

THE TWO AFGHAN BLACK SITE STORIES

We've long discussed that Obama's orders regarding torture don't apply to Bagram, as well as rules that allow the Red Cross some—but not enough—access to our prisons in Bagram. So the news reported in the NYT and WaPo today that we've still got black sites in Afghanistan are no surprise.

What I'm curious about is why now? Why did both the NYT and WaPo decide to publish this story on a holiday Saturday at the same time?

The NYT relies on the stories of three former detainees—who allege sleep deprivation but not physical beatings.

"The black jail was the most dangerous and fearful place," said Hamidullah, a spare-parts dealer in Kandahar who was detained in June and who, like some Afghans, doesn't use a last name. "They don't let the I.C.R.C. officials or any other civilians see or communicate with the people they keep there. Because I did not know what time it was, I did not know when to pray."

Mr. Hamidullah was released in October, after five and half months in detention, five to six weeks of it in the black jail, he said.

Although his and other detainees' accounts could not be independently corroborated, each was interviewed separately and described similar conditions. Their descriptions also matched those obtained by two human rights workers who had interviewed other former detainees at the site.

While two of the detainees were captured before the Obama administration took office, one was captured in June of this

year.

All three detainees were later released without charges. None said they had been tortured, though they said they heard sounds of abuse going on and certainly felt humiliated and roughly used. "They beat up other people in the black jail, but not me," Hamidullah said. "But the problem was that they didn't let me sleep. There was shouting noise so you couldn't sleep."

Whereas the WaPo focuses primarily on two teen-aged former detainees who allege physical beatings and sleep deprivation there, though it uses the claims of two more detainees to corroborate their story.

The two teenagers – Issa Mohammad, 17, and Abdul Rashid, who said he is younger than 16 – said in interviews this week that they were punched and slapped in the face by their captors during their time at Bagram air base, where they were held in individual cells. Rashid said his interrogator forced him to look at pornography alongside a photograph of his mother.

The holding center described by the teenagers appeared to have been a facility run by U.S. Special Operations forces that is separate from the Bagram Theater Internment Facility, the main American-run prison, which holds about 700 detainees. The teenagers' descriptions of a holding area on a different part of the Bagram base are consistent with the accounts of two other former detainees, who say they endured similar mistreatment, but not beatings, while being held last year at what Afghans call Bagram's "black" prison.

The NYT story references the WaPo story, so it is likely a response to WaPo's decision to publish this today.

Others, however, have given accounts of abuse at the site, including two Afghan teenagers who told The Washington Post that they had been subjected to beatings and humiliation by American guards

Now maybe what happened is that the WaPo got the story of these two teenagers. And decided to go with the story (which they admit could not be independent substantiated). And not wanting to be scooped entirely, the NYT decided to go with the story of its interviews with former detainees.

But I can't help but note that this story came out just weeks after the Center for American Progress' Ken Gude floated sending military detainees from Gitmo to Bagram. And just after two of the Administration officials focused on doing the right thing with Gitmo left the Administration.