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Inmates Appear Before U.S. Panel in Cuba

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Two prisoners with alleged ties to the al-Qaida terrorist network appeared Saturday before a U.S. military review tribunal in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

One detainee, whose age was unknown, was accused of shooting an Afghan militiaman and two civilians in 2003, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals. Afghan militiamen captured the detainee a year ago after a shootout and grenade battle, Ross said.

Regional and factional militias helped the United States rout the Taliban in late 2001. The militias are being disarmed under a U.N.-sponsored peace plan, and the United States and its allies are training a new Afghan army.

Although the prisoner was also accused of spying on Americans, it was not clear what he said at his hearing.

The review tribunals determine whether the 550 detainees at the U.S. naval base have been properly classified as "enemy combatants" or should be freed.

The government defines enemy combatants as anyone who supported al-Qaida or the ousted Taliban regime, a classification that human rights groups and defense attorneys complain is vague and doesn't afford as many legal protections as prisoners of war are entitled to under the Geneva Conventions.

The Associated Press filed a Freedom of Information Act request more than a month ago to obtain transcripts of the testimonies, as well as copies of the men's written statements.

The military refused to say how the second prisoner, a 42-year-old, was linked to al-Qaida. Unclassified allegations said only that he gave false identification when he was captured and couldn't explain why he was in Afghanistan, Ross said.

The review tribunals, which have considered 505 cases, have ordered 206 prisoners to remain in custody and one Pakistani prisoner freed.

Last week, the U.S. military started separate hearings that could result in the release of Guantanamo detainees who are determined to no longer pose a threat to the United States or to have intelligence value.