

By Andy Worthington

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[WikiLeaks' latest revelations](#) — secret military files on almost all of the 779 prisoners held in the US “war on terror” prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba — are already causing a stir, and for good reason, as they resuscitate a story that appears to have been forgotten in the last few years: how, in their rush to prove themselves tough and vengeful in response to the 9/11 attacks, the most senior officials in the Bush administration not only discarded international laws and treaties including the [Geneva Conventions](#) and the [UN Convention Against Torture](#), but also [threw out safeguards](#) designed to protect innocent people from being wrongly imprisoned in wartime.

Some of the key discoveries in the Guantánamo files are the documents on the 201 prisoners released between 2002 and summer 2004, which cover new ground, as the US military has never publicly released any of this information before. For the other 578 prisoners, information has at least been revealed through the release of the government's allegations against the prisoners, and the transcripts of the tribunals and review boards used to assess their significance, which were [released in 2006](#) (with follow-ups in the years since), but for these 201 prisoners, many of the stories are being related for the very first time. These are [mostly dispiriting revelations](#) about how children as young as 14 and old men in their 80s were rounded up and sent to Guantánamo, joining farmers, taxi drivers and unwilling Taliban recruits — hordes of the innocent or the insignificant, whose stories help to confirm the folly of Guantánamo.

Just as significant, however, are the stories of the majority of the other prisoners — the nearly 400 others released, and most of [the 171 still held](#). Understanding their stories generally requires more effort, as the allegations marshalled against them seem to prove what a threat they are — until, that is, the sources of these allegations are investigated, and are revealed, time and again, as very dubious indeed.

Although JTF-GTMO, the Joint Task Force at Guantánamo, responsible for creating these files,

has done a good job of creating the illusion of coherent intelligence dossiers, an illusion is all it is. On close inspection, the files are full of lies and distortions, with [certain figures appearing over and over again](#). They include “high-value detainees” like [Abu Zubaydah](#), [waterboarded 83 times](#) and held for four and a half years in secret CIA prisons, and [Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi](#), tortured in Egypt until he falsely confessed that there were connections between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein (used to [justify the invasion of Iraq in March 2003](#)), who was finally [sent back to Libya to be murdered](#).

There are also others, held only in Guantánamo, who are [known as notoriously unreliable informants](#), and who, whether through the use of torture, coercion, or bribery (the promise of better living conditions) have [repeatedly told lies](#) about their fellow prisoners. These have been seen through, generally by some official figures at Guantánamo, and also [by judges in the prisoners' habeas corpus petitions](#), who have recognized their baleful influence, and have often moved to dismiss their testimony, damaging or even eviscerating the government's cases.

There are dangerous men in Guantánamo, of course — some, if not all of the 14 ‘high-value detainees,’ including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, who arrived in Guantánamo from [secret CIA prisons](#) in September 2006, some of the ten others transferred to Guantánamo from secret prisons in September 2004, plus a handful of others. Essentially, these are the 36 men [recommended for trials](#) by the Obama administration's Guantánamo Review Task Force, which spent the whole of 2009 analysing the prisoners' cases.

As for the rest of the 171 men still held, 47 of whom are being [held indefinitely without charge or trial](#) by President Obama on the basis that they are too dangerous to release, even though no evidence exists that can be used in court, these documents reveal how the distortions engendered by Guantánamo continue to erode all hope of a rational settlement to the vexed question of when Guantánamo

will actually close.

When innocent people are labelled as “low risk” detainees, and foot soldiers are labelled as “medium risk” or “high risk,” [as they are in these official documents](#) , the proper outcome — that prisoners should either be charged or released, and the abomination that is Guantánamo should be closed as soon as possible — is lost in a miasma of misplaced fear.

Politically, it appears that President Obama has decided that [Guantánamo is too toxic to touch](#) . That is a disgrace, as it shows him to be a man lacking in firm principles, after all his fine talk about the importance of justice and the law, when he was a Senator, and it is also a tragedy for America.

I won't hold my breath hoping for enlightenment, but these documents released by WikiLeaks deserve to be read widely, and to be acted upon decisively by Americans who care about justice and the rule of law, because, with Guantánamo still open, they reveal the unjustifiable triumph, from beyond the electoral grave, of the Bush administration, whose actions, whatever their supposed justification, took the country to a wretched and disturbing place that still needs to be abandoned and repudiated as a thoroughly unacceptable aberration from the principles on which the United States was founded.