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Guantanamo captives claim false confessions

Lawyer: Statements were falsified to halt abuse by U.S. troops

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Nearly a dozen prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp contend they were wrongly imprisoned after repeated abuse by U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including beatings with chains, electric shock and sodomy, their lawyer said Monday.

"These are classic stories of men who ended up in Guantanamo by mistake," charged attorney Tom Wilner, who represents 11 Kuwaiti prisoners held in the detention center at the U.S. Navy base in eastern Cuba.

Most of his clients say they falsely confessed to belonging to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or the al-Qaida terrorist network as a way to stop the abuse, Wilner said. He said one is too angry over his treatment to discuss details of his case, but all argue their detentions are unjustified.

Human rights groups and defense lawyers have long charged that some information used as the basis for incarcerations at Guantanamo Bay resulted from abuse or torture. Many of the 545 prisoners there have been held for more than three years, most without charge. About 150 have been let go, but officials have not given explanations for their release.

Investigations under way

The government has denied using torture, but multiple investigations into abuse at detention camps in Afghanistan and Guantanamo are under way. It is not clear whether some of the men's statements could be dismissed if investigators confirm there was abuse during interrogations.

Maj. Michael Shavers, a Pentagon spokesman, said all "credible" abuse allegations are investigated, but he suggested the Kuwaitis' claims were consistent with al-Qaida tactics to falsely allege abuse or mistreatment.

"That these detainees are now making allegations of abuse seems to fit the standard operating procedure in al-Qaida training manuals," Shavers said in response to questions from The Associated Press about the Kuwaitis' accusations.

Although most of 11 Kuwaitis say physical abuse stopped once they arrived at Guantanamo, all complain of mistreatment, such as being locked in cells with scant reading materials and little information on the outside world, Wilner said in a conference call from Washington to discuss recently declassified notes on his meetings with the prisoners.

'Switch to mental torture'

"At Guantanamo, the physical abuse — at least for Kuwaitis — has stopped, but there has been a switch to mental torture," he said.

Wilner and other lawyers representing the Kuwaitis were allowed to interview the prisoners for the first time in December and January, after the Supreme Court ruled in June that foreigners held as enemy combatants at Guantanamo could challenge their imprisonment. Wilner last visited his clients between Jan. 10 and Jan. 13.

Lawyers are required to surrender attorney-client notes before leaving the U.S. base. The notes are sealed and sent to a secure facility in Arlington, Va., where attorneys must request for them to be reviewed and unclassified. The lawyers must also get government permission to speak about their conversations with the prisoners.

Some of Wilner's clients range from a young man who is accused of being Osama bin Laden's spiritual adviser to a low-level member of the Taliban. None has been charged.

One prisoner, referring to Wilner's notes, said: "The American soldiers kept saying, 'Are you Taliban or are you al-Qaida?' 'Are you Taliban or al-Qaida!' They kept hitting me, so eventually I said I was a member of the Taliban." The prisoners did not want to be identified by name.

' ... People looked up to Americans'

Another Kuwaiti told Wilner he was held by U.S. troops in Afghanistan at bases in Bagram and Kandahar where he was hooded, tied with chains, hung by his wrists and stripped in front of female guards. He also said his interrogator forced him to sign a statement, but Wilner said the government has not provided him with any statement.

One Kuwaiti said he was sure he would be killed, Wilner's notes said.

Another Kuwaiti described how he confessed after having metal paddles placed under his arms and shocked in Afghanistan. Another said he was beaten so badly his ribs were broken. Some said they were beaten with chains.

One said U.S. troops in Afghanistan pulled down his pants and sodomized him with an object.

"One of the saddest things is these people looked up to Americans for liberating Kuwait in the '90s," Wilner said. "A lot of them still can't believe U.S. troops are doing this."