

What Price Security? The View from Inside Gitmo

Erik Saar et al.

In her 2008 book, My Guantánamo Diary: The Detainees and the Stories They Told Me, Mahvish Rukhsana Khan, one of the translators at the Guantánamo detention camp, writes that "I came to believe that many, perhaps even most" of the detainees were "innocent men who'd been swept up by mistake." She observes that the American military dropped leaflets across Afghanistan promising up to \$25,000, or nearly one hundred times the annual per capita income, to anyone who would turn in members of the Taliban or al Qaeda and that this led bounty hunters to wild errors in a place where hardly anyone in the military spoke any of the national languages. She writes that many of the men she worked with had no idea where Guantánamo was or why they were there. While clearly some prisoners at Gitmo were indeed connected to organizations that were hostile to American security, the question that most people were asking by the time her book came out was whether it was necessary to make so many mistakes to stop genuine terrorists and whether the price of security had been set too high by the Bush administration. For many of the individuals who came in contact with Gitmo, the answer became no.

Sergeant Erik Saar describes how he went from a gung-ho soldier who wanted to be assigned to Gitmo to an individual deeply disillusioned with the army for the injustices and incompetence that he witnessed at Guantánamo. Moazzam Begg, a British national who was captured in Afghanistan while on a mission to help his fellow Afghans, tells in an interview and in his published account a harrowing tale of false imprisonment and abuse at the hands of the U.S. military. Finally, James Yee, a career officer and West Point graduate, who acted as army chaplain for Muslims at Gitmo, tells how he attempted to do the job the army set for him and was eventually punished, persecuted, and unjustly imprisoned for his belief in the Constitution and his loyalty to the U.S. Army.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What aspects of these three accounts do you think are the most and least reliable and why?
2. How might these three individuals provide different arguments against John Ashcroft's defense of Gitmo? How might their arguments be similar?
3. Saar and Begg both believe that the war on terror may be producing more terrorists. How do you think Ashcroft would respond to this charge?

ERIK SAAR

Witness to Interrogations

[Erik Saar]: I volunteered to go to Guantánamo Bay because I believed in the mission, to be honest with you, ma'am. I went there enthusiastically to serve my country and hopefully to use my Arabic skills to contribute to the war on terrorism and to help. I believed I was going to sit face-to-face with those who perpetrated and were responsible for the events of September 11 and those who were—or those who were planning future attacks against the United States.

Amy Goodman: And is that what happened when you went to Guantánamo?

Erik Saar: Well, I went there with one expectation. What I found shortly after I arrived, and then I actually went through a process of realizing that my expectations really clashed with the reality of Guantánamo Bay. And it's not exactly what I found. There were a number of things that troubled me, that ended up leading me to the conclusion that Guantánamo Bay, to me, represents a mistake and a failed strategy in this war.

Amy Goodman: You translated for the interrogators at Guantánamo?

Erik Saar: I did. In the second half of my six-month assignment, I did serve as a translator in a number of interrogations.

Amy Goodman: You describe one scene of a female interrogator. Can you talk about what happened that day and start from the beginning?

Erik Saar: I walked in with her. The prisoner had already been there waiting for a good period of time before we arrived. He was shackled to the floor and forced to hunch over. We were asking him—telling him to be cooperative. She was explaining—saying that, you know, this is going to be unpleasant for you. After a break, we then returned to the interrogation booth, and that was when she started taking off her outer blouse, where she was wearing a tight t-shirt underneath, and she was touching herself and trying to arouse the detainee. . . .

She was saying, you know, it doesn't have to be this way. We could sit across a table and talk like adults, but I could tell—and then she went on to say—I could tell that you're aroused by me. How do you think Allah feels by you being attracted to an American infidel?

We took a break and then we went back. That was when she went and found a red marker to wipe red ink on her hands. We returned to the interrogation, where she told him that she was menstruating and walked around and began to put her hands in her pants and walked around the detainee and then wiped the red ink on the side of his face and told him that it was menstrual blood. . . .

He lunged from the chair and actually he came out of one of the ankle shackles that was on, and the M.P.'s had to come in, the guards had to come in and put him back in the shackles. And all of this, I'd like to say, was with someone that personally based on the intelligence I had access to was someone who was an individual that, to be honest with you, I hope never sees the light of day, and—but of course, goes through some process of justice, in order to be—to face a just punishment, but at the same time, what convinced me and what was so troubling was that, first of all, this was ineffective; secondly, even if it was

effective, it was apparent to me that what we were doing there was not in keeping with the values we stand for as a country.

Amy Goodman: Was he responding to you at all?

[Erik Saar]: . . . I actually felt—it was one of the frustrations of dealing with certain interrogations, because as a linguist, you're to take on the role of the interrogator who was with you. So, there was a conflict there in that I wasn't necessarily agreeing with what was taking place, but you had a mission at the same time.

Amy Goodman: And so, when she took the red ink and smeared it on him, did she say to him, this is menstrual blood?

Erik Saar: Yes, she said this is menstrual blood. And then she also said, you know, have fun attempting to pray in your cell tonight when your water is going to be turned off. So they would turn off the water in his cell so he couldn't become ritually clean.

Amy Goodman: And his response?

Erik Saar: His response was really non-verbal. The only thing I can make out that he said was some profanity, but other than that, he really was just despondent, and I guess that's the best way to put it. . . .

Amy Goodman: And as a result of the interrogation, did he reveal anything?

Erik Saar: To my knowledge, Amy, I don't know that he ever did. . . .

Amy Goodman: What about these hundreds of prisoners at Guantánamo? How many of them would you say are what the U.S. government calls terrorists?

Erik Saar: Well, it's difficult for me to say, because that definition seems so ambiguous, but I'll say this, that I was under the impression when I went there that I was going to be sitting face-to-face with hardened terrorists, meaning what our government had said is the worst of the worst. And I took that to mean those individuals that had extensive training from al Qaeda. Additionally, I thought that they were going to be men who had planned attacks against the United States, who were responsible for the events of September 11, or who were planning future attacks against the United States. But what I found to be the case was that—and then I was also told that they were all enemy combatants, supposedly, this new term, that were picked up on the battlefield with weapons; they had taken up arms against Americans. But we knew, to be—I shortly found out after arriving there that that necessarily was not the case with a number of individuals. And we knew that there was a chunk of men there who we really had no idea how they came to us, or we did know that they were turned over by foreign governments or by the Northern Alliance. So, we had no way to ascertain whether or not they had, in fact, ever taken up arms against them, or really even know how to corroborate their story. . . .

One of the things I learned when I joined the intelligence team was that when a V.I.P. visit would take place, meaning it could be a general or could be an executive from the senior government service, one of the intelligence agencies, maybe, or even a congressional delegation, there was a concerted effort to explain to the interrogators that they were to find a detainee who had previously been cooperative and put him in the interrogation booth at the time when the V.I.P. would be visiting and sitting in the observation room. Essentially,

they were to find someone who had been cooperative, who they were able to sit across a table with and have a regular dialogue, and someone who would also—had in the past provided adequate intelligence, and then they were to replay that interrogation for the visiting V.I.P.s. And essentially, as an intelligence professional, this was insulting. And I don't think I was alone in feeling this way, to be honest with you, because in the intelligence community your whole existence is in order to provide policymakers with the right information to make the right decisions. So, that's really the existence of the intelligence community, to simply provide the right information. And this concept of creating this fictitious world so Gitmo [looked] like one thing to those visiting, when in reality it was something far different, completely undermined everything that we, as professionals, were trying to do in intelligence. . . .

. . . You know, honestly, ma'am, I didn't know if I thought that the V.I.P.s when they came to visit really believed they were seeing an actual interrogation. I almost find that hard to believe, because if they wanted to see something that might be typical, at least from the military's perspective, regarding what was going on in the interrogation booth, they might have been better off coming unannounced and asking to see an interrogation at 2:00 in the morning. . . .

You know, a lot of the soldiers there shared some of my frustrations, but I don't want to say or act as though they all came to the conclusions exactly in the same way that I did or had the same conclusions. But at the same time I think if you talk to individuals who had been there, you will find someone who has frustrations with some elements of the camp. I mean, it was—the way in which the camp was run, the gray lines that no one knew what was clearly defined as right and wrong, frustrated a number of individuals, and many people even were troubled by the fact that the files on a number of the individuals being held were extremely thin. We knew very little, excuse me, about why they were there. And that bothered some people in thinking that as Americans, we enjoy one way of life, and we say that our system of justice is something that we want to promote around the world, and our democratic values are something that we stand up for, but at the same time we're defying those very same values in Guantánamo Bay. . . .

Amy Goodman: Erik Saar, [were] the words Geneva Conventions ever used at Guantánamo?

Erik Saar: One time, ma'am, I can say, when we were talked to regarding the Geneva Conventions, and there was a meeting that I describe where our leaders of the intelligence group explained to us that the Geneva Convention does not apply at Guantánamo Bay. And they gave us reasons as to why they rationalized that it did not, and that now the detainees, we should understand—of course, we knew this beforehand, but this was in a meeting where they were explaining to us the reasons why—we should understand that these individuals were enemy combatants and to be treated as detainees. And one of the frustrations regarding that is someone who interacted with and had friends who were interrogators, is that the essence of their training, ma'am, when they go through school, is that you were taught a couple of things about the Geneva Convention. First of all, all your training is under the umbrella of the Geneva Convention, and you are told that you never violate the Geneva Conventions as an interrogator,

because—for two reasons: Number one, it's illegal; and number two, they're taught that it's ineffective. And if you need to use tactics outside of the scope of the Geneva Conventions, you are going to get bad intelligence anyway. But somehow, no one quite understood how it was determined that now those rules don't need to apply. Plus there's limited, if no training, for how these new rules should be implemented in the interrogation booth, and what is the rationale for why previously, I was taught as an interrogator or one of my colleagues was taught, that these techniques wouldn't work, but now we're saying that maybe they will?

Amy Goodman: Erik Saar, do you think that the abuse was creating terrorists?

Erik Saar: I think, Amy, that what I witnessed at Guantánamo Bay was, on a practical level, counterproductive in the war on terrorism. Because, in fact, as we go throughout the Arab and Muslim world and say that we're going to promote values of democracy and justice and human dignity, but at the same time defy those very same values in Guantánamo Bay, I do think in the long run, it could produce more terrorists.

MOAZZAM BEGG

From Kandahar to Bagram to Guantánamo

Moazzam Begg: I was the world's number one terrorist. I was hog-tied, shackled, kicked and punched. Black hole no end in sight. I cracked up fell in a corner weeping. I can't believe, I, it's incomprehensible for me to think how they would come to the conclusion that I am a threat to Britain. Britain is my home, it's my, it's where I was born, it's where I was raised, I went to school, my friends, my family, everybody is here, my wife and my children are here, they were all born and raised here. I'm as British as I, as, as anybody else.

Q: So you decided to go in 2001 with the family.

Moazzam Begg: That's correct, yes.

Q: To a Taliban administered Afghanistan.

Moazzam Begg: Yes that's correct. . . .

Q: But you are moving from Birmingham where your wife can move freely, where your children can be educated, your girl children can be educated, to a country where, at that point, under Taliban rule, your wife would have to be beneath a burka and your girl children—

Moazzam Begg: I think though in hindsight, when I look back at Afghanistan, there were rules that were austere but they really weren't as bad as, as people have made them out to be—and my evidence for that of course is if you'd speak to some of the other people, who were not of a Muslim background that lived there, and I think they might give you similar story. What I would say, yes, the Taliban rules, I think they were austere, they were strict, to their own detriment, but as far as my wife and my children were concerned it was, they were free to go wherever they wanted. . . .

. . . I went to a country where people were a lot more impoverished, I tried to help people that were a little worse off than myself in whatever little way that I could, and perhaps stay away for a year, two years or so, with my family rather than be away from them, and then come back when, when we felt the time was right. . . .

I remember some, somebody coming knocking to the doors. . . . He said America has been attacked. . . .

. . . [A] friend of mine, I'd phoned him and he told me that there could be imminent attacks on Afghanistan, that they're blaming al-Qaeda that's based in around Kandahar for being responsible. . . .

Well we evacuated from Kabul, myself and my family. I really didn't want to give up all the projects that we'd begun, we put a lot of hard work, time, effort and money into all of this.

Q: You are in your house in Islamabad with your wife and your children. Tell us then what happens, this is three months after you have fled from Afghanistan and, and you are all asleep?

Moazzam Begg: I was awake actually, I was, I was sitting in, I think I was playing a game on my computer, I was just about to go to sleep. There was a knock, about 12 o'clock at night, I answered the door, it was sort of strange to get a, receive a visitor at that time, but I answered the door anyway and I was faced with several gun-toting, I don't know who they were, I still maintain to this day that they were thugs and they were not part of the intelligence service and I'll tell you why in a minute. But a gun was put to my head and I was pushed forward into my front room, made to kneel, a black hood was put on my head, my hands were tied behind my back and my legs were shackled and I was physically carried into a vehicle, the back of a vehicle, I think it was a 4x4, and driven off. Never got a chance to say goodbye or a word to my wife or my children. And then everything was to change forever. . . .

They lifted my hood in the vehicle and I saw these two Americans and I remember one, clearly, he said to me, he said, he was wearing an Afghan cap, and he said that, he produced a pair of handcuffs, and he said that do you know why I have got these, gotten these handcuffs from? I said no. He said I was given these handcuffs by one of the wives of the victims of 9/11 to go and catch, capture the perpetrators. I said well wouldn't she think that you are an idiot for having caught the wrong person, and he said nothing.

Next Begg was taken to Bagram airbase—holding center for terror.

Moazzam Begg: They used to take us into freezing ice-cold showers from which people actually dropped from the sheer cold and were taken to hospital for hypothermia. I had witnessed old people, who were older than 80 years old, brought into detention. I had witnessed people have their hearing aids removed from them because it was an electrical device that might possibly cause some security problem. I had witnessed children in detention, 11, 12 year olds. I had witnessed people who had been wounded and brought over and held. So it was very, it was very, very difficult to bear and up until June of 2002, which is almost five months after I had been taken in, I still had no word from my family.

And I remember during one of the interrogations, which was probably one of the hardest ever, in the room next door they had the sound of a woman screaming and at that time I believed it was my wife. . . .

A particularly harsh interrogation took place in May, in which I faced two members of the FBI, one CIA, one major, and one other unknown chap, and I believe it's those, amongst them that date, particularly the FBI and the CIA, which had ordered my punishment or harsh treatment, which included me being hog-tied, left in a room with a bag put over my head, even though I suffered from asthma . . . after which they threatened to have me sent to Egypt, to be tortured, to face electric shocks, to have my fingers broken, to be sexually abused, and, and the like. . . .

I witnessed two people get beaten so badly that I believe it caused their deaths. And one of those deaths was later investigated and those investigators turned up to Guantánamo Bay and asked me if I would be willing to point out the perpetrators of that, those beatings, of what I witnessed and so they subsequently brought over pictures of all the units at the time—asked if I would be willing to stand as a witness. And how ironic it is that after two and a half years in detention, which is when they turned up, that the only crime that I can witness to is one that has been committed by American soldiers. . . .

[Next, Begg was sent to Guantánamo Bay. Three days after arriving he was compelled to sign a false confession by two U.S. intelligence officers.]

Moazzam Begg: They said you can't go any further, you could be sitting here for years, you could face a summary trial, which could mean execution by the electric chair, a lethal injection or gas chamber and all of that, the British government has washed its hands of you, you have no access to any legal courts, to any normal proceedings, so this is your only option to proceed with this. And I thought to myself, I couldn't believe that this was happening and yet, again I asked for a lawyer, again I asked for British consular representation and again it was all denied. And finally I relented, and I put my name, I signed and initialed this document that they had put together and I thought to myself, okay, at least if I get a chance to appear in court that's when I can say this is all rubbish. . . .

I think the interrogation effectively had ended about a few months after I had been there and then I thought that some process might begin but it just became a black hole of incarceration with no end in sight. The worse thing was being cut off from news of current affairs, of what's taken place, even about my own affairs, and the sporadic, intermittent mail, postal service that they'd established, was months on end I would not get any reply. I wouldn't know if my letters had gotten through, and eventually when they did, this is an example of the type of censorship that was so ridiculous. This is a letter from my daughter, who was at the time seven years old. They've blocked out all but maybe six or seven lines. I asked her a few weeks ago, when I had arrived, I said do you remember what you wrote over here? She said yes I did. She said I wrote here: one, two, three, four, five, once I caught a fish alive, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, then I let it go again. When the general appeared, General Hood, I presented

this to him, this is an example of several types of letters, and I said what is it possibly that you could be afraid of from a seven year old girl that you would do something like this, that she wrote so lovingly to her father, and he could give me no reply. He put his head down in shame.

[Begg later went on to write a book about his experiences, *Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim's Journey to Guantánamo and Back*. In the excerpt that follows, he describes his new surroundings in Guantánamo Bay.]

Extract from Enemy Combatant

The next time I remember anything was in a daze in Guantánamo. The first sensations I felt were intense heat and humidity. I realized I was out of the plane and the shackles I had on were different. There was a chain going from the waist to the ankles, which restricted my movement even more than before. That was my introduction to the “three-piece suit,” which I soon knew only too well. I was still half dazed and vaguely felt there were a lot of MPs around. In and out of a vehicle, in and out of more orange clothes, I was barely conscious. The guards on both sides held me up for a few steps, and I noticed the ground under my feet was very different from anything I’d seen in Afghanistan. There were small light-brown sun-baked rocks, it seemed a lot drier, hotter . . . and I could smell the sea. It was distinctly different to the smell of the sea in Britain. But I could definitely smell the sea.

I was in Camp Echo—or Eskimo, as they called it at that time—although I didn’t know it just then. I was taken into a room where they took off my hood, goggles, earmuffs, and facemask. The guards took me to a cell in the corner of the room, asked me to step up and in, and locked the door. Then they asked me to stand up with my back to the door so they could take the shackles off, through the beanhole, an opening in the cell door covered with a metal flap controlled from the outside. They undid the legs first, and then the padlock at the back of the waist, then I had to turn round and hand them over the rest of the chain that had gone from the wrist to the ankles. Then they undid the wrists, and I was free in my little cell. My cell, my new home, measured about eight foot by six foot. It had a toilet in there, an Arab-style toilet, all metal, on the ground.

I didn’t know what I was expecting, but it was not this. I looked around in utter bewilderment, almost disbelief. Nothing had changed, in fact things were worse. From Kandahar to Bagram, from Bagram to Guantánamo: each time I thought things were going to get better, but they actually got worse. What could be more bleak, or grimmer, than being in a cage like this? I could not even see out of it clearly as it was covered with a pale green steel mesh, doubled with one part of the mesh set vertically, and the other horizontally, so they crisscrossed one another. I could barely see through it, it was a strain on the eyes. I felt I was really back to square one.

It is considered a sin in Islam to despair, but in Bagram, during the worst days of May 2002, I had been unable to hold despair at bay. Here in Guantánamo, in this steel cage with its mesh sides, steel roof and floor, steel bed, steel toilet, all inside a white, new-looking brightly lit room, I felt despair returning as I took in my surroundings for the first time.

All I had in the cell was a sheet and a roll of toilet paper, not even my glasses. I asked for something that I could use as a prayer mat, and they brought a thin camping mat, which became my mattress for the next two years. . . .

JAMES YEE

Faith and Patriotism under Fire

. . . I was coming home in September of 2003 for what I thought would be a short two-week break. I landed in Jacksonville Naval Air Station, the first stop where U.S. service members come back into the country after being in Guantánamo. The customs officials, they stopped and they searched my bags. It was interesting, because when they directed me to get my bags, I went to the pile of luggage where all of the luggage had been unloaded from the plane, but lo and behold, beside this pile of luggage, were my two bags already set aside, and I was wondering how that happened? Nevertheless, it was very convenient. I was able to grab those two bags and give them to the customs officials. Disturbingly, I would actually learn that it was the FBI—the FBI—who had contacted the customs officials, even as early as the day before my arrival and again the morning of my arrival, requesting them specifically to single me out, identify me before I even get off the plane, and have my bags searched. And that's what happened.

So we no longer have a routine customs search, but instead we have now a search being conducted by an extension of a law enforcement agency, the FBI, without probable cause, a violation, of course, of my Fourth Amendment right to be free from an illegal search and seizure. Didn't matter too much to me, because it's not like I had anything. But then, it would matter, because these customs officials would say, "Oh, we got some suspicious documents in his backpack," and then these suspicious documents were immediately, within seconds, handed over to several federal and military intelligence officers, who, by the way, just happened to be standing by. No, it wasn't a coincidence. It was a sting operation, and then these intelligence officers would say, not only were these documents suspicious, but they are classified documents, and then they would be able to get an arrest warrant, and then I was thrown in jail for which it ultimately would be for 76 days in isolation.

I was arrested in secret, held incommunicado. I never showed up at the airport in Seattle like I was supposed to have, where my wife and daughter were waiting. They didn't know what happened to me. My parents in New Jersey

had no idea what had happened. I essentially disappeared from society, from the face of the earth. But my family would learn of what happened to me ten days later, when government leaks to the media were then reported, first by the *Washington Times*, that I was now arrested and charged with these heinous crimes of spying, espionage, aiding the enemy, and mutiny and sedition, which is like trying to overthrow the government. All of these capital crimes, and, yes, I was threatened with the death penalty days after my arrest by a military prosecutor.

But now, I was sitting in a super-maximum security prison down in Charleston, South Carolina. Interestingly enough, the prison in which they sent me to is the very same prison in which they hold the U.S. citizen enemy combatants. Foreign enemy combatants, we know, are held down in Guantánamo and these other secret C.I.A. black sites that we've heard about. Enemy combatants declared by our U.S. president that are U.S. citizens are held in Charleston, South Carolina at the Consolidated Naval Brig, and that's where they sent me, and I believe it was a U.S. Southern Command public affairs representative—I believe it was on Amy's¹ show—who said this was only a coincidence that they sent me to this very same prison. But I know it wasn't a coincidence, because of the way in which they transported me there.

I was taken from Jacksonville, shackled like prisoners are shackled down in Guantánamo, at the wrist and at the waist and at the ankles in what we call in the military a three-piece suit, not a three-piece suit like you buy at the mall, made by Armani, a three-piece suit of chains. This is how I was shackled and then thrown in the back of a truck next to an armed guard, two other armed guards in the front. And down on the way, on this trip to Charleston, the guard pulls out of this bag these goggles—they're blackened out, opaque—puts them on my eyes so now I can't see a thing. He takes out these heavy industrial type ear muffs, the likes that you might see a construction worker wearing when he's jack hammering in the middle of the street, puts them on my ears, and now I can't hear a thing. We call this tactic "sensory deprivation." Sensory deprivation, it's something that I recently read that the American Psychiatric Association has included in a draft of their definition of torture.

Sensory deprivation. I was subjected to sensory deprivation, but I knew about this tactic, because that's, of course, how I saw prisoners being treated and subjected to when they are in-processed into Guantánamo when they are flown in from Afghanistan under this very same tactic of sensory deprivation; its purpose, which is meant to instill fear and intimidation. You, yourselves, maybe have seen the pictures with the prisoners wearing the hoods on their head. Well, I feared also that a hood would be then thrown on my head, but fortunately for me, that practice of hooding had just been stopped months before my arrest. I also feared of being kicked and beaten violently, especially after hearing some of the prisoners when I spoke with them down in Guantánamo, how they were kicked and beaten during their transport down to Guantánamo.

1. Amy Goodman, radio host of DemocracyNow.org.

One prisoner, as I've written about, even said, "Chaplain, if you look in my medical records, you'll see that I've even been treated by Army medics for being kicked and beaten so violently when I was brought here." I feared that I was going to be subjected to this same type treatment. So when they threw me in a cell down in Charleston, South Carolina, in solitary confinement, in isolation, I was at least relieved that I was still alive. But what was life like in that prison cell for me for those seventy-six days down in Charleston?

One of the most ironic parts of this situation is that down in Guantánamo, as the Muslim chaplain, I was able to protect certain religious rights for the alleged, suspected, Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners down in Guantánamo. I was able to ensure that the call to prayer was made five times a day over a loudspeaker. I was able to ensure that in every cell, an arrow was painted, directing them towards Mecca so they can properly make their prayers. I was able to ensure that every meal that is served to Muslim prisoners in Guantánamo is what we call "halal," meaning "the meat." The meals are prepared according to Islamic guidelines, a concept similar to kosher. I was able to ensure that meal schedules were adjusted during the holy month of Ramadan to accommodate for the holy fasting of that month, but when I, a U.S. citizen, was taken into U.S. military custody and thrown into a maximum security prison, I was denied my religious rights.

Yes, the prison chaplain came to see me, and he knew that I was a Muslim chaplain and, of course, by this time, it's high profile, as it has hit the news. The chaplain asked me if I needed anything, and I said, "Yes, could you get me the five prayer times so that I can make my Muslim prayers during their correct time?" And I even gave him a website, www.islamicfinder.org. Type in the zip code and you can get the prayer times for Charleston, South Carolina. He said, "Sorry, I can't give it to you. The security section won't allow me to give you that type of information."

I said, "Well, how about just a quick confirmation to the northeasterly direction, so that I can at least pray in the right direction, northeast from North America?" Mecca is to the northeast from North America. He said, "Sorry. I can't give you that either. The security section won't allow me to give you even that information." And I interpreted that to mean that if he gave me the north-easterly direction, then I, of course, being a military soldier, would be able to determine which way was north, south, east and west, and that information would help me if I was able to escape from this super-maximum security prison, because then I would know which way to run.

The point is, I was denied my religious rights as a U.S. citizen in military custody, the very same rights that I was able to uphold for prisoners down in Guantánamo. With that, I have to say that after 76 days I was suddenly released. I was never charged officially with those heinous crimes. I was charged with some lesser offenses of mishandling classified documents, which the military tried to prosecute me on....

I didn't receive an apology. Yes, I am an eternal optimist, and I hope one day that I will receive an official apology, and I believe that by speaking out, speaking the truth, and making people aware of what's going on in Guantánamo and letting others know what happened to me, as a U.S. citizen held in this so-

called war on terrorism, that one day all of this will lead to a well-deserved apology. Thank you.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. In what ways does point of view affect the way Gitmo is viewed?
2. Why do you think the U.S. government kept Gitmo open, despite the criticisms from so many people who had contact with it?
3. How do you think the U.S. Army might have done things differently to avoid creating such criticisms?