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## Terror suspect was terrorized in a Navy brig

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The accused was held in extreme isolation for 1,307 days. Held in a nine-by-seven-foot cell. The only window blacked out. He was the lone prisoner on the two-tier cellblock. He was given food through a slot in the door. He slept on a steel mattress. No reading material. No calendar. No clock. Nothing to connect him to the outside world.

But it was the short trip down the hallway for a dental examination that captured the utter isolation and sensory deprivation inflicted on Jose Padilla during his 3 ½ years in the Navy brig at Charleston, S.C.

Helmeted guards, their faces obscured behind dark plastic visors, manacled his hands and feet through slots in his cell door. They covered his ears with sound-canceling headphones, covered his eyes with blacked-out goggles.

Padilla, mind you, has been described by his jailers as docile `` as a piece of furniture."

At that point, after months of a dehumanizing interrogation regime, any useful information had long been squeezed from him.

### LIVED IN BROWARD

The prosecution of Jose Padilla, an American citizen and a former resident of Broward County held as an enemy combatant, involves some of the defining legal issues of our time. His case is about the reach of executive power, the suspension of habeas corpus, about how long an American citizen can be held without charges. It is about validity of information obtained by coercion and torture.

But Padilla's dental visit -- photos of the exercise are in the federal court files -- reach beyond the legal questions. It has the look of gratuitous cruelty.

The treatment of an American citizen in pretrial detention seemed to be taken from the imaginings of Kafka. It appeared to be sensory deprivation just for the hell of it.

Jose Padilla, you'll remember, was arrested in Chicago in 2002 with considerable fanfare as the homegrown al Qaeda operative who planned to set off radioactive dirty bombs in American cities. He was a former Chicago gangbanger who converted to Islam in jail and worshipped in a Broward mosque before his alleged descent into terrorism.

He was originally held, without criminal charges, as an enemy combatant. But that changed in 2005. To avoid a Supreme Court review, the government charged Padilla in federal court. Not as the celebrated dirty bomber but as a conspirator in some 1990s Islamic extremist plots in Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya.

But Padilla's prosecution may have been undermined by his jailers. His lawyers claim their client, who was not allowed to see an attorney for his first two years in confinement, was subjected to an extreme regime of physical stress, sleep deprivation, sensory tricks involving loud noises, bright lights and foul odors and was drugged with LSD -- all designed to break him mentally. It may have worked too well.

### A BROKEN MAN

His lawyers claim Padilla -- now held in Miami -- has become so mentally addled, so timid that he is afraid to help in his own defense. They cite Dr. Angela Hegarty, director of forensic psychiatry at the Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens, N.Y., who examined Padilla for a total of 22 hours.

She concluded: `` It is my opinion that as the result of his experiences during his detention and interrogation, Mr. Padilla does not appreciate the nature and consequences of the proceedings against him, is unable to render assistance to counsel, and has impairments in reasoning as the result of a mental illness, i.e., post-traumatic stress disorder, complicated by the neuropsychiatric effects of prolonged isolation."

On Friday, the federal judge postponed Padilla's trial from Jan. 22 to April 16 to allow the prosecution time to arrange its own examination of Padilla's mental state.

In light of the Padilla case, the rest of us might take the extra time to ponder our own post-9/11 psychological state.