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In part two of our exclusive interview, Sami al-Hajj, the Al Jazeera journalist imprisoned and tortured at Guantánamo for six years, describes how he waged a 438-day hunger strike to protest his detention. Al-Hajj was arrested in Pakistan in December of 2001 while traveling to Afghanistan on a work assignment. Held for six years without charge, al-Hajj was repeatedly tortured, hooded, attacked by dogs and hung from a ceiling. Interrogators questioned him more than 100 times about whether Al Jazeera was a front for al-Qaeda. Al-Hajj waged his hunger strike from January 2007 until his release in May 2008. [Click here to watch Part 1](#) of this interview. [includes rush transcript]

Guest:

[Sami al-Hajj](#), the only journalist imprisoned at Guantánamo. Released in 2008 after six years in U.S. custody without charge, he now heads Al Jazeera's human rights and public liberties desk.

Transcript

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Protesters calling for the closure of Guantánamo have entered their fourth day of a hunger fast in Washington. The activists from Witness Against Torture plan to protest outside the Supreme Court on Friday, the 11th anniversary of the opening of the military prison.

Well, today we turn to part two of our exclusive interview with Sami al-Hajj, the Al Jazeera journalist who was held without charge at Guantánamo for six years. On [Tuesday](#), he described being arrested in Pakistan in December of 2001 while traveling to Afghanistan on a work assignment. He was then transferred to U.S. custody. He was first held at U.S. prisons in Kandahar and Bagram, then six months later taken to Guantánamo Bay. In U.S. detention, he says, he was repeatedly beaten and tortured. Dogs attacked him, and he was prevented from

sleeping for days.

AMY GOODMAN: In January 2007, Sami al-Hajj began a hunger strike to protest his imprisonment. It continued for 438 days, until his release, May 2008. Well, when we were in Doha, Qatar, for the climate change summit, I had a chance to conduct a rare interview with Sami al-Hajj at Al Jazeera's headquarters in Doha, where he heads the network's human rights and public liberties desk. In this part of the interview, I asked him to describe how officials at Guantánamo force-fed him with tubes during his hunger strike.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: They doesn't bring a small tube, big.

AMY GOODMAN: They bring a tube that's too big—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes, too big, very big.

AMY GOODMAN: —to put up your nose and down into your stomach?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: And there is some [inaudible]. When they take it, they take it by force, and very quick.

AMY GOODMAN: So they jerk it out of your nose.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, some blood coming, yes. And many times they doesn't cleaning the

tube. When they feed the other guy, they come, and same thing. They give it to you by—

AMY GOODMAN: They use the tube that they used in the person they have seated next to you.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For another, yes, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And then they put it into you—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For you, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: —without cleaning it.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Without cleaning. You see the blood and everything inside.

AMY GOODMAN: You see the blood.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Inside, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you say—when they would take the tube of a man next to you and put it into you, shove it down through your nose into your stomach, would you say something?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For that, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Would you ask why they were doing this?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, they said—they told us, "We want you to break your hunger strike." They tell us directly like that. They ask us to break our hunger strike. They said, "We'll never deal with you as the detainees until you break your hunger strike."

AMY GOODMAN: Why did you go on hunger strike, Sami al-Hajj?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: I go in hunger strike for many reasons. First reason is they—we are in Guantánamo without charge, without court. They doesn't give us chance to go to court and talk about our case. Even if—even when civilian court in U.S.A. accept our case, also they put something in our way. This is the first one. Second one, also they kill three guy in Guantánamo—that Yasser al-Zahrani and Manei al-Otaibi and Ali from Yemen. Three people, they killed them in Guantánamo, and they said they killed themself.

AMY GOODMAN: They said they committed suicide.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: I told them—we told them, "You should tell us how they killed themself." And the third thing, also, they doesn't allow for us to call our family or to do any communication with them.

AMY GOODMAN: In the seven years that you were detained, did you ever see your wife?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Nothings. No—

AMY GOODMAN: Your child?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: —not my wife. Even I didn't saw child. When I get my release after seven years, the first child I saw it, my son. At that time, he become eight or nine years. I leave him baby and found him as nine years. The first one I saw it in hospital when they returned me back, in hospital, child is my son, Mohamed. We didn't see child. We didn't see family, just letter from them. And even that letters, they put crossing some words.

AMY GOODMAN: The censored much of the language.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: What did they censor out?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Nothings. Just they said me your son now reach this years, and this—he gets this mark in school, or like that. They doesn't—

AMY GOODMAN: And what did the military censors cross out?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: What—

AMY GOODMAN: Did they cross out.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: [speaking Arabic] The mark of my son.

AMY GOODMAN: They would cross out—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes, yes, they crossed. Yes, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: —the grade that he got in school?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes, yes, that word. They—if they said he ask about you, also they cross. If he said Al Jazeera done anything for you, they also [inaudible]. Sometimes they bring for me the letters, "Dear my husband. At last goodbye, your wife." All the whole—

AMY GOODMAN: The whole letter was censored.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes. I have a copy of it now with me.

AMY GOODMAN: On you right now?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes. I have it in my home.

AMY GOODMAN: So it just said—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes. Just only—

AMY GOODMAN: "Dear Sami" —

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And "From your wife," but the whole letter is crossed out.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, just crossed, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And did you ask your wife, when you saw her, what did she write in this letter?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: My wife, after I get it?

AMY GOODMAN: Yes.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Just she said for me, "I tell you our family news." Yes, nothing more.

AMY GOODMAN: So, describe the day you were released. What day was it?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: That day is the 1st of May.

AMY GOODMAN: The?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: First of May.

AMY GOODMAN: First of May.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: 2008, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you know you were going to be released?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, because I met Clive Stafford Smith. He told me, before that, they decide to release you. And even I met group of people coming from government of Sudan; also they told me that things. And also group of Qatar's government also come and visit me there.

AMY GOODMAN: Here, Qatar.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: There, yes. There in—

AMY GOODMAN: And they came to you in Guantánamo.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, in Guantánamo, and also they told me that things. Last, I met the Red Cross. They asked me, "Did you have any objection to go to Sudan, to return back?" I told them, "No." At last, I don't know when it will be, but they said, "We deciding—decide to release you." At last, they came and take me to some military court, and they said, "We decide to release you and return you back to Sudan, but you are still our enemy. And you should sign for us a paper, you will never leave Sudan, travel out of Sudan, and you are never working in journalist field." And I didn't sign.

AMY GOODMAN: You refused.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: I refused, yes, to sign that bit.

AMY GOODMAN: Were you still on hunger strike that day?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes. Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: So they put a feeding tube in you that day.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes. I break my hunger strike in Sudan, after I arrived Sudan, in hospital.

AMY GOODMAN: So, what was it like? They took you onto a plane at Guantánamo?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Who?

AMY GOODMAN: They took you, put you on a plane?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: In Guantánamo?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, in plane in Guantánamo, me and two people from Sudan, and seven people—

AMY GOODMAN: Did they put bags on your heads?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Same thing. Seven people from Afghanistan. And the aircraft, we take off from Guantánamo and landing in Baghdad, in Iraq, one journey. And then they changed their aircraft and sent me to Sudan. And we have another guy who's also from Morocco; they sent him to Morocco from Sudan.

AMY GOODMAN: And when you landed in Khartoum—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: —was your family there?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: My family, at that time, in Doha, but they came to me, because when I come to Sudan, because the journey was too long, and I—my situation is so I was in—I didn't understand where I was, and I didn't feel anything. I opened my eyes. I find myself in hospital, Sudan, yes. After five or six hours, my wife and my son arrived.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you recognize your son?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Of course. Of course. By feeling, not by face, yes. From feeling, I recognize him, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: How long were you in the hospital there?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: I spent about two weeks, and then I continues my—

AMY GOODMAN: Then you—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, here in Qatar.

AMY GOODMAN: And you resumed your work at Al Jazeera?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, I was working Al Jazeera. I continues my work with Al Jazeera. And Al Jazeera established a new department. It's called the public liberty and human rights. And that take care about human rights news and also make training for our people of Al Jazeera about human rights. And we have also cooperated with organization who are working human right and liberties, like International Red Cross and U.N. and UNESCO. And also we have agreement with them and cooperated.

AMY GOODMAN: Sami, how do you cope with what you have been through?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: When I was in Guantánamo, I ask myself—it is a bad situation, but I ask myself, maybe it is a good chance for me to be a journalist inside Guantánamo, to see the situation there and to be a witness of that section, about that things. And when I get my release, I will tell the outside people about that thing. But also, it is that things—seven years, it is harm myself, but at same time also I find some positive things, like I believe in journalist, but after that, after that things, also I am believing now in human rights. I'm believing in freedoms. I know the situation of people who are losing their freedoms and the sufferings, really. So I'm happy when I get my release to return back to my field and my family and Al Jazeera. And also I work in the field of protect journalists and to help the people who are looking for help, for freedom of human being or like that things.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you suffer from flashbacks?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Of course. Of course, seven years, it's not easy to forget everything. Still I—in dream, I woke up at the middle night, and I saw some dream I am still inside Guantánamo or like that. And also, because I missed my family for seven years, still the relationship between me and my wife and between me, my son, it's not like a normal people's. Still I like to be sitting in place quiet. There is no—because we are—seven years, we are under the light. It's not allowed for us to close the light at night. Even the shouting. I didn't like dog at all. Some things, psychological things happening.

But for myself, if I comparative myself with the other detainees, I find me is very better than the other people. I returned to my family, and I found them are OK, and Al Jazeera take care about them. I find job. But other detainees, they doesn't find job. They doesn't return back to their family. I know one journal—I know one from Algeria. They keep him in Guantánamo for six years. And he returned back to Algeria now. And he's free, but he's far away from his wife. His wife in Pakistan, and he's in—he doesn't saw their family until now. Some of them are suffering from some illness, but they doesn't find someone to help them. And many of them, they doesn't have job. Some of them, they lock them again in jail in their country. And many,

many, many sufferings people. Rehabilitation for them, it's not completed until now. Nobody want to help them. Everybody he knows, "Those people are terrorists and coming from Guantánamo." Nobody allowed for them to travel. Even they doesn't have a passport or some document to leave their country or to go pass somewhere. Still they consider them are terrorist people.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you plan to sue the U.S. government for what happened to you?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Of course. Of course, if I am trying to open a case against Bush administration and Bush himself, we established an organization in Geneva. It's called Guantánamo Justice Centre. And we established that—

AMY GOODMAN: Guantánamo Justice Centre.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: We have three reason for that. The first reason, to help the people still locked in Guantánamo to find another country to accept them. Second, rehabilitation for the other people who are get released. Third thing, to make justice for the people, by following Bush and his administration. And now we open a case against Bush in Geneva, when he trying to visit Geneva. But he's canceled that in March 2011.

AMY GOODMAN: He canceled his trip?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, he canceled. And we're trying to make for him case when he went to visit Canada. But Canada doesn't accepted our case. Now we have a case against Canada also. And we tried to open for him a case, he also, Pervez Musharraf, the president of Pakistan. He is now in London. We tried to open a case against him.

But also, me and other people, they understand that what has happened for us in Guantánamo, that not means all American are same like Bush and his administration. There, some people are good, like Clive Stafford Smith, like Cori, like Zachary. There came for us a thousand mails from their family to help us. They didn't get any payment for that help. They believe that is wrong. And many of them, I met him—I met him after I get my release. And they said, "We are against what is going there in Guantánamo."

But I surprise at same times, when Obama get—become a president. He promised first to close Guantánamo, but he doesn't keep his promise. I wish he keep his promise in this period, during these years.

AMY GOODMAN: What else do you have to say to President Obama?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: I ask—I ask him to keep his promise to close Guantánamo. Guantánamo is a shame for U.S.A. Obama, he come to clear Bush administration history, bad history for. I respect U.S.A. before Guantánamo. I respected U.S.A. because I believed U.S.A. is a democracy country, and they're fighting for democracy. The people who are created U.S.A., they created for democracy, for freedoms. I read the history of U.S.A. before Guantánamo and after Guantánamo. But I think what is done by Bush administration, they destroyed all the honest of U.S.A. at that time. Obama, he tried to clear that things. But he promised to close Guantánamo, but he doesn't close it.

AMY GOODMAN: Sami al-Hajj, the only journalist ever detained at Guantánamo, spent six years there without charge. He now heads the human rights department at Al Jazeera in Doha, Qatar. For [part one of the interview](#) with the Al Jazeera journalist, you can go to our website at democracynow.org. This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*. Back in a minute.