

By Andy Worthington

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Part Three: Captured Crossing from Afghanistan into Pakistan

This is the third part of an eight-part series telling the stories of all the prisoners currently held in Guantánamo (174 at the time of writing). See the introduction [here](#), and [Part](#)

[One](#)
and
[Part Two](#)

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This third article tells the stories of 22 prisoners seized in Pakistan after crossing from Afghanistan in December 2001, shortly after the prisoners described in Part One, and during a week-long period when around a quarter of the total number of prisoners held at Guantánamo (779 in total) were seized. Although these 185 or so men were routinely regarded as al-Qaeda members who had fled from the showdown between al-Qaeda and the US (via its Afghan allies) in the Tora Bora mountains, the truth is that almost every significant al-Qaeda member escaped from Tora Bora, that many of these men were nothing more than insignificant foot soldiers, and that many others were missionaries, humanitarian aid workers or economic migrants, caught fleeing the death and destruction in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, all were presented as al-Qaeda operatives by their Pakistani captors, who then handed them over — [or sold them](#) — to their US allies.

Around 140 of these men have been released, and the remaining prisoners are not only described in this article, but also in Part Four, where 24 more stories are told. Two of these men have won their habeas petitions, but are still held, and three others have lost their petitions (although none could remotely be described as terrorists). As before, the majority of the prisoners are Yemenis, and although many have presumably been [cleared for release](#) by President Obama's Guantánamo Review Task Force, they are waiting to see if the President will, at any point in the future, [lift the unprincipled moratorium](#)

on transfers to Yemen that he announced in January.

ISN 152 Al Khalaqi, Asim (Yemen)

As described in [The Guantánamo Files](#), al-Khalaqi stated that he “went to Pakistan with a friend to preach with Jamaat-al-Tablighi, but decided to go to Afghanistan after discovering that there were too many Tablighi representatives in Pakistan. He explained that he and his friend were successful in their mission, but everything changed after 9/11, when his friend ‘went one day to go eat lunch and didn’t return home.’ He then met an Afghan, who advised him to leave because Arabs were being killed, and explained that this man took him in his car to the foothills where he joined a group of Arabs crossing the mountains to Pakistan and handed himself in to the army on arrival.” The US authorities [allege](#) that he undertook military training and was on the front lines at Bagram.

ISN 153 Suleiman, Fayiz (Yemen)

According to [a summary of evidence](#) at Guantánamo, Suleiman “identified himself as a trained imam in Jeddah,” and stated that various sheikhs “would frequent his facility to solicit money for other countries and to address jihad.” He added that the majority of the sheikhs’ talks “focused on Chechnya.” Although he was accused by unknown sources of training to make poisons at Kandahar airport and of being in Tora Bora, he maintained that “he had no military service and he had no desire to serve in such a capacity,” stated that he was “never trained on the use of weapons,” and “denied any connection with al-Qaeda or the Taliban.”



ISN 156 Latif, Adnan Farhan Abdul (Yemen)

In Guantánamo, Latif, who was cleared for release by a military review board in 2007, [stated](#) that he had sustained a serious head injury in an automobile accident in 1994, and had spent years trying to find affordable medical treatment. After being told about the health-care office of a Pakistani aid worker in Afghanistan who would treat him, he said that he traveled to Afghanistan in 2001, and explained that, when the US-led invasion began, he fled to the border town of Khost and then made his way into Pakistan, where he was arrested by Pakistani forces, along with about 30 other Arabic-looking men. He told his lawyer, Marc Falkoff, that he later

learned that each of them had been turned over to the US military for a bounty of \$5000. On July 21 this year, Latif [won his habeas corpus petition](#), but he has still not been released. This is partly because of President Obama's [unprincipled moratorium](#) on releasing any Yemenis from Guantánamo, even though it has been repeatedly established that Latif is suffering from schizophrenia, and has attempted to commit suicide on numerous occasions, and partly, as Lette Taylor of Human Rights Watch explained in a recent article for [Global Post](#), because the US government "informed the court shortly after the ruling that it [was] giving 'serious consideration' to appealing his release." I need hardly add that, in light of Latif's serious mental problems, even entertaining an appeal marks out the Obama administration as fully capable of plumbing depths of cruelty that are, essentially, no different from the brutal innovations of the Bush administration.

ISN 163 Al Qadasi, Khalid (Yemen)

Little is known of al-Qadasi, because, as the authorities at Guantánamo have [explained](#), "he claims that he is willing to spend the rest of his life in prison and has emphatically stated that he would rather die than answer questions." The authorities have apparently ascertained that he served in the Yemeni army as a young man and traveled to Afghanistan in July 2001, and al-Qadasi has apparently stated that he "left Yemen for Pakistan to obtain medical treatment," and has also said that he "never possessed any weapons in Afghanistan, as he was unable to fight due to his bad back." The only evidence against him is a claim by an unidentified source that he was a mujahideen fighter who came to Tora Bora, and other claims that he stayed in a guest house in Kabul and traveled on a truck from a guest house in Jalalabad to Tora Bora.

ISN 165 Al Busayss, Said (Yemen)

Al-Busayss, who was cleared for release by a military review board under the Bush administration, apparently "traveled to Afghanistan in late 2000, attended a Taliban training camp and fought on the front lines until his unit withdrew, when he was given the option of staying or escaping. Choosing the latter, he fled to Pakistan, where he 'surrendered his weapon and was arrested by Pakistani police,'" as I explained in [The Guantánamo Files](#).

ISN 167 Al Raimi, Ali Yahya (Yemen)

Al-Raimi, who was cleared for release by a military review board under the Bush administration, was just 17 at the time of his capture, and [has stated](#) that he didn't want to go to Afghanistan, because he had a job in a restaurant in Yemen, but his parents, who were living in Afghanistan, forced him to visit. He added that, once he was there, his father and brother told him that he could only return to Yemen if he agreed to attend al-Farouq (the main camp for Arabs, associated with Osama bin Laden in the years before 9/11) for two months' training. He said

that he got sick at the camp, went to a clinic in Kabul, and then returned to resume training, but added that this was four days before 9/11, after which “the training stopped and the camp was closed down.” After the US-led invasion began, he said that he was unable to contact his family, so he crossed the mountains with some friends, and was in Pakistan for a few days before he was arrested in a car by Pakistani soldiers. In the unclassified summary of evidence, one of the factors justifying his detention was, “The detainee’s country of origin does not participate in joint enforcement of the global war on terrorism.”



ISN 168 Hakimi, Adel (Hakeemy) (Tunisia)

Before traveling to Afghanistan, Hakimi had lived in Belgium, and for eight years in Italy, where, as I explained in [an article in 2008](#), he had worked as a chef’s assistant in several hotels in Bologna. “I lived with Italians in their homes,” he told Cori Crider of Reprieve (his London-based lawyers) during a visit at Guantánamo in May 2008. “I am used to their culture. The Italians worked alongside me, they respected me, they treated me as their brother.”

[According to Reprieve](#)

, he traveled to Pakistan to get married and was living in Jalalabad, near his wife’s family, when the US-led invasion began in October 2001, and was then seized crossing the border like most of the other men described in this article. Although he was cleared for release from Guantánamo by a military review board under the Bush administration, both the US authorities and investigators in Europe still seem to regard him as a member of a group of Tunisians who joined al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and who helped recruits cross from Pakistan into Afghanistan, according to a Belgian police report produced at the 2003 trial in Belgium of Sliti’s uncle, Amor Sliti, when he and Hisham Sliti (ISN 174) were sentenced *in absentia*

. His lawyers argue that the allegations are false, and are based on testimony extracted through torture, but

[since last summer](#)

, there have been

[rumors](#)

that he and Sliti might be extradited to Belgium.

ISN 170 Masud, Sharaf (Yemen)

In Guantánamo, it was [reported](#) that Masud traveled to Afghanistan “because he heard that the Afghan leader led by Islamic ways” and that he supported the Taliban, but “did not travel to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban ... because it was Muslim versus Muslim.” He stated that he “left Kabul because the Afghans were trying to kill Arabs in the market,” took a taxi back to Jalalabad, and then joined a group of people walking to the border, where he was arrested after asking to be taken to his embassy. There are no allegations that he took part on any kind of combat — only claims that he stayed in guest houses for four months — and a ludicrous allegation by a “senior al-Qaeda lieutenant,” who “noted the detainee looked familiar and that he may be a Tunisian with connections to Italy.”

ISN 171 Alahdal, Abu Bakr (Yemen)

According to [the US authorities](#), Alahdal “served as a fighter for the Taliban Arab forces” at Bagram, but then “contracted malaria and some other unidentified illness” and was sent to a hospital in Kabul, where he spent two months recuperating. He then made his way to Jalalabad, where he “waited to be recalled to the front lines,” but “withdrew to a village on the outskirts of Jalalabad,” from where he made his way to Pakistan, where he was turned in by villagers. In Guantánamo, he has been a long-term hunger striker. Although he only weighed 99 pounds on arrival, his weight dropped at one point to just 81 pounds, and he was force-fed daily from the end of August 2005 until the publicly-released weight records ended in December 2006, when he still weighed only 101 pounds ([PDF](#)).

ISN 174 Sliti, Hisham (Tunisia)

In January 2009, Sliti, who had lived in various countries in Europe, including Belgium and Italy, lost his habeas corpus petition, when Judge Richard Leon ruled that he was “part of or supporting Taliban or al-Qaeda forces,” based on claims made by the government that he traveled to Afghanistan as “an al-Qaeda recruit ... at the expense of known al-Qaeda associates and on a false passport provided to him by the same,” that he stayed in a guest house and a mosque, and attended a training camp, which also had connections to al-Qaeda, and that he was “instrumental” in “starting a terrorist organization with close ties to al-Qaeda.” As I explained in [an article at the time](#), “The problem with all of these allegations is that Sliti’s story actually suggests that all these conclusions are based on guilt by association. He may well have been connected with others who were involved in or interested in terrorism, but his own trajectory is that of a junkie rather than a jihadist, or, if you prefer, a tourist rather than a terrorist.” Judge Leon disregarded Sliti’s own claim that he went to Afghanistan “to kick a long-standing drug habit and to find a wife,” but it was certainly true that he had been a drug addict in Europe (where he had been imprisoned on several occasions), and he also has a worldly cynicism that is fundamentally at odds with the fanatical rigor of al-Qaeda. In [a review board at Guantánamo](#)

, he explained that he only ended up in Afghanistan because he had begun attending mosques in Belgium, where the country had been portrayed as “a clean, uncorrupted country where he could study Sharia and further his religious education,” but that what he found instead was that “I didn’t care for the country. It was very hot, dusty and [the] women were ugly. The atmosphere

and environment didn't agree with me." Despite this, he, like Adel Hakimi (ISN 168, above) faces possible extradition to Belgium, where he was sentenced *in absentia* in 2003.

ISN 178 Baada, Tareq (Yemen)

In Guantánamo, it was [alleged](#) that Baada, who denied being a member of al-Qaeda, trained al-Farouq, and that he and a group of fighters were then assigned to the third line, about 4 km south of the front line near Kabul. It was also alleged that, after the fall of Kabul, he fled to Tora Bora, where he was put on guard duty. One of the most persistent hunger strikers at Guantánamo, he weighed 121 pounds on arrival at the prison, but in January 2006, when he was one of a handful of hunger strikers to continue after [the](#)

[prison-wide strike of 2005](#)

was largely halted, he weighed just 94 pounds (

[PDF](#)

). In March 2007,

[Sami al-Haj](#)

(the al-Jazeera cameraman

[released in 2008](#)

)

[mentioned](#)

that he was one of three prisoners who had been on hunger strike — and force-fed — for the previous year.

ISN 189 Gherebi, Salem (Libya)

Little is known of Gherebi. Initially, it was [alleged](#) that he arrived in Afghanistan in 1995, having lost most of the fingers of his right hand in an explosives accident in Tajikistan the year before, and that he was an al-Qaeda operative in Kabul, who had “reportedly” trained at an al-Qaeda training camp in 1996 (an allegation that borders on the implausible, as Osama bin Laden only returned to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996). By 2006, the US authorities had dropped the claims about losing his fingers and being an al-Qaeda member in exchange for a new set of allegations, most of which centered on his purported links with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). Deciding that his name was actually Rafdat Muhammed Faqi Aljj Saqqaf, the authorities alleged that he had lived in Pakistan in the early 1990s and then, fearing that talks between the Libyan and Pakistani governments would lead to the deportation of all Libyans from Pakistan, had moved back to Afghanistan, where he stayed in refugee camps.

ISN 195 Al Shumrani, Mohammed (Saudi Arabia)

The US authorities [allege](#) that al-Shumrani left Saudi Arabia for Afghanistan in June 2001, because he “wanted to fight in Chechnya, but was told he would need military training that could

best be obtained in Afghanistan.” It is also claimed that he “stated he attended a training camp,” and then spent about five months on the front lines. In what seemed to be an attempt to beef up the allegations, it was also claimed that he “stated that while he was fighting in Afghanistan, he tried to see Osama bin Laden,” and that he “operated a hand-held two-way radio, which he used to request additional supplies” in the Tora Bora area.

ISN 197 Chekhouri, Younis (Morocco)

Chekhouri is [accused](#) of being a founder member of the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group (or GICM, the *Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain*), who had a training camp near Kabul, but he has

[always maintained](#)

that he traveled to Afghanistan in 2001, with his Algerian wife, after six years in Pakistan, where he had first traveled in search of work and education, and has stated that they lived on the outskirts of Kabul, working for a charity that ran a guest house and helped young Moroccan immigrants, and had no involvement whatsoever in the country’s conflicts. He has also repeatedly explained that he was profoundly disillusioned by the fighting amongst Muslims that has plagued Afghanistan’s recent history, and he has also expressed his implacable opposition to the havoc wreaked on the country by Osama bin Laden, describing him as “a crazy person,” and adding that “what he does is bad for Islam.”

ISN 200 Al Qahtani, Said (Saudi Arabia)

As I explained in [The Guantánamo Files](#), al-Qahtani attended a training camp in Pakistan in 2000, when he also spent some time (possibly a day, possibly a week) with

[Abu Zubaydah](#)

, the alleged “high-value detainee,” seized in Pakistan in March 2002, for whom the CIA’s torture program was

[initially developed](#)

. Zubaydah’s case reveals the true horror at the heart of the “War on Terror,” because, despite being

[waterboarded 83 times](#)

and held in secret CIA prisons for four and a half years, he was not a senior al-Qaeda operative at all, and was, instead, the mentally troubled gatekeeper of the Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan. However, although the US authorities have steadily

[distanced themselves](#)

from making grand claims about Zubaydah, al-Qahtani’s brief association with him has probably counted against him in Guantánamo. In his tribunal in 2004,

[he said](#)

that he didn’t know that Zubaydah was allegedly involved with al-Qaeda, and asked, “just because somebody stays at someone’s house, who may not be the best person in the world, does that make the people who stayed at that house bad people?” After returning home, he spoke to an imam who

[explained](#)

that he should help the Taliban because, after the Soviet occupation and the civil war, “they brought peace to 95 percent of the country, except the places where the Northern Alliance were at the time. I don’t think there was anything wrong with helping to make peace after 30 years of fighting.” Returning to Afghanistan in April 2001, he served as a guard on the front lines near Kabul before fleeing to Pakistan with around 15 other people, but pointed out that he was in Afghanistan before 9/11, and

[insisted](#)

, “Even if you say I am right or wrong, I don’t think I did anything wrong. At the time I didn’t think I did anything wrong, and I still don’t. I didn’t do anything illegal or bad to anyone. I want you to understand this.”

ISN 219 Razak, Abdul (China)

Razak is one of 22 Uighurs (Muslims from China’s oppressed Xinjiang province), who had fled persecution in their homeland, and had ended up in Afghanistan, either because they had been thwarted in their attempts to reach Turkey or Europe, or because they nursed futile hopes of rising up against the Chinese government. 17 of the men were living in a rundown settlement in Afghanistan’s Tora Bora mountains when the US-led invasion began in October 2001, and after the settlement was destroyed in a bombing raid, they made their way to the Pakistani border, where they were seized and later sold to US forces. In [The Guantánamo Files](#), I described Abdul Razak’s story as follows: “Yusef Abbas, who was injured in the raid, said that one man died and ‘we were covered in half a bucket of his body meat.’ After the bombing, he was taken to a hospital in Jalalabad, where Abdul Razak, a Uighur who worked at the hospital and occasionally brought food to the camp, took care of him, until ‘there was a riot in the city’ and he returned to the other Uighurs in the mountains, taking Razak with him.” Five of the Uighurs were

[released in](#)

in May

[Albania](#)

2006, and the remaining 17 — including Razak —

[won their habeas corpus petitions](#)

in October 2008. However, although 12 of these men have been resettled in

[Bermuda](#)

,

[Palau](#)

and

[Switzerland](#)

, Abdul Razak and four others remain in Guantánamo. Having turned down offers of a new home because of fears about the suitability or security of the countries offered, they are

[back in legal limbo](#)

, as the US courts have ruled that they have no right to be accepted in the US, and no other offer to rehouse them has yet been made.

ISN 223 Sulayman, Abdul Rahman (Yemen)

On July 21 this year, Sulayman [lost his habeas petition](#). In Guantánamo, he explained that a

man identified by the US authorities as a known recruiter for al-Qaeda had facilitated his travel to Afghanistan, although he added that he had been recruited under false pretences and that the man “promised me that I’d be able to get married in Afghanistan. He may have had different intentions for me other than the marriage, but I didn’t know.” This was not the whole story, as Sulayman also conceded that, after arriving in Afghanistan in March 2001, he stayed in Kabul for seven months, and then, when given the opportunity to go to the front lines or the second lines or to return home, he went to the second lines because he didn’t want to fight but he also didn’t want to return home. It was there, he said, that he received some weapons training, and later, after the US-led invasion began, he fled to Pakistan in the company of men that he didn’t know, where he was seized and handed over to US forces. This was enough for him to lose his habeas petition, although it fails to demonstrate that he was a threat to the US, and what his case reveals most of all is how much of the supposed evidence was demonstrably false, and almost certainly produced by unreliable witnesses, either in Guantánamo or in other US-run prisons. These included ludicrous allegations that he was identified as a mortar instructor from a video made in the Tarnak Farms training camp in 2000 (before he arrived in Afghanistan), that he “was identified as an al-Qaeda spokesman and was part of Osama bin Laden’s entourage ... during the escape from Tora Bora,” and, most alarmingly, that he was identified as a Taliban prison guard “who used torture techniques on inmates under his control.”

ISN 224 Muhammad, Abd Al Rahman (Yemen)

Muhammad, who was just 19 when he was seized, [said](#) that he initially traveled to Karachi to look for work, and stayed for three months with a Yemeni friend. He then visited the Taliban’s office in Quetta, in July or August 2001, “seeking a teaching job in Afghanistan,” but was told that there was “no work in Afghanistan.” After returning to Karachi, he decided to try again, and this time paid for a guide to take him to Kandahar, where he stayed in a madrassa for ten days. After the 9/11 attacks, he said that “the people at the madrassa” sent him to a “known Taliban house” near Kabul, and from there he eventually made his way to the Pakistani border, where he was seized. Although the US authorities came up with an impressive list of documents seized in raids, on which Muhammad’s name and details were allegedly recorded, there is no way of knowing how accurate these records are, as many featured supposed “aliases” that were notoriously generic, and others appear to record the names of prisoners that were leaked to al-Qaeda sympathizers, who duly described them in online postings as al-Qaeda members. For his part, Muhammad “denied that he received any weapons [training] during his one-month stay in Kabul.”



[won his habeas corpus petition](#)