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Republicans lobby for sweeping changes at Pentagon

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Senior Republican senators are pressing the White House to make sweeping changes at the Pentagon following concerns voiced by military officers over the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld, defence secretary.

The Pentagon came under renewed scrutiny this week following the release of Federal Bureau of Investigation documents revealing that its agents witnessed the torture of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Republican senators, including John McCain, Chuck Hagel, Trent Lott and Susan Collins, last week openly criticised Mr Rumsfeld, after he dismissed a soldier's concerns about a lack of armour in Iraq. President George W. Bush came to his defence on Monday, saying Mr Rumsfeld was doing a "really fine job".

Privately, the senators, joined by Richard Lugar, Olympia Snowe and Lincoln Chaffee, have been more vocal in communications with the White House. One person familiar with their campaign said they have called for sweeping changes at the Pentagon, including Mr Rumsfeld's resignation.

The White House is understood to have agreed to make significant changes in February, but has resisted calls for Mr Rumsfeld's resignation.

The senators' lobbying effort has grown out of criticism from senior serving and retired military officers, who say Mr Rumsfeld's refusal to take advice from uniformed officers is hurting the military's efforts to defeat the insurgency in Iraq.

John Hutson, former navy judge advocate-general and now dean of Franklin Pierce Law Center, said: "A lot of [military officers] are unhappy. He has worn out his welcome."

FBI e-mails obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) this week under the Freedom of Information Act describe the abuse of suspected terrorists at Guantánamo and prisoners of war in Iraq.

They lend weight to findings of the International Committee of the Red Cross, reported last month, that the US military used physical coercion "tantamount to torture" at Guantánamo.

The Bush administration rejected the allegations, but said this week it was willing to investigate.

"On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a foetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water," one FBI interrogator said. "Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves and had been left there for 18, 24 hours or more."

One was shivering with cold, with the air-conditioning turned low. Another was reported to be nearly unconscious in a very hot room, with a pile of his torn hair next to him. Another chained detainee, in an "unbearably hot" room, had loud rap music playing for more than a day.

A second FBI agent wrote: "I saw another detainee sitting on the floor of the interview room with an Israeli flag draped around him, loud music being played and a strobe light flashing".

A third e-mail said the FBI witnessed defence department interrogators using sleep deprivation, loud music and bright lights, and growling dogs at Guantánamo.

One FBI e-mail claimed that Paul Wolfowitz, deputy defence secretary, approved the impersonation of FBI interrogators by military personnel. The Pentagon yesterday denied this, saying that Mr Wolfowitz "did not approve interrogation techniques". Mr Bush said in June that he had ordered that interrogations should conform to US law and international treaties.