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U.K. Reality TV to Test 'Guantanamo' Techniques

Volunteers will suffer sleep deprivation, extreme temperatures

Reuters
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LONDON - A British TV channel is preparing "Guantanamo Guidebook," a show that will test the effectiveness of interrogation techniques like sleep deprivation which freed inmates say were used by the U.S. military at its camp in Cuba.

Channel Four, which brought the world reality TV hit "Big Brother," will film seven British volunteers as they are subjected to extreme temperatures and mild physical contact while being kept awake for long periods.

The techniques are based on information from declassified U.S. government documents, and will be carried out by expert interrogators from the United States, a Channel Four spokesman said, declining to provide additional details.

He said the volunteers were rigorously screened prior to their participation and received intensive medical and psychological attention during and after the taping of the show.

One man was forced by doctors to withdraw after he contracted hypothermia.

Series on torture

The program, due to air in mid-March, will examine the effects of the interrogation techniques over 48 hours in a London warehouse. It is part of a four-part series on torture hosted by news presenter Jon Snow.

It could be a useful way of showing viewers that seemingly innocuous techniques like sleep deprivation can have a devastating effect, said Steve Crawshaw, director of Human Rights Watch's London office.

His group consulted with Channel Four on parts of its torture series.

"The U.S. administration has defined torture very narrowly and avoided the other key phrase, which is 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,'" he said.

"Without having seen it, my understanding of the Channel Four program is that it shows clearly that even a very small amount of these treatments can be seriously damaging."

Courting controversy

The publicly owned Channel Four is known for courting controversy with edgy programming. It drew fire from the Russian government last week for airing an interview with the Chechen rebel leader who masterminded the deadly Beslan school siege.

It is also the home in Britain of contentious reality TV shows "Big Brother" and its spin-off "Celebrity Big Brother."

Feminist author Germaine Greer, who took part in the latter series, leveled her own accusations of torture against its makers earlier this year, saying she was subjected to bullying and sensory deprivation.

The United Nations criticized the United States last week for holding Guantanamo detainees for nearly three years without legal advice or information about how long they were likely to remain incarcerated.

Human rights groups have also criticized conditions at the camp, where Washington has excluded detainees from the terms of the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war.

The last four Britons detained at Guantanamo Bay were released last month.