

## From the hyper-local to the supra-global: review of the globalization of supermax prisons

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In April of 2004, the investigative news show *60 Minutes II* aired a series of photos that shocked the United States and the world. The photos documented abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the U.S.-run prison at Abu Ghraib: male prisoners attached to leashes, forced to masturbate in front of female soldiers, and hooded and connected to electrical wires. But as Rothe points out in a chapter on Abu Ghraib in the book *The Globalization of Supermax Prisons*, the *60 Minutes* expose was not exactly breaking news [1]. Human Rights Watch, the *Washington Post*, and certain members of the Bush administration, had been paying attention to the abuses in Iraq for months, competing over whether to publicize or cover up the revelations. *Sixty Minutes* broke the relative silence about American abuses abroad in the newly-coined “War on Terror;” a series of internal investigations into military policy and responsibility ensued in 2004 and 2005.

But nearly ten more years would pass before the media, politicians, and the American public would turn their attention inward, scrutinizing conditions in mainland U.S. prisons, and making a more direct connection between domestic prison policy and international military policy. A range of events converged to produce greater public knowledge and understanding of harsh domestic prison conditions, between 2011 and 2013, including: a 6,000-person strong hunger strike over conditions of long-term solitary confinement in California prisons [2], which followed quickly on the heels of a 2011 U.S. Supreme Court decision condemning severely overcrowded California prisons, in which one prisoner a week was dying unnecessarily [3]; reductions in high-security prison populations in prisons across the country, including in Mississippi, Maine, and Colorado, as well as the closure of Illinois state’s highest security, total isolation prison, Tamms, in January of 2013 [4]; and a congressional hearing about the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons in the summer of 2012 [5]. The result? A revelation, not unlike the Abu Ghraib moment in 2004, has gradually filtered through to the American public about domestic prison conditions generally, and especially about the expansive use of long-term solitary confinement that has been institutionalized in U.S. prisons over the last 20 years.

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