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Secret Report Questions Guantánamo Tactics

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SAN JUAN, P.R. - Videotapes of riot squads subduing troublesome terrorism suspects at the United States prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, show the guards punching some detainees, tying one to a gurney for questioning and forcing a dozen to strip from the waist down, a confidential report says.

One squad was made up entirely of women, the report says, a factor that traumatized some prisoners, though the tapes offer no evidence that this squad was involved in any of the stripping incidents.

Investigators from the United States Southern Command, which has headquarters in Miami and oversees the Guantánamo camp, wrote the report after spending a little over a week in June reviewing 20 hours of videotapes. The tapes were among some 500 hours of videos that a spokesman at Guantánamo said last year had been turned over to the investigators. The tapes involved the operations of teams known as "immediate reaction forces," "immediate response forces" or simply I.R.F.'s.

According to a six-page summary dated June 19, 2004, the report, authenticated by an official speaking on condition of anonymity, cited several cases of physical force but said investigators had found no evidence of systemic detainee abuse.

Yet the tapes did raise questions about mistreatment and misconduct, said the investigators, who suggested that some video clips needed more scrutiny for abuse to be ruled out. The military has cited 10 substantiated cases of abuse at Guantánamo, and announced on Tuesday an extension for investigators to interview witnesses.

One clip the investigators cited, from Feb. 17, 2004, showed "one or more" team members punching a detainee "on an area of his body that seemingly would be inconsistent" with their striking a pressure point, which is a sanctioned tactic for subduing prisoners.

In five other clips showing detainees who appeared to have been punched by team members, the investigators said, "the punching was in line with accepted law enforcement practice of striking the pressure point on the back of the thigh to temporarily distract the detainee."

In other "questionable" cases, reviewers said, a video showed a guard kneeling a detainee in the head. Another showed a team securing a detainee to a gurney for interrogation.

A separate clip showed a platoon leader taunting a detainee with pepper spray and repeatedly spraying him before letting the reaction team enter his cell, the report said.

Investigators also noted about a dozen cases in which detainees were stripped from the waist down and taken to the camp's "Romeo block." By the account of two former detainees, Shafiq Rasul and Asif Iqbal, who were released last year, prisoners in that block were often left naked for days.

Although no women among the guards were videotaped in any of the stripping cases, the investigators, citing religious and cultural issues, cautioned against using the all-female team to

handle disruptive detainees. Given strict interpretations of Islam, many of the prisoners view contact with women other than their wives as taboo.

In one video clip, the report says, "a detainee appears to be genuinely traumatized by a female escort securing the detainee's leg irons."

"In another video," it says, "inexplicably an all-female I.R.F. team forcibly extracts a detainee from his cell."

Investigators warned that such use of an all-female team could create the perception that the gender of the squad had been taken into consideration in determining ways to deal with the camp's Muslim population.

"By forming an all-female I.R.F. team for use with one detainee," the report said, "we potentially undercut our position that we do not distinguish between male and female soldiers. Clearly, the soldiers' gender did play a role in forming the all-female I.R.F. team."