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Pentagon Said to Probe Guantanamo Reports

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - The Pentagon said Friday it was investigating allegations of abuse by an Australian prisoner at the U.S. detention camp in Guantanamo Bay.

Also, a U.S. senator from New Mexico said he asked Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to explain reports the government tried to suppress reports by U.S. military personnel and FBI of abuse at U.S.-run detention camps in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo.

The Pentagon, which maintains detainees are treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions that prohibit the use of torture or abuse, said it was looking into claims by detainee David Hicks of beatings and other mistreatment at Guantanamo. Hicks' allegations became public Thursday in an affidavit released by his attorney.

"There's currently an ongoing investigation into allegations of abuse in the case of David Hicks based on abuse allegations," Pentagon spokesman Maj. Michael Shavers said.

The investigation began before the allegations became public, he said.

Additional investigations into abuse and mistreatment at Guantanamo Bay, as well as other aspects of the detention mission, are also pending, Shavers said.

Several documents published this week show FBI agents sent to Guantanamo warned the government about abuse and mistreatment at the start of the detention mission in 2002, more than a year before a scandal over mistreatment of detainees at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. One letter, written by a senior Justice Department official and obtained by The Associated Press, suggested the Pentagon failed to act on the FBI complaints.

Additional documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and released by the American Civil Liberties Union show a special operations task force in Iraq sought to silence Defense Intelligence Agency personnel who may have observed abusive interrogations.

"We need to have a full accounting of what has happened in connection with efforts to suppress information," Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., told AP on Friday, a day after he sent a letter to Rumsfeld. "The main focus has been on abuse allegations, but now it seems pretty clear there were efforts to prevent people from properly reporting incidents of abuse."

Hicks, accused of fighting with Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime, said he and others suffered abuse by U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay, where he has been held since January 2002.

He is one of only four men among about 550 detainees at Guantanamo who have been charged. He is scheduled to be tried by a military commission in March.

Most of the prisoners being held at the remote outpost have been held without charge or access to attorneys.

"At one point, a group of detainees, including myself, were subjected to being randomly hit over an eight-hour session while handcuffed and blindfolded," Hicks, 29, said in the affidavit sealed in

August. "I have been struck with hands, fists, and other objects, including rifle butts. I have also been kicked."

Hicks also said he was forcibly injected with sedatives and troops denied food to prisoners to coerce cooperation with interrogators.

The military has acknowledged 10 cases of abuse since the detention mission began at Guantanamo, including a female interrogator climbing onto a detainee's lap and a detainee whose knees were bruised from being forced to kneel repeatedly.

Those cases are not among three incidents detailed in the July FBI letter to Maj. Gen. Donald J. Ryder, the Army's chief law enforcement officer investigating abuses at the U.S.-run prisons.

The memo obtained by the AP documents abuses including a female interrogator grabbing a detainee's genitals and bending back his thumbs, a prisoner being gagged with duct tape and an attack dog being used to intimidate a detainee, who later showed "extreme" psychological trauma.