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Guantanamo interrogators 'impersonated' FBI

Will Dunham
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WASHINGTON - U.S. Defence Department interrogators impersonated FBI agents at the Guantanamo Bay prison to avoid being held accountable when they used "torture techniques" on a prisoner held there in the U.S. war on terrorism, according to FBI e-mails, which have been made public.

Another FBI e-mail made available in the same package on Monday said that President George W. Bush had issued an executive order authorizing a series of harsh methods for interrogations. The White House said no such directive existed and Justice Department and FBI officials echoed the denial.

The documents were made public by the American Civil Liberties Union which obtained them under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Bush administration has been accused of abusing prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the prison at the Naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. A number of military personnel have been charged.

FBI e-mails dating from December 2003 and January 2004 complained of "DOD (Department of Defence) interrogators impersonating Supervisory Special Agents of the FBI" at Guantanamo.

A December 5, 2003, e-mail said that "these tactics have produced no intelligence of a threat neutralization nature" and that the "techniques have destroyed any chance of prosecuting this detainee."

"If this detainee is ever released or his story made public in any way, DOD interrogators will not be held accountable because these torture techniques were done (by) the 'FBI' interrogators. The FBI will (be) left holding the bag before the public," the e-mail said.

The impersonation "was approved by the Dep Sec Def," a January 21, 2004, e-mail stated, referring to Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, the Pentagon's No. 2 official.

INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said Wolfowitz "did not approve interrogation techniques." Whitman added, "It is difficult to determine from the second-hand description whether the technique in this e-mail (impersonating the FBI) was permissible or not."

A May 22, 2004, e-mail, sent by an FBI agent in Iraq to senior FBI officials, referred repeatedly to what it said was an executive order signed by Bush, listing some of the methods the order authorized.

These included sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation by forcing detainees to wear hoods, the use of military dogs and stress positions such as forced squatting for an extended period, the e-mail stated.

A senior Bush administration official said, "The FBI agent was mistaken regarding the existence of an executive order on interrogation techniques. No such executive order exists or has ever

existed. The Defence Department determines the methods of interrogation of military detainees in the Iraq conflict," said the official, who asked not to be named.

The names in many of the documents released by the ACLU were blacked out. The name of the FBI author of the May 22 e-mail from Iraq was redacted, but the author was referred to as "On Scene Commander-Baghdad."

The author stated that since arriving in Iraq "we have been very careful to instruct our personnel to use only standard interview techniques which we would use back home in our regular work.

"We have also instructed our personnel not to participate in interrogations by military personnel which might include techniques authorized by Executive Order but beyond the bounds of standard FBI practice."

A heavily redacted June 25 FBI memo titled "URGENT REPORT" to the FBI director, provided details from someone "who observed serious physical abuses of civilian detainees" in Iraq.

"He described that such abuses included strangulation, beatings, placement of lit cigarettes into the detainees ear openings, and unauthorized interrogations," the document stated. The memo also mentioned "cover-up of these abuses."

Jameel Jaffer, an ACLU lawyer, said the documents made clear there was no question that prisoner abuse by U.S. forces "resulted from policies that were adopted by the highest levels of government." The administration denies this.