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Ten years after the first publication of photos from inside the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, we speak to Al Jazeera journalist Salah Hassan about his torture by U.S. forces inside the facility. To date, no high-ranking U.S. official has been held accountable for the torture at Abu Ghraib, but Hassan and other former prisoners are attempting to sue one of the private companies, CACI International, that helped run the prison. "Throughout my detainment in the solitary cells, there was an interrogation every two or three days," Hassan says. "During these interrogations, we were subjected to many psychological and physical torture methods. One of these methods was that you are kept naked, handcuffed, the hood on your head, then they would bring a big dog. You hear the panting and barking of the dog very close to your face."

AMY GOODMAN: It was 10 years ago last week when CBS News first broadcast photographs of American soldiers and contractors torturing and sexually humiliating prisoners in Iraq.

The New Yorker
soon published a

[story](#)
on its website called "Torture at Abu Ghraib" by Seymour Hersh. The photos from inside the prison shocked the world. One showed a hooded Iraqi man standing on a box with his electrical wires attached to his outstretched arms. Another showed a U.S. soldier holding a leash attached to the neck of a naked prisoner. Another photograph showed a U.S. soldier giving the thumbs up while posing next to the body of a dead prisoner.

At the time, the Bush administration condemned the abuse as the work of a "few bad apples." A few low-ranking soldiers were sentenced to prison, but none of the contractors involved with running the prison were prosecuted. No high-ranking military official was held responsible, and reparations were never paid to the Iraqi prisoners.

Today we bring you the story of one former prisoner in his own words. Salah Hassan was detained in November of 2003 while working as a journalist for Al Jazeera in Iraq. He's now a plaintiff in a lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights against the private contractor CACI International, known by many simply as CACI. According to the lawsuit, employees of CACI

working at Abu Ghraib allegedly threatened Salah Hassan with dogs, deprived him of food, beat him, and kept him naked in a solitary cell in conditions of sensory deprivation. I spoke to Salah Hassan last week. He was in Doha, Qatar, where he still works for Al Jazeera. I began by asking about when he was first arrested.

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] First, I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to meet with you and discuss an issue that is 10 years old. Of course, the place where I was arrested was the district of Diyala, north of Baghdad, about 10 years ago. This was the first place of arrest. After that, I was moved from one place to another 'til I ended up in Abu Ghraib prison.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you explain, Salah, who arrested you? And then describe what happened to you at Abu Ghraib.

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Actually, it is assumed that the people who arrested me in the district of Diyala are from the American Army, but I cannot really differentiate if they are truly individuals from the Army or from private security companies, because most people there used to wear military outfits and without military ranking insignia/badges that might have clarified their affiliation to the Army or other institutions.

AMY GOODMAN: Where were you arrested? Can you talk about what you were doing at that time, and even before you made it to Abu Ghraib, where you were taken?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Of course. This is the main point of this issue. The issue is that I am a journalist, and I was at my workplace covering the events in the district of Diyala, north of Baghdad. It is my duty to cover events in the field and on the ground, as well as political events. So my arrest happened while I was doing my journalistic duty. There was an explosion in that area. I went to that place to try to take some photographs and gather information about this incident. After I was done with all this work, I was surprised that a man in a military uniform ordered my arrest. After that, I was moved from one station to another. The first of these stations was in the same district, Diyala. Then I was moved to another airport that is used as a military base, also in Diyala district. Then I was moved by helicopter, alone, to another district,

which is the district of Salahuddin located north of Diyala district. Of course, I was kept in each of these stations for a day or two. And from the last station, I was moved to Abu Ghraib prison.

AMY GOODMAN: Were you hurt? Were you injured in this time by those who had captured you?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] The helicopter moved me from Diyala to Salahuddin, then from Salahuddin to Abu Ghraib by military trucks. Of course, I was subjected to a lot of hurt and harm during this period, being moved from station to station. The simplest thing was being very tightly handcuffed and having my legs restrained with metal iron chains. They also left me in tiny rooms with no food or water. They also verbally abused me throughout my detainment in all these stations.

AMY GOODMAN: Did they understand, Salah Hassan, that you were a journalist with Al Jazeera?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Of course they know I am a journalist with Al Jazeera. And their knowledge is solid since I could not have worked in the district without getting permission from the American forces that were present in the district. There was a media office, and we provided this media office with all the names of the crew, and the office gave us special permit cards for media coverage. So they do know me well. Also, I have previously worked with them, and I have previously gone to this media office more than once. There was an officer in the American forces, who was the liaison for the journalists who worked in this district. So, consequently, I was not at all a stranger to them.

AMY GOODMAN: Salah Hassan, describe what happened when you first came to Abu Ghraib.

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] The details are many, in reality. I cannot summarize it or limit it

to a few short minutes. But for me as a journalist, this was a huge shock. I did not expect it at all that a journalist would be treated in this manner. I have many friends from America, and I know that the American society does not allow or accept these kinds of behavior and that this behavior would be coming from people who do not believe in democracy or who have a lot of problems. Consequently, what happened in Abu Ghraib was very difficult, an extremely big shock.

As soon as I arrived to the prison, they ordered me to strip off all my clothes. And as you know, we, in an Oriental, Eastern society, and taking off all of our clothes in the culture is a very difficult issue, which the people of this area cannot bear. This is an issue related to honor and to family and community values. This was the first issue that I was subjected to in Abu Ghraib prison. I remained without clothes, I remember, from 5:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. of the following day.

AMY GOODMAN: Was a hood placed or a plastic bag placed over your head?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Yes, I had a black hood on my head, and my hands were tied upward, and I remained in this state for long hours. I had medical issues in my stomach. Some excretion was going out of my mouth involuntarily and falling to the ground. But all of this was of no consequences to the guards in the prison. On the contrary, they were laughing. And even at midnight or after midnight, I heard some people singing, in English, of course, "Happy Birthday, Al Jazeera." The message is clear: You are with Al Jazeera, so you will celebrate your birthday here, or something of this kind.

AMY GOODMAN: Were you forced, Salah Hassan, to stand for many hours at a time, hooded, naked?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Of course. I was helpless and could not object or not comply because, as military men, they had more power than me. They forced me. At the beginning, when they asked me to take off my clothes, I refused, of course, and told them, "I will not take my clothes off." They said to me, "You either take them off yourself, or we will take them off for

you." Then I realized they are serious, so I started taking off some pieces like my pants and shirt, but they insisted that I strip completely. I told them it is impossible and I cannot take off all my clothes. They said, "You either take them off, or we will." So I had to take off all my clothes, timidly, the hood on my head. I put my hand to cover my genitals, very embarrassed. These were very difficult moments. I transformed, in a second, from a journalist on the ground who has a social status and people look at me in a certain way—I have my familial and social values and status—to a humiliated person stripped down forcefully, very naked, helpless. This was a huge shock in these moments. These were the first hours of getting into the Abu Ghraib prison. And, of course, there are more details from the following days.

AMY GOODMAN: The secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, famously said in a memo, when the description of people being held for hours at a time standing, that he stands at his desk for 11 hours, he doesn't call that torture. Could you respond to this, Salah Hassan?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Well, I can stay standing in the street for a whole day on my own volition. There is no problem there. But when I am forced to stand in this humiliating manner, without clothes, hooded and handcuffed, I believe this is a different situation. It is very different.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Salah Hassan, an Al Jazeera journalist who was jailed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. When we come back, we'll hear more of Salah talking about how he was psychologically and physically tortured, and we'll speak with the Center for Constitutional Rights about their lawsuit against the private contractor CACI International, or CACI. This is *Democracy Now!*
We'll be back in a minute.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman. It was 10 years ago last week when the world first viewed the shocking photos of U.S. military personnel humiliating and torturing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. We return now to our interview with Salah Hassan, an Al Jazeera journalist who was jailed at Abu

Ghraib. I spoke with him on the 10th anniversary of the release of the photographs at his offices, his studio, in Doha, Qatar, where Al Jazeera is based. I asked Salah where he was held at Abu Ghraib and who was holding him there.

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] In the Abu Ghraib prison, there were solitary cells, probably not more than 50 or 60 cells. When I arrived to Abu Ghraib, I stayed for one day at the outdoor tent. Then, after a very brief, simple interrogation, they transferred me to one of those solitary cells. Of course, I was not able to see from my cell all the other people in the other cells, but I knew that there are other detainees, some of them arrested on charges of terrorism, some accused of civil charges. There were many.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you encounter dogs?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Throughout my detainment in the solitary cells, there was an interrogation every two or three days. During these interrogations, we were subjected to many psychological and physical torture methods. One of these methods was that you were kept naked, handcuffed, the hood on your head, then they would bring a big dog. You hear the panting and barking of the dog very close to your face. This is one of the methods of torture and interrogation that they conducted. There are many other similar cases.

AMY GOODMAN: How long were you held like this?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] These interrogations that happened every two or three days would last for an hour, an hour and a half or two hours, in this manner. The details of the interrogations were different. In some cases, they would bring dogs, then start the interrogation. In other cases, they'd put you in a place and throw cold water or hot tea on you, then start the interrogation. But, of course, all the interrogations were conducted while you were kept naked and hooded, and they'd ask you questions to which you answer. I stayed for 40 days in a solitary cell, and 70 percent of that time I was kept naked.

AMY GOODMAN: What kind of questions did your interrogators ask you? And who were your interrogators?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] As for the interrogators, I did not know who they were. I was hooded throughout the interrogations, so I cannot identify who they were. Were they American Army personnel? Were they from outside the Army? Were they affiliated with security companies? I knew later that the security companies were involved in these interrogations. But at the moment, I was not able to identify the affiliations of the interrogators to this or that side.

As for the questions I was asked, most of them were questions relating to Al Jazeera and the details about Al Jazeera channel, details about my life. Some examples of these questions were: "Will you go back to work for Al Jazeera when you get out of here?" "Do you like working for Al Jazeera?" "Why do you like working for Al Jazeera?" But they did not directly charge me with any specific accusation while I stayed in this prison.

AMY GOODMAN: How were you released, Salah Hassan? How long were you held, and how did you get out?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] They held me for two months. I stayed seven or eight days before Abu Ghraib, as I mentioned before, in the other stations—in Diyala, then Salahuddin, then Abu Ghraib. So I stayed about seven days before Abu Ghraib, and the remaining days at Abu Ghraib. At the end, I was not accused of anything. They transferred me to a court. The court was formed by the Iraqi government at the time and the coalition authority, which was present in Iraq during the occupation. There was a judge. He asked a few questions. But he found that there were no charges against me, so he ordered my release, and I left Abu Ghraib prison.

AMY GOODMAN: Salah Hassan, this is the 10th anniversary of the release of the Abu Ghraib photos. Did you recognize anyone in those photos? And when did you first see these pictures?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] After I was released from Abu Ghraib prison, I wrote a complete report about what happened to me in the prison and about my observations while inside the prison about psychological and physical torture and the stripping of detainees. But many people did not believe these observations. They did not believe that inside the prison such things are happening. They did not believe these details at all. But after the photographs showed up and the scandal that happened in Abu Ghraib prison broke out, many told me, "You were right in your descriptions, and your details are true." Many photos were of people that I knew or saw at Abu Ghraib prison. In the famous photo of a woman in a military uniform holding a rope tied around the neck of one of the detainees, I knew that detainee and used to hear him and see him. In other photos, I did not recognize all the detainees, but have witnessed similar situations that other detainees were subjected to. When the photos showed up and the scandal broke, I saw the photos and remembered all the details and all the pains that I endured in Abu Ghraib.

AMY GOODMAN: And, Salah Hassan, what effect has this had on you—it is 10 years later—your captivity?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Often when I am asked this question, I cannot control myself, remembering all the bad memories and images very clearly. I remember all the details that happened then, as if they happened just now. It is difficult for me to forget all these details. It is difficult to overcome all these details easily. Their effect is huge, their effect on me personally, on my family, on the community where I live. There are many people who, after I got out and after the Abu Ghraib scandal broke out, asked me if any of those things happened to me. This was very embarrassing and disconcerting to me. I avoided talking to people about this issue. And truly, I have not talked about these details until after many years have passed, after some friends convinced me to share these memories to unload the burden that those details cast on me, and to get rid of some of the pains inside. But truly, they had a big effect on me that I will never be able to forget.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about your lawsuit and what you're hoping to accomplish with it?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Truly, I believe a lot in the justice of the American judiciary system, so I was hoping that the lawsuit would be positive, or at least make a change or clarify to the American public what was happening in Abu Ghraib prison in detail. I heard that the lawsuit reached a certain stage and then stopped, but then an appeal was filed. We are now waiting for at least an acknowledgment and recognition if the lawsuit reached again the Supreme Court or the courthouse and it was ruled that what happened was wrong. This will be a huge deal for me, as at least an acknowledgment that will restore justice and affirm that we are innocent. At least I speak about myself: I am a journalist, and I am innocent, and I committed no wrong or crime. I believe that American law will do me justice.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you remain a journalist with Al Jazeera? The U.S. government, the defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, said that—called Al Jazeera a terrorist network. It was showing the images of war in Iraq. Your thoughts about that, being a journalist, that the American soldiers knew from the beginning, what this meant for journalism?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] Truly, when I was released from Abu Ghraib prison, I resumed my work in journalism and with Al Jazeera. Until now, I work with Al Jazeera and have covered many regions—in Africa, in Asia and many other countries. I did not stop my journalistic work at all. I consider my profession a humanitarian one that shows facts and truths everywhere, whether it is in Iraq or elsewhere. Al Jazeera work in Iraq was probably different from other stations and channels because it delved into details of the issues that were related and of importance to the Iraqi people. And it showed details that other stations might have been afraid to show. This matter might have annoyed some parties, so they were not happy with the performance of Al Jazeera in Iraq because it showed many photos and details—how people were killed, how mistreatment of humans were conducted. It showed the problems that the security companies caused through attacking people. All of this was not satisfactory to the other side, so they accused Al Jazeera of not being neutral. On the contrary, Al Jazeera is objective and works diligently to broadcast truth everywhere, and nothing will stop it. You can see that many journalists of Al Jazeera are harmed because of their affiliation. But this work stays a humanitarian profession and is trying to show the truth. I am continuing on this path.

AMY GOODMAN: What is your message to the American people on this 10th anniversary of the release of the Abu Ghraib photos?

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] First, as I said, I have many American friends, and I deeply believe that the American people are good people that do not approve of such breaches. I visited the United States, and I met many people there. I observed how they treat each other. I observed how democracy functions in the U.S. Truly, it is amazing and beautiful. But what happened in Abu Ghraib prison was very different. It is not the image present in the U.S. I think that the American people know the truth now, so they should side with those who were harmed in Abu Ghraib prison. At least, those who were harmed should obtain some acknowledgment in their lawsuit and that what happened to us in Abu Ghraib was not supposed to happen. As a journalist, I think that many people realize that my case was an unfair case in Abu Ghraib. I did not commit any crime. I did not commit any professional mistake. And what happened to me in Abu Ghraib was very harmful to me and to journalism around the world.

AMY GOODMAN: Salah Hassan, thank you so much for joining us. I know this was very difficult as you relive this. Thank you for taking the time.

SALAH HASSAN: [translated] It is good that I controlled myself and did not burst into tears. Thank you.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Salah Hassan Nusaif Jasim Al-Ejaili, an Al Jazeera journalist who was jailed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. He spoke to us from Doha, Qatar, where he continues to work for Al Jazeera today. Special thanks to Suneela Mubayi and May Ahmar for help in translating.