

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Global Costs of Unlawful Detention and Interrogation Post-9/11

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(New York) Twenty years after [Guantanamo Bay](#) detention operations commenced on January 11, 2002, a new report assesses the massive costs of US unlawful transfers, secret detention, and torture after the September 11, 2001, attacks. [The report](#), from the [Costs of War](#) Project at Brown University's Watson Institute and Human Rights Watch, outlines how these abuses trample on the rights of victims and suspects, create a burden to US taxpayers, and damage counterterrorism efforts worldwide, ultimately jeopardizing universal human rights protections for everyone.

The Costs of Unlawful US Detentions and Interrogations Post-9/11

Around the world, Guantanamo remains one of the most enduring symbols of the injustice, abuse, and disregard for the rule of law that the US unleashed in response to the 9/11 attacks, said [Letta Tayler](#), an associate Crisis and Conflict director at Human Rights Watch and the reports co-author. The US governments reliance on deeply flawed military commissions, along with other due process failures, has not only violated the rights of the men held at Guantanamo. It also has deprived survivors of the September 11 attacks and families of the dead of their right to justice.

The report notes that:

The extraordinary renditions (unlawful transfers from one country to another), secret detentions, and torture have damaged the international human rights system, Tayler and her co-author, Elisa Epstein, said. By committing abuses with impunity, the US has made it easier for countries such as Russia, Egypt, and China to criticize Washington and deflect international condemnation of their own human rights violations.

US counterterrorism partners have replicated the Guantanamo model by detaining thousands of people in dire conditions in Iraq, northeast Syria, Nigeria, Egypt, and elsewhere for alleged terrorism offenses. Those detained, often without charge or trial, include civil society members, suspects relatives, and children who are victims of armed groups.

The report also cites instances in which unlawful rendition and detention and torture have undermined US security goals. The Islamic State (ISIS) and other armed groups have used US abuses as a propaganda tool to lure recruits and bolster their narrative that Washington and its Western allies are waging a crusade against Muslims.

The authors call on the Biden administration to close the Guantanamo prison and enact significant legal and policy reforms to end further abuses. Reforms should include far greater transparency about crimes that US forces committed and accountability at the highest levels, as well as robust efforts to address religious, racial, and ethnic bias in counterterrorism efforts.

This report lays out a comprehensive assessment of the many unconscionable costs of US torture and illegal detentions and renditions of Muslims over the past 20 years since 9/11, said Stephanie Savell, co-director of the Costs of War Project. This is a moral failure of epic proportions, a stain on the nations human rights record, a strategic blunder, and an abhorrent perpetuation of Islamophobia and racism.

This report is the latest resource from the [Costs of War](#) project, housed at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. The project was launched by a group of scholars and experts to document the costs of the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

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