

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Jean Casella](#) | January 2, 2010

Since the release of Peter Moore, the British IT consultant kidnapped in Iraq in 2007, accounts of his experience have highlighted the anguish of solitary confinement. As reported last week in the London [Independent](#):

Mr Moore's release ended 31 months in captivity. The remains of three of the bodyguards snatched with him at the Iraqi finance ministry in May 2007 were delivered to the British embassy earlier this year. The fourth guard is also believed to be dead.

The Independent has learnt that Mr Moore told diplomats he had been separated from the other captives and held in solitary confinement since December 2007. During the long months which followed he learnt about the murders of the other Britons and remained unsure until the very end of his ordeal whether he would suffer the same fate.

When he was taken out blindfolded from the room where he was being kept in the early hours of yesterday morning, he feared he was going to be killed.

In an interview in the [Guardian](#), hostage expert Dr. James Thompson speculated on Moore's experience in captivity, and the psychological challenges he still faces upon release.

If he was held with others he would have had company and distractions. Being alone would have been worse because anyone, to sustain a reasonably normal psychological life, needs human contact, to be recognised as a person, and a variety of sensory inputs, like knowing buy clonazepam canada when its night and day. Being held alone would have been like being in solitary confinement on death row.

In a sense getting out is the start of the difficulty. Despite the lifting of the threat to your life, the person can face all sorts of mental hardship. Very few former hostages are immediately well, mentally speaking. It doesn't mean that they go psychotic or can't understand reality, but they tend to have significant adjustment problems. Typically they are much more fearful than before, one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which he will have.

In his much-discussed [New Yorker article](#) on solitary confinement published earlier this year, Atul Gawande also spoke to former hostages held in isolation for long periods of time. While most hostages survived their ordeal, Gawande writes, none saw solitary confinement as anything less than torture. He continues:

This presents us with an awkward question: If prolonged isolation is as research and experience have confirmed for decades so objectively horrifying, so intrinsically cruel, how did we end up with a prison system that may subject more of our own citizens to it than any other country in history has?

The sympathy felt for freed hostages apparently does not translate into prison policy, in United States or in the UK. While solitary confinement may be less common in British prisons, it is hardly unknown, as a recent [BBC report](#) confirms.

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.

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