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New F.B.I. Files Describe Abuse of Iraq Inmates

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WASHINGTON - F.B.I. memorandums portray abuse of prisoners by American military personnel in Iraq that included detainees' being beaten and choked and having lit cigarettes placed in their ears, according to newly released government documents.

The documents, released Monday in connection with a lawsuit accusing the government of being complicit in torture, also include accounts by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents who said they had seen detainees in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, being chained in uncomfortable positions for up to 24 hours and left to urinate and defecate on themselves. An agent wrote that in one case a detainee who was nearly unconscious had pulled out much of his hair during the night.

One of the memorandums released Monday was addressed to Robert S. Mueller III, the F.B.I. director, and other senior bureau officials, and it provided the account of someone "who observed serious physical abuses of civilian detainees" in Iraq. The memorandum, dated June 24 this year, was an "Urgent Report," meaning that the sender regarded it as a priority. It said the witness "described that such abuses included strangulation, beatings, placement of lit cigarettes into the detainees' ear openings and unauthorized interrogations."

The memorandum did not make clear whether the witness was an agent or an informant, and it said there had also been an effort to cover up the abuses. The writer of the memorandum said Mr. Mueller should be aware of what was occurring because "of potential significant public, media and Congressional interest which may generate calls to the director." The document does not provide further details of the abuse, but suggests that such treatment of prisoners in Iraq was the subject of an investigation conducted by the bureau's Sacramento office.

Beyond providing new details about the nature and extent of abuses, if not the exact times or places, the newly disclosed documents are the latest to show that such activities were known to a wide circle of government officials.

The documents, mostly memorandums written by agents to superiors in Washington over the past year, also include claims that some military interrogators had posed as F.B.I. officials while using harsh tactics on detainees, both in Iraq and at Guantánamo Bay.

In one memorandum, dated Dec. 5, 2003, an agent whose name is blanked out on the document expressed concern about military interrogators' posing as F.B.I. agents at the Guantánamo camp.

The agent wrote that the memorandum was intended as an official record of the interrogators' behavior because, "If this detainee is ever released or his story made public in any way, D.O.D. interrogators will not be held accountable because these torture techniques were done by 'F.B.I.' interrogators. The F.B.I. will be left holding the bag before the public." D.O.D. is an abbreviation for the Department of Defense.

Asked about the possible impersonation of F.B.I. agents by military personnel, Bryan Whitman, the deputy Pentagon spokesman, said Monday that "It is difficult to determine from the second-hand description whether the technique" was permissible.

The Pentagon did not offer any fresh reaction to the descriptions of alleged abuse. But it said in response to other recent disclosures that the Defense Department did not tolerate abusive tactics and that some of the allegations contained in such documents were under investigation.

The documents were in the latest batch of papers to be released by the government in response to a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups to determine the extent, if any, of American participation in the mistreatment of prisoners. The documents are the most recent in a series of disclosures that have increasingly contradicted the military's statements that harsh treatment of prisoners happened only in limited, isolated cases.

Anthony D. Romero, the executive director of the A.C.L.U., said the documents meant that "top government officials can no longer hide from public scrutiny by pointing the finger at a few low-ranking soldiers."

Another message sent to F.B.I. officials including Valerie E. Caproni, the bureau's top lawyer, recounted witnessing detainees chained in interrogation rooms at Guantánamo, where about 550 prisoners are being held.

The agent, whose name was deleted from the document, wrote on July 29, 2004: "On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water. Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves and had been left there for 18 24 hours or more."

The agent said that on another occasion, the air-conditioning had been turned up so high that a chained detainee was shivering. The agent said the military police had explained by saying that interrogators from the previous day had ordered the treatment and "that the detainee was not to be moved."

The agent also wrote: "On another occasion, the A/C had been turned off, making the temperature in the unventilated room probably well over 100 degrees. The detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his own hair out throughout the night."

As in previously released memorandums in the case, F.B.I. officials expressed their deep concerns about seeing the use of interrogation techniques that they are prohibited from using in their own investigations.

The Dec. 5, 2003, memorandum in which an agent frets about the F.B.I. being left "holding the bag," also asserted that the threats and abuses of one detainee did not produce any intelligence that could help thwart an attack. Further, the memorandum said other bureau officials believed that the harsh interrogation techniques would have meant that any chances of prosecuting the individual were destroyed because the evidence would have to be thrown out in court because it was coerced.

The issue of military interrogators' impersonating F.B.I. agents was especially troubling to bureau officials, according to the memorandums, not least because they seem to have been unsuccessful in persuading the military to stop the practice.