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## **Britain attacks US abuses in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay**

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BRITAIN made a rare public criticism of America's human rights record yesterday, and also leveled serious accusations against some of its closest allies in the War on Terror.

In its seventh annual human rights report, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office took the Bush Administration to task for the continued detention of British citizens at Guantanamo Bay, in Cuba, and the abuses against Iraqi detainees exposed this year at Abu Ghraib jail outside Baghdad.

Human rights groups welcomed the findings, but complained that Britain had failed to take abuses into consideration while conducting the rest of its foreign policy. They said that Britain had continued to sell arms to repressive states and to use intelligence gathered from third countries that practiced torture against terrorist suspects.

Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, presenting the report, said: "We have always made it clear, not only in respect of the British detainees, but generally, that we regard the circumstances and the conditions under which all those detainees are being held in Guantanamo Bay as unacceptable."

Families of the four Britons being held at Camp Delta have urged Tony Blair to raise their cases when he meets President Bush on Friday.

In its section on Guantanamo Bay, the report said that Britain had repeatedly asked the US to give the detainees a fair trial or return them to Britain. In a stinging criticism of the Bush Administration's proposed "military tribunals", the Foreign Office concluded that they "would not provide sufficient guarantees of a fair trial according to international standards".

Steve Crawshaw, head of Human Rights Watch in London, welcomed criticism of Guantanamo Bay, but said that the problem went beyond the British prisoners. "There are hundreds of people whose human rights are being breached at Guantanamo," he said. "There is still timidity about criticizing the US. If America's closest ally can't speak out, then who can?" The section on abuses by US soldiers against Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib was limited to a short paragraph of the glossy report, which otherwise hailed the democratic reforms under way in post-Saddam Iraq.

Other allies in the War on Terror are much more harshly criticized, particularly Uzbekistan, which is accused of torture, Saudi Arabia, which discriminates against women and minorities, Israel, which kills Palestinian militant leaders, and Russia, whose forces abuse civilians in Chechnya.

In one twist, the report cited the work of Craig Murray, the former British Ambassador to Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, who was removed from his post this year after championing human rights in the former Soviet republic. He is suspended and awaiting a disciplinary hearing in London. He maintains that he was sacked for being too outspoken about human rights.

Some of the report's toughest language was on Sudan. It described "gross violations" in the Darfur region of Sudan as "the most worrying development over the past year", although it could not find "proof" that ethnic cleansing or genocide were taking place against African villagers by the Janjawid militia.

In general, the findings were welcomed by human rights groups, but experts said that the report exposed contradictions in government policy.

Amnesty International praised the tough language against the use of torture, but said that this stood in sharp contrast to the recent decision to allow evidence gained from torture by foreign agents to be used as evidence in court. Stephen Bowen, Amnesty International's UK campaigns director, said: "Some countries have seen the threat of terrorism as a blank check to imprison their opponents and ignore international law. It is vital that countries speak out against this or it will never be stopped."