The Oath
A film by Laura Poitras

POV
www.pbs.org/pov
I was first interested in making a film about Guantanamo in 2003, when I was also beginning a film about the war in Iraq. I never imagined Guantanamo would still be open when I finished that film, but sadly it was — and still is today.

Originally, my idea for The Oath was to make a film about someone released from Guantanamo and returning home. In May 2007, I traveled to Yemen looking to find that story and that’s when I met Abu Jandal, Osama bin Laden’s former bodyguard, driving a taxicab in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen. I wasn’t looking to make a film about Al-Qaeda, but that changed when I met Abu Jandal.

Themes of betrayal, guilt, loyalty, family and absence are not typically things that come to mind when we imagine a film about Al-Qaeda and Guantanamo. Despite the dangers of telling this story, it compelled me.

Born in Saudi Arabia of Yemeni parents, Abu Jandal left home in 1993 to fight jihad in Bosnia. In 1996 he recruited Salim Hamdan to join him for jihad in Tajikistan. While traveling through Afghanistan, they were recruited by Osama bin Laden. Abu Jandal became bin Laden’s personal bodyguard and “Emir of Hospitality.” Salim Hamdan became bin Laden’s driver. Abu Jandal ends up driving a taxi and Hamdan ends up at Guantanamo.

The Oath is the second documentary in a trilogy I am working on about America post 9/11. The first film, My Country, My Country, is about the U.S. occupation of Iraq told from the perspective of a Sunni doctor and his family. In many ways, My Country, My Country, and its depiction of the victims of this conflict, gave me permission to take on The Oath. The third film will look at domestic surveillance.

In each film, my goal has been to understand the repercussions of 9/11 through the stories of people living this history. I’m also interested in creating primary documents — an on-the-ground record that can help us understand this history as time passes. I believe the world will be grappling with the tragedy of 9/11 and America’s reaction to the attack for generations to come.

In the nine years since the attacks of 9/11, the United States has begun two wars, institutionalized indefinite detention without trial, conducted “extraordinary rendition,” established secret prisons overseas and participated in the legalization of torture. In these same nine years, Al-Qaeda has grown from a fringe terrorist organization into an international social movement that is being “franchised” worldwide.

If the United States and Western nations hope to contain, rather than spread, the threat of Al-Qaeda, we must understand its motivations and internal divisions. To do that requires first seeing Islamic radicals like Abu Jandal as real people — subject to the human condition rather than apart from it. To acknowledge that humanity is not a justification of their acts, but rather an acceptance of an uncomfortable reality.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Potential Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Key Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Using This Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Background Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>America's War on Terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Rise of Al Qaeda, Islamic Militancy and Osama bin Laden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>• Jihad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>• Yemen: Ancestral Homeland of Osama bin Laden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>U.S. Policy in the Wake of 9/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interrogation, Torture and Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>• Extraordinary Rendition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>• The U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>• Habeas Corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>• Suspending Habeas Corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>• Geneva Conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>• Miranda Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>• Military Commissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>• <em>Hamdan v. Rumsfeld</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>• Military Commissions Act of 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Dialogue Committee: A Government Re-Education Program for Jihadis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Selected People Featured in <em>The Oath</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>General Discussion Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Discussion Prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Taking Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>How to Buy the Film</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

# CREDITS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Writer**
Faith Rogow, PhD  
*Insighters Educational Consulting*

**Background Editors**
Jamie Dobie  
Kristin Wilton

**Guide Producers, POV**
Eliza Licht  
*Director, Community Engagement and Education, POV*

Jamie Dobie  
*Coordinator, Community Engagement and Education, POV*

**Design**: Rafael Jiménez  
**Copy Editor**: Natalie Danford

© American Documentary, Inc.
The Oath (95 minutes) tells the story of Abu Jandal (Osama bin Laden’s former bodyguard), and Salim Hamdan, bin Laden’s former driver and the first Guantanamo Bay prisoner to face trial under controversial U.S. military tribunals. Though thoroughly reflective of the highly charged political atmosphere inhabited by its subjects, the film is essentially a family drama about two men whose fateful encounter in 1996 set them on a journey that would lead to Osama bin Laden, 9/11, the Guantanamo Bay detention center and the U.S. Supreme Court.

We enter the story in a taxicab in Yemen. Here we meet Abu Jandal, the film’s central protagonist, as he transports passengers through the chaotic streets of Yemen’s capital city, Sana’a. Salim Hamdan is the film’s “ghost” protagonist. He was arrested in Afghanistan shortly after 9/11 and taken to Guantanamo. His seven-year captivity at Guantanamo is narrated through his prison letters.

In an era where news-by-soundbite rules, The Oath affords a rare glimpse into the lives of people who, to many, are no more than names in headlines. As an outreach tool, the film humanizes compelling questions about ideology, war and the prisons — both physical and spiritual — that they create.
The Oath is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to the Iraq War and attempts to achieve reconciliation, including My Country, My Country and War Feels Like War.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

The Oath is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people interested in the following topics:

- Afghanistan
- Al Qaeda
- Guantanamo Bay detention center
- Hamdan v. Rumsfeld
- Iraq War
- Islam
- Jihad
- Justice system
- Law (especially international, military and Constitutional law)
- Military tribunals
- Peace studies
- Prisoners of war
- 9/11
- Religious fundamentalism
- Terrorism
- U.S. Constitution
- U.S. Foreign Policy
- U.S. Supreme Court
- Yemen
- War

Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use The Oath to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a very wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/pov/outreach
America's War on Terror

The phrase “war on terror” was first used by then United States President George W. Bush in response to the terrorist attacks launched against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. With the purpose of waging a war against Al Qaeda and those who were deemed responsible for the attacks, a military campaign was launched against organizations believed to be terrorist regimes or connected to terrorist ideology. The United States and Great Britain invaded Afghanistan in 2001 with the purpose of ending the Taliban regime (the rulers of Afghanistan who provided support to Al Qaeda). In 2003, shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan, the United States invaded Iraq with the stated aim of removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power and establishing democracy in the country.

The Rise of Al Qaeda, Islamic Militancy and Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network emerged in the late 1980s after a coup d’état toppled the Afghan monarchy. A Soviet government gained power, and Afghans responded with a national resistance movement that defeated Soviet forces. The United States, along with several of its allies, encouraged and monetarily supported what was being called jihad (which means “holy war”) against the Soviets. This support fueled the rise of the Taliban regime and radical Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda. The ultimate goal of Al Qaeda (an Arabic word meaning “the base”) was to extend Islamic rule throughout the world.

In 1996, bin Laden declared war on the United States, pledging to drive the country out of Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. Over the next six years, the group carried out a number of attacks across the world, including several against U.S. targets, such as the 1998 twin bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed a total of 200 people and the suicide bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in a Yemeni harbor in 2000 that killed 17 sailors.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States launched a war against Afghanistan, intending to destroy its Al Qaeda bases and bring down the Taliban. Several Al Qaeda leaders were captured and killed, weakening the group, but those who remained (including Osama bin Laden) have since relocated, at least some of them in tribal areas of Pakistan.

In June 2010, Michael E. Leiter, a top U.S. counterterrorism official, said that there were “more than 300” Al Qaeda leaders and fighters hiding in Pakistan’s tribal areas. Estimates of the full size of this network, which has cells in some 100 countries across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe and even in the United States, range from several hundred to several thousand.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, while Al Qaeda originated as a well-budgeted hierarchical organization that provided in-person training and employed operatives to carry out its planned attacks, it is now just as likely to inspire individuals or groups to launch their own attacks through the Internet and other media.

Meanwhile, the war in Afghanistan rages on, as President Barack Obama continues to pursue President George W. Bush’s stated mission of wiping out Al Qaeda’s safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan and limiting the group’s ability to strike U.S. targets.

Sources:

Jihad is a widely debated term that has multiple interpretations throughout the world. In its purest form, it is an Arabic word meaning “struggle.” This “struggle” is interpreted by some as an internal, non-violent struggle to maintain faith and morality, while others interpret it as a violent struggle in a “holy war.” According to a past president of the Harvard Islamic Society, jihad is “the determination to do right, to do justice even against your own interests. It is an individual struggle for personal moral behavior.” In this “determination to do right,” Muslims are often called on to defend their faith and community by extending the territories ruled by Muslims.

**Sources:**


In January 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Yemen “an urgent national security priority.” The country is the ancestral home of the bin Laden family and has a long history of producing militants who go on to fight abroad.

Yemen has a variety of political parties ranging from Islamist to Socialist, but for more than three decades power in the country officially has been held by one man — Ali Abdullah Saleh. According to *The New York Times Magazine*, Saleh pays large sums of money to “sheiks, military leaders, political figures and anyone who might pose a threat to his power,” which means that a large portion of Yemen’s budget goes to funding bribery and other corruptive practices.

The first major evidence of Al Qaeda involvement in Yemen came when the U.S.S. Cole was attacked in the Yemeni port of Aden in 2000. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Saleh, fearing the United States would attack Yemen, met with officials in Washington, D.C. to pledge his support against Al Qaeda. Hundreds of jihadists were rounded up and jailed without charges being brought against them.

According to *The Washington Post*, a new branch of Al Qaeda known as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has since “escalated efforts to exploit Yemen’s instability and carve out a leadership role among terrorist groups” training in the country. However, the areas where Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has settled are so remote and unknown, even to officials, that it’s unclear how best to target them.
Traffic at dusk in Sana’a.
Photo by Khalid Al Mahdi

Sources:

Global Post. “The House bin Laden built.”
http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/middle-east/100101/safe-haven-extremists


BBC News. “Yemen Country Profile.”
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/784383.stm


In the weeks following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the George W. Bush administration began to develop a legal framework that would give Bush the authority to order suspected “enemy combatants” to be interrogated aggressively and detained for indeterminate periods of time. A 2003 legal memo issued by the U.S. Department of Defense essentially asserted that international treaties did not apply to U.S. interrogators in foreign countries. The memo also legalized harsh interrogation methods that many consider to be torture.

This legal framework served as a basis for some of the most controversial tactics used by U.S. interrogators, including those employed at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba and Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Under the legal justifications set up by the Bush administration, interrogators used contested techniques, such as sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation, nudity, forced stress positions, harsh lights, extreme hot and cold temperatures and — perhaps the most widely debated technique — waterboarding, a form of partial suffocation.
extraordinary rendition

Extraordinary rendition is the practice of capturing suspected terrorists and transporting them to undisclosed foreign locations where they are often interrogated and tortured without formal legal protection or proceedings. Prior to September 11, 2001, rendition had been employed in 70 instances, most of them during the Clinton administration. Then as now, the stated aim was to disrupt terrorist plots abroad. It was during the Bush administration that the practice of extraordinary rendition became commonly used for interrogation. The three administrations have, however, consistently stated that it is the policy and practice of the United States neither to use torture nor to hand over detainees to countries that use torture.

Historically, presidents needed Congressional authority for these transfers, and the purpose of the resulting transfers was to bring detainees to trial, not simply to interrogate and torture them. Under both the Clinton and Bush administrations, many suspects were deemed illegal “enemy combatants” without any evidence of terrorist activity. In the landmark 2006 Hamdan v. Rumsfeld case, the Supreme Court ruled that all non-citizen prisoners are protected by the Geneva Conventions, thus essentially rendering extraordinary rendition illegal. While many expected President Barack Obama to institute changes to counterterrorism policy, the current administration has continued the C.I.A.’s program of prison transfers. On September 2, 2010, a federal appeals court dismissed a lawsuit against Jeppesen Dataplan Inc., a Boeing subsidiary accused of arranging flights for

Salim Hamdan’s wife. Photo courtesy of “The Oath”
the C.I.A. to transfer prisoners to other countries for imprisonment and interrogation. According to The New York Times, "Judge Raymond C. Fisher described the case . . . as presenting 'a painful conflict between human rights and national security.'"

**Sources:**


---

**THE U.S. NAVAL BASE AT GUANTANAMO BAY**

The Guantanamo Bay naval base was established as a detention center for holding suspected “enemy combatants” following the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks. The Guantanamo Bay site, located in Cuba, was selected with the intention of creating a detention facility that was outside the law. Detainees were not granted the rights of U.S. citizens accused of crimes, nor were they granted the rights of prisoners of war. This meant that no formal charges were filed and no public trials held. The Bush administration argued that the detention center was outside the jurisdiction of the law because it was not on American soil. The Obama administration vowed to close the facility by January 2010, but failed to fulfill that promise, and the detention center remains open as of this writing. Though detainees have been offered increased legal protection since the Hamdan v. Rumsfeld Supreme Court ruling, they have not been granted access to the U.S. civilian court system.
Two-thirds of the 800 prisoners who have passed through Guantanamo since 2002 have been freed, most of them without being charged, after several years in captivity.

Sources:


HABEAS CORPUS

Habeas corpus is a legal action that prevents the government from holding prisoners for political or personal reasons. The concept of habeas corpus (which means “you have the body” in Latin) dates back to the Magna Carta of 1215 and it was one of the earliest legal actions English courts could take. According to an article in the journal Social Education, “The writ, or written order of the court, gave judges the power to command the presence of a person before the court. This power worked two ways: (1) the writ was an order for the government and the accused to appear before the court; and (2) it required the government to explain why a person was being detained. If the court was not satisfied by the government’s explanations for holding a person, the judges had the power to free the prisoner.”

SUSPENDING HABEAS CORPUS

Habeas corpus has been suspended at different times throughout American history. According to an article in the journal Social Education, at the start of the Civil War President Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus without permission from Congress. Congress later passed legislation to support his actions. For its part, the George W. Bush administration argued that during what it termed America’s “war on terror,” enemy combatants had no right to writs of habeas corpus, and that these foreign nationals could be held at Guantanamo Bay indefinitely. Enemy combatants, in response, applied for habeas corpus in federal court. Some notable cases have resulted, most significant perhaps being the Hamdan v. Rumsfeld ruling, which stated that the military commissions convened to try Hamdan were illegal and lacked the protections required under the Geneva Conventions and the United States Uniform Code of Military Justice. Since the Hamdan trial, many detainees in Afghanistan have attempted to bring habeas corpus lawsuits against the U.S. government, challenging the basis for their imprisonment without trial. However, according to a September 8, 2010 article in The New York Times, the Obama administration has effectively blocked these detainees from filing such lawsuits.

Sources:


GENEVA CONVENTIONS

A cornerstone of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Convention of 1949, ratified after World War II, traces its roots to the late 19th century. What initially was conceived of as a treaty created out of concern for wounded soldiers eventually came to encompass protection for prisoners of war, civilians and civilian non-combatants. The convention outlaws the taking of hostages and, according to the Congressional Research Service, prohibits “‘cruel treatment and torture’ and ‘[o]utrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment.’”

The George W. Bush administration determined that the Geneva Conventions (which include the original 1949 Geneva Convention, plus other treaties and protocols) did not apply to “enemy combatants” detained at the Guantanamo Bay facility in Cuba, which sparked much controversy surrounding the treatment of Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners of war.

Sources:

History News Network. “What is the Geneva Convention?”
http://hnn.us/articles/586.html

Congressional Research Service. “Overview and Analysis of Senate Amendment Concerning Interrogation of Detainees.”
http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/56860.pdf

MIRANDA RIGHTS

Miranda rights are police warnings given to criminal suspects in the United States to inform them of their Constitutional rights to remain silent and to have counsel present during interrogation. If a law enforcement officer does not recite Miranda rights to an individual taken into custody, that individual’s statements may not be used as evidence to incriminate him or her in a criminal trial. Much controversy exists over whether Miranda rights should be extended to prisoners of war and suspected terrorists — including those who are U.S. citizens.

Sources:


MILITARY COMMISSIONS

In 2001, President George W. Bush issued a controversial executive order that attempted to establish tribunals to prosecute war crimes by Al Qaeda members and affiliates. The Bush administration maintained that because detainees were foreign and not being held on American soil, they did not have the right to challenge their status in American courtrooms; they were not entitled to the protections laid out by the international Geneva Convention; and they could be held indefinitely. The order gave the president absolute power to designate enemy combatants of the United States and to set his own definitions of torture and coercion. He effectively gave himself the power to create military commissions without consulting Congress.

While there are Americans who believe suspected terrorists in U.S. custody should be tried in the U.S. federal court system, there are also many who believe that these suspected criminals should not be offered legal protection under the Constitution of a nation they have condemned. The group 9/11 Families for a Safe & Strong America collected signatures for a 2009 letter to President Obama that states that none of the 9/11 conspirators were informed of their Miranda rights before detention, and that they, therefore, cannot be considered common criminals. The letter states, “The public has a right to know that prosecuting the 9/11 conspirators in federal courts will result in a plethora of legal and procedural problems that will severely limit or even jeopardize the successful prosecution of their cases. Ordinary criminal trials do not allow for the exigencies associated with combatants captured in war, in which evidence is not collected with CSI-type chain-of-custody standards.”

Sources:

American Civil Liberties Union. “Military Commissions Act of 2006.”

http://ccrjustice.org/learn-more/faqs/factsheet%3A-military-commissions

This landmark 2006 Supreme Court case challenged the authority of the president to create military commissions without consulting Congress.

Salim Hamdan was captured by Afghan forces in 2001 and imprisoned at the detention center in Guantanamo Bay by the U.S. military for his employment as the driver of Osama bin Laden. According to the Oyez Project, Hamdan filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus in federal district court to challenge his detention. However, before the district court had ruled on the petition, he received a hearing from a military tribunal and was designated an “enemy combatant.”

The Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia found that the Geneva Convention could not be enforced in federal court and that the establishment of military tribunals had been authorized by Congress and was therefore not unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court, in a 5-to-3 decision authored by Justice John Paul Stevens, held that the president’s creation of this sort of military commission was unconstitutional and failed to comply with the ordinary laws of the United States and the laws of war. According to the Oyez Project, the Geneva Convention, as a part of the ordinary laws of war, could therefore be enforced by the Supreme Court, along with the statutory Uniform Code of Military Justice. Hamdan’s trial was, therefore, deemed illegal.
The Military Commissions Act of 2006 was passed by Congress in response to the Supreme Court’s ruling. The act authorized the use of military commissions established by executive order and also created new legal precepts, including the concept that material support for terrorism was itself a war crime.

Sources:

MILITARY COMMISSIONS ACT OF 2006

Passed in direct response to the Hamdan v. Rumsfeld case, the Military Commissions Act of 2006 overturned the Supreme Court’s decision and created a new law that allowed the government to file fresh charges against Hamdan. According to the Center For Constitutional Rights, Congress authorized the use of military commissions established by presidential order, while also suspending the right to habeas corpus, creating a broad definition of “unlawful enemy combatant,” granting U.S. officials immunity for abuse and torture, permitting the use of secret evidence and allowing the use of statements obtained through coercion in prosecutions. Hamdan was the first person to stand trial under the Military Commissions Act of 2006.

After Hamdan’s trial, President Barack Obama signed into law the Military Commissions Act of 2009, which was an attempt to reform the military commissions system created under the Bush administration. While the new system offers detainees greater due process rights, it still contains provisions that fall short of providing detainees access to a trial in civilian courts. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) states that the new commissions under Obama remain “a second class system of justice.” Jameel Jaffer, director of the ACLU National Security Project, writes, “The commissions remain not only illegal but unnecessary — the federal courts have proven themselves capable of handling complex terrorism cases while protecting both the government’s national security interests and the defendants’ rights to a fair trial.”

Sources:

THE DIALOGUE COMMITTEE: A GOVERNMENT RE-EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR JIHADIS

The Dialogue Committee is a Yemeni government re-education program for imprisoned jihadis in Yemen that was initiated in 2002 and led by judge Hamoud al-Hitar. Yemeni officials created the program with the idea that engaging in theological dialogue with prisoners would correct their beliefs and cause released inmates to reject violent jihad. Jihadis released from the program agreed not to battle the government, not to use Yemen as a base for foreign operations and not to kill foreigners. The released jihadis were also offered government assistance with job placement.

The effectiveness of the Dialogue Committee was debatable. While the program seems to have been effective in many cases, including that of Abu Jandal, some former prisoners have returned to violence. The program was shut down in 2005, but U.S. counterterrorism officials are pressuring Yemeni authorities to restart the program for detainees returning from Guantanamo Bay, as nearly half of the current detainees are from Yemen. A center for the program’s purposes was under construction, and the United States government would like to see the facility finished, but Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen, refuses to continue construction work without U.S. funds.

Sources:
Selected People Featured in The Oath

Salim Hamdan (a.k.a. Saqr al-Jedawi)

Born in 1970, Salim Hamdan was a 26-year-old struggling part-time taxi driver in Sana’a, Yemen, when he was recruited for jihad in 1996.

Hamdan and some 35 other jihadis traveled from Jalalabad, Afghanistan toward Tajikistan, but they were turned away at the border and, at the suggestion of one of the men in the group, went to see Osama bin Laden. The group stayed at bin Laden’s home, where he preached to them about ejecting the United States from Arab countries. About half of the group decided to stay and work for bin Laden. Among these men were Hamdan, also known as Saqr al-Jedawi, and Nasser al-Bahri, who went by the name Abu Jandal.

The two men had become close; Hamdan, who had only a fourth grade education and modest aspirations, especially admired the more sophisticated, well-educated al-Bahri. In 1999, at the request and with the support of bin Laden, the two married Yemeni sisters. They both soon conceived children with their wives.

In 2000, al-Bahri was rounded up and imprisoned by the Yemeni government in response to the attack on the U.S.S. Cole. Hamdan continued to work as bin Laden’s driver until November 2001. With the U.S. attack on Afghanistan well underway, Hamdan feared for his family’s safety, so he relocated his wife and children to Pakistan. On the drive back, he was apprehended near the Pakistan border by Afghan warlords who turned him over to U.S. officials for a $5,000 bounty.

The U.S. officials identified Hamdan as an associate of bin Laden’s and, after detaining him in U.S. prison camps in Bagram and Kandahar for six months, sent him to Guantanamo in May 2002.

Prosecutors argued that he was an Al Qaeda member and devotee of bin Laden’s and claimed he had been carrying missiles when he was apprehended.

Hamdan and his defense team argued that he was a low-level employee collecting a paycheck, that he had no terrorist ambitions and that the missiles in the borrowed car were not his.

In 2006, Hamdan was at the center of a milestone Supreme Court case, Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, that found the planned military commissions in violation of international law.

In 2008, he became the first person in decades to face an American war crimes trial. He was charged with conspiring to commit terrorism and materially aiding terrorists, the latter having been classified as a war crime following the Hamdan v. Rumsfeld decision in 2006. Hamdan was found guilty of only the latter charge and was sentenced to a total of 66 months in prison, 61 of which he had already served.

Hamdan was reunited with his family in January 2009.

Sources:


Selected People Featured in The Oath

Nasser al-Bahri (a.k.a. Abu Jandal)

In 1994, Saudi Arabian born Nasser al-Bahri snuck out of his father’s home to travel to Bosnia and commit himself to jihad. There he was given the name Abu Jandal, or “the killer.”

Abu Jandal fought in both Bosnia and Somalia before coming to Afghanistan, where he first came into contact with Osama bin Laden. He underwent seven months of instruction and became devoted to educating himself. Eventually he was admitted to bin Laden’s inner circle as bin Laden’s bodyguard. Reportedly, taking on that position meant that he pledged to kill bin Laden himself before letting his boss be captured.

In 2000, in the wake of the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in the Yemeni harbor of Aden, al-Bahri was among the dozens of jihadis rounded up by the Yemeni government — under pressure from the American government to fight Al Qaeda — and imprisoned. He learned of the September 11, 2001 attacks while in prison. He was interrogated by the FBI beginning six days after the 9/11 attacks.

In prison, al-Bahri participated in the Dialogue Committee rehabilitation program intended to reform former jihadis. After 22 months in custody he was released, and, according to a Pulitzer Center article by François-Xavier Trégan, since his release he has devoted himself to re-educating “those wayward crusaders who have been blindly recruited onto the battlefields by the ‘orators.’

Sources:

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1901491,00.html#ixzz0tr3VsoBB

Pulitzer Center. “Abu Jandal, In the Name of Jihad.”

Selected People Featured in The Oath

Lawrence Morris

Army lawyer Lawrence Morris, chief prosecutor of the Guantanamo military commissions, was instrumental in establishing the rules and regulations of trying suspected terrorists held in custody there. A graduate of Marquette University Law School in Milwaukee who had been in active service since 1982, Morris served as the Army’s chief of criminal law following the attacks of September 11, 2001, leading the team tasked with developing strategies for trying suspects by military commission. He was tapped for the chief prosecutor position at Guantanamo in 2007.

The military commission procedure was harshly criticized by human rights advocates and other groups, including the American Bar Association. Several military prosecutors resigned from their positions to protest the strategy.

It was reported last year that Morris would retire from active duty and would be replaced as chief prosecutor by John Murphy, a captain in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Sources:

http://www.alternet.org/rights/139842/breaking_new_chief_prosecutor_tapped_for_military_commissions_at_guantanamo/
Selected People Featured in The Oath

Charles Swift

In 2003, Navy lawyer Charles Swift was assigned to represent Hamdan and to have him plead guilty to war crimes charges. Swift believed the tribunal system was unethical and fought for Hamdan’s rights instead, ultimately taking the case to the Supreme Court and changing the way Guantanamo inmates were tried.

Swift graduated from the Naval Academy in 1984 and for seven years served aboard a series of different ships before leaving the service to earn a law degree at Seattle University. He later returned to the Navy, where he served as both prosecutor and defender.

Two weeks after the Supreme Court decision in 2006, Swift was told that he’d been passed over for promotion for a second time, and that under the Navy’s “up or out” policy, he would have to retire when he reached 20 years of service in 2007.

Swift was one of several Guantanamo defenders eventually forced out of military service, but he told NPR that he did not believe the decision was retaliatory. “In taking the Hamdan case,” he told NPR reporter Nina Totenberg in an interview, “I took myself out of the normal progression path.”

Sources:


NPR reporter Nina Totenberg in an interview, “I took myself out of the normal progression path.”
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can’t engage until they have had a break, don’t encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won’t lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

• If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would it be and what would you ask him or her?
• What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
• Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing, moving or thought-provoking. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
Laws, Trials and Justice

• When the Supreme Court struck down the original charges under which Salim Hamdan was detained, Congress stepped in to create a new law under which he could be tried. Beyond the immediate impact on Hamdan and his case, what are the potential long-term implications of creating laws after the fact and using them to try people?
  • The United States prohibited cameras in the courtroom for Hamdan’s trial. What are the pros and cons of allowing cameras in this type of legal proceeding?
  • Hamdan says, “I would like justice. Nothing else.” In your view, what would justice look like in this situation?
  • The attorneys involved in the Hamdan case express differing views of whether the trial was fair. The defense calls the entire process “deficient” and “fundamentally flawed,” while the prosecution argues that acquittal on some charges provides evidence of a just system. Which of these arguments, if any, do you find convincing? Why?
  • Hamdan’s wife is barred from attending the trial. Do defendants have a right to have family members present? Do family members have a right to attend their loved ones’ trials? Under which circumstances should they be permitted to attend?
  • There is no question that Hamdan served as Osama bin Laden’s driver, but there are many questions about where that position placed him in the Al Qaeda hierarchy. In your view, does one have to be a decision maker, commander or operative who commits an act of terrorism to be guilty of war crimes, or does mere membership in an organization that carried out a terrorist attack make one a war criminal?
  • The Obama administration has promised to close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay. Did anything in the film inform your thinking regarding that policy decision?
  • Appearing at a Congressional hearing, Ali Soufan, the man who interrogated Abu Jandal, testifies against “enhanced interrogation” techniques. What is your reaction to learning that Soufan read Abu Jandal his Miranda rights every day? With regard to U.S. policies governing interrogation, what lessons did you take away from Soufan’s and Abu Jandal’s descriptions of their encounters? What lessons did you take away from Hamdan’s description of his own interrogation?
  • The Yemeni government released Jandal from prison under a program that used theological dialogue and suggested that Yemen was the fulfillment of the desire for a true Islamic state. Compare and contrast this rehabilitative approach with the more punitive approaches to detention that are common in the United States. From what you see of Abu Jandal in the film, do you think the Yemeni approach is sound? Why or why not?
  • When Abu Jandal was released, the Yemeni government provided him money to buy a taxi. Why? What is the relationship between economic security and the likelihood that people will be attracted to extremist thinking? What do the prisons in your state provide inmates who are being released back into the community? How well is the community served by that policy?

Al Qaeda

• What is the significance of the film’s title?
  • The following is the oath taken by Al Qaeda members:
    I pledge to God to assist and support,
    regardless of my own self-interest or reasoning,
    regardless of my own well-being;
    and not to challenge the leadership.
    What do you learn about Al Qaeda’s worldview from this oath? Can you think of other times or places where leaders have asked followers to make similar commitments?
  • Describe Abu Jandal’s view of the West and the United States in particular. How would you characterize the differences between Abu Jandal’s value system and what he perceives to be the value system of the United States?
  • In a holiday address to his followers, Osama bin Laden says, “The pleasures of this life are nothing compared to those of the afterlife... if you do not mobilize, you will be replaced by other people... God called us to jihad against the Americans and their allies. O Almighty God, we plead with You to make us steadfast along this path so You will be...”
pleased with us when we meet You.” In your view, what function does bin Laden’s view of the afterlife play in his ability to inspire his followers? Why is the afterlife so prominent in his theology? How does his vision of the afterlife compare with your own ideas about it?

- Abu Jandal meets with a group of young men (his “students”) throughout the film. If you could speak to these young men, what questions would you ask them?

- One of Abu Jandal’s students questions him about Al Qaeda’s future, asking, “Is there a chance that Al Qaeda could become part of the political game, especially if its ideology is the hope of the Islamic nation?” Abu Jandal responds, “If you stay on the battlefield (as opposed to entering politics), then a soldier can kill a king.” What does this answer suggest about how Al Qaeda sees itself in terms of the world’s powers? What does it say about the possibility that Al Qaeda could, at some point, be motivated to use peaceful means to achieve its goals? If politics cannot be part of Al Qaeda’s future, what are its options and what options do others in the world have for responding to the organization’s demands?

- How is it that Abu Jandal was surprised to find out that his Al Qaeda brothers were responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001? Do you think he really was surprised? If so, what does his surprise tell you about Al Qaeda and the role that it plays in its members’ lives?

- Abu Jandal says that the problem with Al Qaeda is that “we believed that guns were the only solution.” When do you believe armed resistance is appropriate or reasonable and when is it a mistake?
Abu Jandal

• As a condition of his release from prison, Abu Jandal pledged not to support jihad. Based on what you see in the film, do you think he is fulfilling that pledge? Why or why not?

• What words would you use to describe Abu Jandal as a father? Are his interactions with his son familiar to you? Are they similar to or different from your own interactions with family members?

• Abu Jandal believes that he is a skilled reader of people. What evidence do you see that either confirms or contradicts that belief?

• Abu Jandal says, “If you want to comprehend people, you need to know yourself first. What do you want, what are you interested in, what makes you angry.” Do you agree that self-awareness is a prerequisite to understanding others? Do you think Abu Jandal knows himself well? Why or why not?

• Like any good public speaking instructor, Abu Jandal suggests that people respond better to appeals to their emotions than they do to dry requests. But the example he uses (saying “women were raped” rather than “God willing, Islam will prevail”) is one likely to provoke fear and anger. How do these particular emotions serve the interests of an Islamist (i.e., an Islamic fundamentalist)?

• When Abu Jandal sends his son to purchase British ginger juice, a young student wonders aloud whether it is a betrayal of the cause to buy Western-made goods. Abu Jandal responds, “It’s true, these Westerners are infidels, but they make things with sincerity and conscience. Our [Yemeni]…
manufacturers are sons of dogs and cheaters.” What do you make of that?

• Abu Jandal’s students wonder if they should fear the Yemeni government because they are associated with Abu Jandal, a former Al Qaeda member. In response, Abu Jandal suggests that he has not advocated for anything outside the mainstream, asking them, “What do I teach you?” What does he teach them? How would you describe his lessons?

• Abu Jandal justifies his new role outside of Al Qaeda by saying that Islam needs more than soldiers. He also says that he uses a pen instead of a gun and urges young men to become educated. In your view, is Abu Jandal still a danger? Why or why not? Is he now in a better or worse position to spread resistance against the Western incursion that he fears?

• If you could talk with Abu Jandal and Hamdan, what would you say to them?

Media Analysis

• How would you describe your impression of Al Qaeda or its members before you viewed the film? On what sources of information did you rely to develop those ideas? How did the film confirm or challenge the information in those sources?

• In the Al Arabiya interview, the host asks Abu Jandal how he was “recruited.” He says he “volunteered.” Why do you think the distinction is important to him? What difference does word choice make? Can you think of other examples of words that are contested in media coverage of the Middle East, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or U.S. policy in the aftermath of 9/11?

• What do you learn from the film about the detention center at Guantanamo Bay and the people detained there? Consider both the images that filmmaker Laura Poitras provides and the events and people she includes.

• As a documentary filmmaker exploring an exceptionally volatile issue, Poitras had to make several difficult decisions in the realm of journalistic ethics. If you had been in her shoes, how would you have acted in the following situations, and why?:

• Abu Jandal says things on camera that are central to the story, but later requests that his comments be deleted. What obligation does a journalist have to accede to subjects’ requests?

• The film includes excerpts of speeches by Osama bin Laden. This provides viewers with insight into Al Qaeda’s ideology and follows good journalistic practice of letting people speak for themselves, but it also provides a controversial group and its leader media attention and an opportunity to spread its ideas to a broad audience. How would you balance the benefits and drawbacks of showing the worldview of Al Qaeda in a documentary film?
• Convene a teach-in on the potential unintended consequences of the USA Patriot Act and the provision that Congress created to declare providing material support to terrorists a war crime. Ask presenters to pay special attention to how people or organizations are labeled “terrorist” and the potential for the law to be used against anyone who disagrees with U.S. foreign or military policies. Weigh those concerns against the contribution the law makes to American security.

• Compare U.S. coverage of any of the issues raised in The Oath with coverage from other news sources, including Arab news sources such as Al Arabiya or Al Jazeera, online sources (e.g., AlterNet) and international sources (e.g., the BBC). Find ways to share what you learn about how differences in perspective color the choice and presentation of information.

• Start an interfaith exchange designed to enhance understanding between people of various faith traditions in your community.

• Contact your elected representatives and let them know what you think should happen to the prisoners currently being held in the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.

Abu Jandal.
Photo courtesy of “The Oath”
FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

ORIGINAL ONLINE CONTENT ON
POV INTERACTIVE (WWW.PBS.ORG/POV)

POV’s The Oath companion website
www.pbs.org/pov/oath

To further enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The companion website to The Oath offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmaker Laura Poitras; a list of related websites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and the following special features:

• Background information;
• Additional video;
• Reactions to the film; and
• Live chat with Laura Poitras.

Film-related Links

THE OATH
www.theoathmovie.com

The Oath’s official site includes a trailer, reviews and information about the film and filmmakers.

Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS.
“PROFILE: OSAMA BIN LADEN.”
www.cfr.org

A brief dossier on Osama bin Laden compiled by the Council on Foreign Relations covers his history, family, ideology, backing, authority, attitude toward the United States, movements and connection to Iraq.

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. “AL QAEDA.”
www.cfr.org

A succinct profile of Al Qaeda compiled by the Council on Foreign Relations covers the network’s origins, leaders, structure, allies and major attacks.

THE NEW YORK TIMES. “TIMES TOPICS: AL QAEDA.”
www.nytimes.com

This page serves as a helpful clearinghouse of documents and articles on Al Qaeda from The New York Times and other sources.

TIME. “THE MOST WANTED MAN IN THE WORLD.”
www.time.com

This rigorously reported profile of Osama bin Laden was published shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks. (September 24, 2001)
RESOURCES

BOOKS:

**THE COMMISSION: WHAT WE DIDN’T KNOW ABOUT 9/11** (NEW YORK: TWELVE, 2008)


Steve Coll reveals startling details of the CIA’s involvement in the evolution of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the years prior to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

**THE BIN LADENS: AN ARABIAN FAMILY IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY** (NEW YORK: PENGUIN PRESS, 2008)

Steve Coll tells the story of the rise and fall of the bin Laden family, shedding new light on Osama bin Laden’s family circle.

**Al Qaeda and Yemen**

**BBC. “YEMEN COUNTRY PROFILE.”**
http://news.bbc.co.uk/

This BBC profile provides basic information about Yemen, its culture, its leaders and its media.

**COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. “ISLAMIST RADICALISM IN YEMEN.”**
www.cfr.org

This recently compiled Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder includes information on Yemen’s internal challenges, relations with Al Qaeda and local terrorist networks and counterterrorism efforts.

**SABA NEWS AGENCY**
www.sabanews.net

Yemen’s state-run, English-language news agency covers news of local and international interest.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE. “IS YEMEN THE NEXT AFGHANISTAN?”**
www.nytimes.com

In this ambitious feature in The New York Times Magazine, Robert F. Worth shows how poverty, corruption, distrust of government and military opportunity have combined to make this struggling Middle Eastern country a hotbed for jihadis and Al Qaeda. (July 6, 2010)

**BOOKS:**

**OSAMA: THE MAKING OF A TERRORIST** (NEW YORK: KNOPF, 2004)

Jonathan Randal’s biography of bin Laden presents a history of the contemporary jihadi movement, from its roots in Afghanistan in the 1980s through the September 11, 2001 attacks and beyond.


For this Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Lawrence Wright conducted more than 500 interviews with everyone from friends of bin Laden to an Al Jazeera reporter to White House counterterrorism chief Richard A. Clarke. The result is a comprehensive examination of the events of September 11, 2001 that is both personal and historical.

**AN END TO AL QAEDA: DESTROYING BIN LADEN’S JIHAD AND RESTORING AMERICA’S HONOR** (NEW YORK: ST. MARTIN’S PRESS, 2010)

Intelligence veteran Malcolm Nance proposes a dramatic shift in efforts to eliminate Al Qaeda, including exposing its mission to seize control of Islam.
Hamdan v. Rumsfeld

**HAMDAN V. RUMSFELD PETITION**
www.globalsecurity.org

These documents are from the lawsuit in which Salim Hamdan challenged the lawfulness of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s plan to try him for alleged war crimes before a military commission convened under special orders by President George W. Bush rather than before a court-martial convened under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The government moved to dismiss — that motion was denied.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.**
“UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V. HAMDAN.”
www.defense.gov

This summary of charges is provided by the U.S. Department of Defense.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.**
“SALIM AHMED HAMDAN.”
www.defense.gov

These transcripts of testimony and exhibits are provided by the U.S. Department of Defense.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES.**
“MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION: HAMDAN V. RUMSFELD.”
www.nytimes.com

*The New York Times* offers audio recording from the March 28, 2006 Supreme Court hearing on the government’s plans to try Hamdan before a military commission.

**HAMDAN V. RUMSFELD**
www.hamdanvrumsfeld.com

This complete site gathers briefs, decisions and news of the landmark case.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES.**
“TIMES TOPICS: SALIM AHMED HAMDAN.”
www.nytimes.com

This page serves as a helpful clearinghouse for documents and articles from *The New York Times* and other sources related to Hamdan.

**THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS.**
“WHY THE COURT SAID NO.”
www.nybooks.com

David Cole, professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center analyzes *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld.* (August 10, 2006)

**Guantanamo/Interrogation/ Military Commissions**

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.**
“GUANTANAMO.”
www.hrw.org

Human Rights Watch’s portal for information about Guantanamo includes up-to-date reports, news releases and commentaries. See also the group’s portal on military commissions: http://www.hrw.org/en/category/topic/counterterrorism/guantanamo-military-commissions and detention without trial: http://www.hrw.org/en/category/topic/counterterrorism/detention-without-trial

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.**
“GUANTANAMO, BAGRAM AND ILLEGAL U.S. DETENSIONS.”
www.amnestyusa.org

Amnesty International gathers background information, reports and action steps related to Guantanamo and illegal detentions.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES.**
“TIMES TOPICS: GUANTÁNAMO BAY NAVAL BASE (CUBA).”
www.nytimes.com

This helpful clearinghouse organizes documents and articles from *The New York Times* and other sources related to the naval base at Guantanamo.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES.**
“TIMES TOPICS: MILITARY COMMISSIONS.”
www.nytimes.com

This is another helpful clearinghouse of documents and articles from *The New York Times* and other sources, in this case on military commissions.
THE NEW YORKER. “CAMP JUSTICE.”
www.newyorker.com
Jeffrey Toobin examines just one of several factors that complicate the proposed closing of Guantanamo. (April 14, 2008)

THE NEW YORK TIMES. “GUANTÁNAMO DRIVES PRISONERS INSANE, LAWYERS SAY.”
www.nytimes.com
William Glaberson reports that Hamdan’s lawyers claim he was driven insane by spending 22 hours a day in solitary confinement, and therefore he cannot prepare for or receive a fair trial. (April 26, 2008)

THE NEW YORKER. “HELLHOLE.”
www.newyorker.com
The United States holds tens of thousands of inmates in long-term solitary confinement. Is this torture? Atul Gawande considers the issue. (March 30, 2009)

THE NEW YORKER. “INSIDE THE WIRE.”
www.newyorker.com
Jeffrey Toobin profiles the appointed lead defense counsel in the trials by military tribunal of the detainees at Guantánamo Bay, analyzing the George W. Bush administration’s approach to trying war criminals and “the place of the rule of law in this new kind of war.” (February 9, 2004)

THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS. “OFFICIAL AMERICAN SADISM.”
www.nybooks.com/
Anthony Lewis looks at the American military’s questionable treatment of political prisoners under the Bush administration. (September 25, 2008)

THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS. “THE PRISONERS SPEAK.”
www.nybooks.com
Jonathan Raban reviews three accounts of treatment of prisoners in Guantánamo. (October 5, 2006)

THE NEW YORK TIMES. “MEDIA SEEK LOOSER GUANTÁNAMO RULES.”
www.nytimes.com
Jeremy W. Peters reports that a coalition of news organizations has demanded that the Pentagon relax restrictions on what can be revealed about Guantánamo. (July 20, 2010)

BOOKS:
ENEMY COMBATANT: MY IMPRISONMENT AT GUANTANAMO, BAGRAM AND KANDAHAR
(NEW YORK: NEW PRESS, 2006)
Moazzam Begg, writing with Victoria Brittain, tells of his abduction by U.S. forces and detainment by U.S. forces at Guantánamo and elsewhere. A British Muslim of Pakistani descent, Begg also writes about what led him to become involved with Islamic political causes.

GUANTANAMO AND THE ABUSE OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER
(NEW YORK: SIMON & SCHUSTER, 2006)
Author Joseph Margulies was the lead attorney in the landmark Supreme Court case Rasul v. Bush, which established that the U.S. court system has the authority to decide whether non-U.S. citizens held at Guantánamo Bay are wrongfully imprisoned. He criticizes the actions of the U.S. government, writing that Guantánamo and similar extraterritorial detention centers have become “prisons beyond the law,” where officials defy the guidelines set out in the Geneva Conventions, holding prisoners indefinitely and in solitary confinement without access to counsel. Margulies bases his reporting on firsthand accounts from both military personnel and prisoners.

Abu Ghraib

THE NEW YORKER. “TORTURE AT ABU GHRAIB.”
www.newyorker.com
American soldiers brutalized Iraqis. How far up does the responsibility go? Seymour M. Hersh discusses the atrocities at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq — and who is ultimately responsible. (May 10, 2004)
SALON.COM. “THE ABU GHRAIB FILES.”
www.salon.com
Salon.com presents an archive of 279 photos and 19 videos of Abu Ghraib abuse gathered by the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command (CID), as well as information drawn from CID’s timeline of events. Essays and analysis by a team of writers are also featured. (March 14, 2006)

THE WASHINGTON POST. “ABU GHRAIB TACTICS WERE FIRST USED AT GUANTANAMO.”
www.washingtonpost.com
Josh White reveals that the practices that shocked the world when they were discovered at Abu Ghraib were approved by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as part of a special interrogation plan aimed at breaking down an alleged conspirator in the September 11, 2001 attacks. (July 14, 2005)

BOOKS:
TORTURE AND TRUTH: AMERICA, ABU GHRAIB, AND THE WAR ON TERROR
(NEW YORK: NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS, 2004)
This hefty 580-page book takes as its starting point essays that Mark Danner, a New Yorker staff writer, wrote for The New York Review of Books just after the Abu Ghraib photographs came to light in 2004. Danner goes behind the images of abuse that shocked the world to the leadership and policy decisions that allowed them.

ABU GHRAIB: THE POLITICS OF TORTURE
(BERKELEY: NORTH ATLANTIC BOOKS, 2004)
This collection of essays from nine prominent thinkers examines the Abu Ghraib scandal from different perspectives. Social critic and feminist Barbara Ehrenreich writes about how the images affected her ideas about women in the military; former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti considers refugees and the displaced.

CHAIN OF COMMAND: THE ROAD FROM 9/11 TO ABU GHRAIB
(NEW YORK: HARPERCOLLINS, 2004)
New Yorker writer and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour M. Hersh investigates the so-called “war on terror,” drawing connections between early mistakes in the hunt for Al Qaeda, troubles on the ground in Iraq and the Abu Ghraib scandal.

From NPR and PBS
NPR:
MORNING EDITION. “GUANTANAMO TRIAL TO BEGIN FOR YOUNGEST PRISONER.”
www.npr.org
Preparations are under way at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for the first military tribunal under the Obama administration. Omar Khadr was captured in Afghanistan and brought to Guantanamo eight years earlier, when he was just 15 years old. Karen Greenberg, author of The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo’s First 100 Days, talks to Renee Montagne about Khadr. (August 10, 2010)

MORNING EDITION. “FREE FROM GUANTANAMO, HE SEeks AFGHAN OFFICE.”
www.npr.org
Izatullah Nusrat, a 42-year-old village elder from a town near Kabul, was held in Guantanamo for five years before authorities decided he wasn’t a threat. Now he’s running for the Afghan parliament. (August 10, 2010)

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. “LITTLE PROGRESS ON CLOSING GUANTANAMO AS TRIALS START.”
www.npr.org
Progress toward making President Obama’s pledge to close Guantanamo a reality is slow. More than 60 prisoners have been relocated since he took office, but politicians on both sides of the aisle have objected to bringing any to American soil, and more than 100 are still being held. (August 10, 2010)

TALK OF THE NATION. “THE GROWING POWER OF AL-QAIDA IN YEMEN.”
www.npr.org
Racked by political chaos and tribal feuds, Yemen is one of the Middle East’s poorest countries. It is also increasingly frequently a base of operations for Al Qaeda propaganda and attacks on the United States and other nations. Robert Worth, Beirut bureau chief for The New York Times, talks about why Yemen may be the next Afghanistan. (July 13, 2010)
**FRESH AIR. “LAURA POITRAS, PUZZLING OVER A JIHADIST’S JOURNEY.”**

www.npr.org

Filmmaker Laura Poitras talks about the making of The Oath. "What we tried to do in the film was take you into the psychological mystery of what does this guy [Abu Jandal] believe, where does he come from and how is he surviving now?" she says. "We wanted the audience to be drawn into his charisma, because this is a guy who ran a guest house [for bin Laden]. And young men seek him out for teaching. . . He has this sort of a power, and he actually talks about it — the art of influencing people." (June 2, 2010)

**ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. “U.S. DILEMMA: YEMENI DETAINES AT GUANTANAMO.”**

www.npr.org

A disproportionate number of Guantanamo detainees hail from Yemen. Presidents Bush and Obama have both sought to release these men to Yemen, but officials do not believe they can trust the Yemeni government to monitor and rehabilitate the men as needed. (January 4, 2010)

**MORNING EDITION. “CONDITIONS IN YEMEN RIPE FOR TERRORIST GROUPS.”**

www.npr.org

The suspect taken into custody for detonating explosives on an airliner near Detroit apparently told authorities he had gotten the explosive material from a bomb expert in Yemen. Richard Fontaine of the Center for a New American Security talks to Linda Wertheimer about deteriorating security in Yemen and U.S. efforts to fight terrorism there. The center develops national security and defense policies that protect U.S. interests. (December 29, 2009)

**MORNING EDITION. “AT WHAT COST? MOVING GUANTANAMO INMATES TO ILL.”**

www.npr.org

A proposed plan to convert an Illinois prison into a detention center for Guantanamo inmates sparks heated debate. (December 22, 2009)

**ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. “GUANTANAMO JURY GIVES HAMDAN LIGHT SENTENCE.”**

www.npr.org

A military jury at Guantanamo Bay sentenced bin Laden’s driver to five and a half years in prison, making Hamdan eligible for release in just six months. (August 7, 2008)

**ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. “‘HAMDAN V. RUMSFELD’: PATH TO A LANDMARK RULING.”**

www.npr.org

This radio story provides clear, concise background on the landmark case. (September 5, 2006)

**PBS:**

**POV. “MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY.”**

www.pbs.org/pov/mycountry

Laura Poitras creates an extraordinarily intimate portrait of Iraqis living under U.S. occupation in the first of her three-part series on the post-9/11 United States.

**PBS NEWSHOUR. “YEMEN LACKS COUNTERTERRORISM RESOURCES TO HALT JIHADISTS.”**

www.pbs.org

As part of a series of reports from Yemen, Margaret Warner reports on the country’s antiterrorism units on the Arabian Peninsula and the impact of military aid from the United States on the impoverished country’s the fight against Al Qaeda. (March 24, 2010)

**PBS NEWSHOUR. “BIN LADEN’S EX-DRIVER SENTENCED TO 5 1/2 YEARS.”**

www.pbs.org

A military jury sentenced bin Laden’s former driver, Hamdan, to five and a half years in prison, making him eligible for parole in six months. (August 7, 2008)
PBS NEWSHOUR. “GITMO TRIAL BEGINS, BUT QUESTIONS LOOM OVER DETAINEE LEGAL PROCESS.”
www.pbs.org
After years of legal delays, the trial of bin Laden’s former driver began at Guantanamo, marking the first full-scale military tribunal at the base since its opening in 2001. Two legal experts examine the future of the detainee program. (July 21, 2008)

NOW. “GUANTANAMO JUSTICE?”
www.pbs.org
NOW looks at a strong blow to the George W. Bush administration’s detainee policy and the military lawyer who dealt it. David Brancaccio talks with Charles Swift, whose Supreme Court victory on behalf of his client, a Guantanamo Bay detainee, successfully challenged the Bush administration’s detainee policy. (August 3, 2007)

THE FILM
FRESH AIR. “LAURA POITRAS, PUZZLING OVER A JIHADI’S JOURNEY.”
www.npr.org
Filmmaker Laura Poitras is interviewed on NPR’s Fresh Air.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ISLAM
PBS. “MUHAMMAD: LEGACY OF A PROPHET.”
www.pbs.org
A list of websites offering information on Islam appears in the Learning Tools section of Resources.

THE WAR WITH AL QAEDA
PBS. “FRONLINE.”
www.pbs.org
The PBS series Frontline has offered a number of programs related to topics in The Oath. A search of its website using the terms “Al Qaeda,” “Yemen” or “Guantanamo” will provide links to relevant episodes and their related resources.

MUSLIM OPPOSITION TO TERRORISM
FREE MUSLIMS COALITION
www.freemuslims.org
and MUSLIMS AGAINST TERRORISM
www.m-a-t.org
These two North American Muslim organizations repudiate Al Qaeda’s interpretation of Islam.

NON-WESTERN PERSPECTIVES
AL ARABIYA
www.alarabiya.net
The film includes an interview of Abu Jandal by this Dubai-based Arab language news agency. The English version of agency’s website provides access to other news stories.

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD
www.ikhwanweb.com
The Muslim Brotherhood website provides news in English from an Islamist perspective.
DISCUSSION GUIDE
The Oath

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order The Oath, for home use, please visit: http://www.shoppbs.org.
To order for educational use, please visit: http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 23rd season on PBS in 2010, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. Air- ing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 300 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, POV’s Borders. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today’s most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive www.pbs.org/pov

POV’s award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, POV’s Borders. In addition, the POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction program- ming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of re- sources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV’s Youth Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a cata- lyst for social change.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, The Fledgling Fund, FACT and public television viewers. Funding for POV’s Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Special support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activi- ties around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportuni- ties and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV; Cynthia Lopez is executive vice president.

Front cover: Abu Jandal, former bin Laden bodyguard, drives a taxi in Yemen.
Photo courtesy of Khalid Al Mahdi