 25 detainees who had undergone various enhanced interrogations to determine which technique was most likely to increase the subject's 'susceptibility to severe pain,'" the *Los Angeles Times* [summarized](#) the report as concluding. The CIA torture program violated the Hippocratic Oath of medical professionals to alleviate suffering rather than using science to maximize it:

The use of health professionals to monitor intentionally harmful interrogation techniques places them in the service of national security objectives which are in conflict with the interests of those who they are monitoring. The result has been a co-opting of health professionals by the national security apparatus and a violation of the highest medical admonition to "do no harm."

None of the detainees upon which the psychological and physical pain-inducing experiments were conducted had been convicted of crimes in either civilian court or under the Uniform Code of Military Justice at the time of their torture, and most were eventually released without charges. Physicians for Human Rights argued in the [report](#) that its well-documented allegations need to be "answered and, if ethical violations or crimes were committed, those responsible are held accountable, the misuse of medical and scientific expertise for expedient and non-therapeutic goals jeopardizes the ethical integrity of the profession, and the public trust in the healing professions risks being seriously compromised."

The [report](#) was released to lackluster reviews among many in the press, partly because the report did



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not reflect any new information about the various torture techniques used by the CIA, and partly because some people believed that calling what the CIA did as “medical experimentation” was a stretch. Katrina vanden Heuvel of the *Washington Post* [claimed](#) in a June 8 blog that “this ‘research’ was not the Frankenstein stuff of Dr. Mengele — the experimentation seems to have been conducted in order to determine how sadistic American torturers could be before they crossed into illegality. But it is still appalling.”

The problem with vanden Heuvel’s analysis is that the Bush administration had essentially concluded that there was no practical limits to the amount of pain that could be inflicted, so long as the torture did not leave a physical mark. The Bush administration’s medical personnel efforts seem to have been focused upon how to create as much pain and agony as possible without leaving evidence, and especially a corpse. [The latter happened](#) several times in the course of the brutal medical analysis of the torture techniques.

One illustration of the pain level caused by the use of medical techniques toward pain enhancement is the case of Binyam Muhammad. Muhammad had been incarcerated beginning in 2002 by the United States, who renditioned him to Moroccan custody, where [he suffered the following torture](#) monthly for 18 months:

“One of them took my penis in his hand and began to make cuts. He did it once, and they stood still for maybe a minute, watching my reaction. I was in agony. They must have done this 20 to 30 times, in maybe two hours. There was blood all over.... They cut all over my private parts. One of them said it would be better just to cut it off, as I would only breed terrorists. ”

But the Moroccans had simply used torture techniques that had been in use for millennia, without the benefit of medical advice on pain enhancement. In 2004, Muhammad was transferred to the CIA’s “Dark Prison,” also called the “Salt Pit” near Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan and supervised by Americans. In the “Dark Prison,” Muhammad was submitted to prolonged isolation, frequent hypothermia, and sensory deprivation, while being chained to the floor. He was not permitted to see the sun for two years, and subjected to sleep deprivation and loud psychedelic music for days at a time. Asked which torture he thought was worse, having his penis cut by Moroccans or subjected to the CIA “Dark Prison,” Muhammad [told](#) a fellow former prisoner:

Moazzam Begg: "which [prison] would you say is the worst?"

Binyam Mohamed: "Personally, I take the ‘Dark Prison’ as being the worst, and that’s because I was literally there not for gathering information. It wasn’t set up as a detention centre, it was literally there just to have somebody go insane.”

The CIA torture doctors had apparently done their homework. They had improved upon the torture of the medieval torture staples of the rack, thumbscrews, and pulling out fingernails. But just because a torturer doesn’t leave a mark, doesn’t mean it isn’t torture. Dr. Mengele of the Auschwitz concentration camp conducted human experiments that caused much pain and death, but in one sense, he wasn’t quite as bad as the CIA under the Bush administration. It was never proven that the primary goal of Mengele’s human experimentation was the causation of pain. The same cannot be said of the CIA doctors after the Physicians for Human Rights reports.



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