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Poe Expresses Doubts About Abuse at Guantanamo

Concerns over detainee treatment are 'annoying,' congressman says

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WASHINGTON - Old allegations of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo Bay and current concerns about the treatment of detainees at the Cuban detention facility are "annoying," said U.S. Rep. Ted Poe.

Even after the results of a military investigation released this week confirmed that some abuse, although not torture, took place there in 2002 and 2003, the Humble Republican still believes that detainees generally are treated well.

"We got our priorities mixed up if we are so consumed with some terrorist who was embarrassed three years ago over the actions of the terrorist, the safety of Americans, the safety of our troops," said Poe, who visited Guantanamo for a few hours last month with about 15 other members of Congress.

He conceded there is "always a chance" that abuse is occurring now, but said he doubted it.

"I think there is a lot of monitoring that is taking place in Guantanamo about what is occurring every day with every prisoner," Poe said in an interview Thursday. "The military has opened the camp to the International Red Cross. ... We haven't heard a peep out of them."

Red Cross workers have said detainees claimed that U.S. personnel mishandled Qurans during 2002 and early 2003. Riots ensued in Afghanistan after the publication of a now-retracted report in Newsweek magazine that said Gitmo interrogators flushed a Quran down a toilet.

Allegations of abuse at Guantanamo have raised questions about the future of the facility, which holds 520 people suspected of terrorist activities.

While some lawmakers have said they would favor closing Gitmo, White House officials and Vice President Dick Cheney have firmly stated that the facility will remain open.

The military's investigation confirmed that a handful of interrogators violated several rules when they used harsh measures to get information.

The report highlighted the case of a Saudi man described as the "20th hijacker" in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. It said guards forced him to dance with a male interrogator, told him his mother and sister were whores, threatened him with a dog and questioned him for up to 20 hours a day.

The investigation by the U.S. Southern Command, which supervises Guantanamo, was prompted by FBI agents who said they witnessed abuse during stints at the detention facility in 2002 and 2003.

"As the bottom line, though, we found no torture," said Air Force Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt, who led the investigation and testified before the Senate Armed Services Committees this week. "Detention and interrogation operations were safe, secure and humane."

Still, Schmidt and his team recommended that Army Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, who ran the prison until March 2004, be reprimanded for lax oversight. That recommendation was vetoed by Gen.

Bantz Craddock, commander of U.S. Southern Command. He said he will refer the matter to the Army's inspector general.

After he returned from Gitmo, Poe wrote a column describing how "some of the rooms enjoyed waterfront views" and menus consisted "of such delicacies as marinated chicken with orange sauce."

"Contrary to the incessant myths," he wrote, "detainees at Gitmo are not mistreated."