

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/07/29/why-holders-pledge-that-snowden-will-not-be-tortured-is-a-lie/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | July 29, 2013



In a [letter](#) pressing Russia not to grant asylum to former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, Attorney General Eric Holder made the highly disingenuous promise that Snowden will not be tortured if he is returned to the United States.

I can report that the United States is prepared to provide to the Russian government the following assurances regarding the treatment Mr. Snowden would face upon return to the United States, Holder wrote Alexander Vladimirovich Konovalov, the Russian minister of justice, on July 23. First, the United States would not seek the death penalty for Mr. Snowden should he return to the United States. In addition, Mr. Snowden will not be tortured. Torture is unlawful in the United States. Holder continued, We believe these assurances eliminate these asserted grounds for Mr. Snowden's claim that he should be treated as a refugee or granted asylum, temporary or otherwise.

The fact that the U.S. attorney general needs to send a letter to a foreign government assuring them that an American citizen will not be killed or tortured in his own country seems damning enough on its face. But in fact, Holder's pledge is by most standards untrue. It relies on a conveniently narrow definition of torture, which precludes forms of extreme psychological and physical abuse that are deemed torturous by the United Nations and a host of human rights groups, but not by the United States government. Chief among these is prolonged solitary confinement.

Snowden faces charges of willful communication of classified communications to an unauthorized recipient and unauthorized communication of national-defense information. Never mind the fact that most of the information was [leaked long ago](#) to journalists like James Bamford. Snowden need only look to the treatment of others accused of national security breaches to see what would surely await him in the United States.

[Bradley Manning](#) was subjected to more than nine months of pre-trial solitary confinement, some of it naked in a bare cell. Suspects held in the civilian, rather than military, justice systems fared, if anything, worse than Manning, who was eventually removed from solitary. Muslims accused of relatively minor national security-related offenses have [spent years](#) in pre-trial solitary under Special Administrative Measures (SAMS) which bar all communication with the outside world. Finally, driven mad by isolation and convinced that they cannot get a fair trial, they are pressured to take pleas with sentences ranging 30 years and up, likely to be served indefinite solitary confinement.

In all probability, if the Russians give up Snowden, he will be brought back to American soil and immediately placed in solitary confinement under SAMS. Once he is convicted which seems virtually guaranteed he will continue to be held in solitary, for national security reasons or perhaps purportedly for his own safety. He could well end up at ADX, the infamous federal supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, the most state-of-the-art isolation facility in the world, where individuals live in 23- to 24-hour solitary in small concrete cells. His attorneys can then argue for such things as permission to exercise outdoors in a kennel run, perhaps without his legs being shackled and hands manacled, or to visit a family member through a glass barrier.

Snowden might be driven to some of the crazy and desperate behaviors demonstrated by other residents of ADX after years of extreme isolation and sensory deprivation. According to a [current lawsuit](#), Prisoners interminably wail, scream and bang on the walls of their cells. Some mutilate their bodies with razors, shards of glass, writing utensils and whatever other objects they can obtain. Some swallow razor blades, nail clippers, parts of radios and televisions, broken glass and other dangerous objects. One man held at ADX, who had no prior history of mental illness or self-harm, has both cut himself extensively and bitten off both his pinky fingers. Suicide attempts are

common.

And all this while he is not being tortured.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

Snowden, Manning, and now Aleynikov. This centuries high tech crimes.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/business/2013/09/michael-lewis-goldman-sachs-programmer>

A month after ace programmer Sergey Aleynikov left Goldman Sachs, he was arrested. Exactly what he'd done neither the F.B.I., which interrogated him, nor the jury, which convicted him a year later, seemed to understand. But Goldman had accused him of stealing computer code, and the 41-year-old father of three was sentenced to eight years in federal prison.

he had a new job at a hedge fund that paid him a million dollars a year..

When he was arrested.

As he wrote:

If the incarceration experience doesn't break your spirit, it changes you in a way that you lose many fears. You begin to realize that your life is not ruled by your ego and ambition and that it can end any day at any time. So why worry? You learn that, just like on the street, there is life in prison, and random people get there based on the jeopardy of the system. The prisons are filled with people who crossed the law, as well as by those who were incidentally and circumstantially picked and crushed by somebody else's agenda. On the other hand, as a vivid benefit, you become very much independent of material property and learn to appreciate very simple pleasures in life such as the sunlight and morning breeze.

So true! Especially for those in the hole.

All those inmates that had died are now resting in peace they've escaped the torture and miserable life CA prisons System May God forgive them, and give them a everlasting life in Paradise. R.I.P. Amen.

Did you watch The Killing Season 3 episode Six Minutes, this week? Here is a summary:

The final minutes of this episode were so raw, so brutal, that it's kind of hard to relive them again even to write them down. Ray finally agreed to let Adrian see him, but thanks to all the delays, the guards said that visiting time was up and dragged Ray away kicking and screaming. Linden tearfully reminded Ray that Adrian could hear him and told him to remember the trees outside his window. Later, when he was being walked toward the execution room, Ray stumbled and lost his step, but when he saw Linden standing with his son outside the window, he found a little strength.

The scene I hoped we wouldn't have to see came when they walked Ray onto the platform. After he gave his final words about Salisbury steak, the bag was put over his head. I couldn't help but notice how Becker's hands lingered on Ray's shoulders as if to provide a touch of encouragement and perhaps a little bit of an apology. Most of the time, a show would have probably cut away from a scene like that or maybe had it play out with only music. The silence, broken only by Ray's sobs, was almost too much to bear and then just when I thought it couldn't possibly get any worse it did. Ray began to choke and I had to wonder at how the writers could torture me like that.

Thankfully, it didnt take six minutes for Ray to die, but it sure felt like it.

So at least Snowden wont have to worry that they got his weight right and his neck might not break instantly leading him to dangle and strangle.

No but the internet as we know it is likely to suffer a slow death. The Guardian reports:

Edward Snowdens not the story. The fate of the internet is!

The fact is that the net is finished as a global network and that US firms cloud services cannot be trusted

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/28/edward-snowden-death-of-internet>

The government can avoid the medias backlash over solitary by utilizing 1 of 2 CMUs.

Why the prisons dont use this method more widely is puzzling to me. It seems the public would also benefit by having avoided releasing a mentally ill from isolation directly to the street. Remember Colorado?

BOP established CMUs in 2006 and 2008, in two institutions (FCI Terre Haute and USP Marion) to house inmates who require increased monitoring of their communications with the public.

In these two Communications Management Units (CMU), the conditions of confinement are similar to general population and inmates are allowed to congregate outside their cells for up to 16 hours per day.

From fiscal year 2008 to February 2013, the total CMU population increased from 64 inmates to 81 inmates.

However each CMU contains a SHU dedicated to housing inmates in need of being placed in SHU-administrative detention or SHU-disciplinary segregation status.

Number of cells: 113;

Population: 81.

The total CMU inmate population and number of cells includes SHUs within the CMUs.

Referrals for transfer to a CMU are to be coordinated by the BOP Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU).

I doubt that they will want him anywhere near the terrorists held in these 2 facilities with what he knows about the NSA data collection methods however. (Nor do I.)

This info is from the following GAO report:

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTING OFFICE REPORT ON

BUREAU OF PRISONS:

Improvements Needed in Bureau of Prisons Monitoring and Evaluation of Impact of Segregated Housing

GAO-13-429, May 1, 2013

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-429>

What way to sacrifice your life.

P.O. Box 11374

Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News