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Detainees' Data 'Best' Resource on Al Qaeda

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Detainees at Guantanamo Bay are providing the U.S. military with its best information on America's No. 1 enemy, Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terror group, says a new Pentagon report.

More than three years after many of the al Qaeda and Taliban fighters were captured in Afghanistan, the 550 prisoners continue to divulge new information on recently nabbed bin Laden operatives and on remotely detonated bombs killing U.S. troops in Iraq.

"The Joint Task Force, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, remains the single best repository of al Qaeda information in the Department of Defense," said the recently compiled report. "Many detainees have admitted close relationships or other access to senior al Qaeda leadership.

"They provide valuable insights into the structure of that organization and associated terrorist groups. They have identified additional al Qaeda operatives and supporters."

Some left-leaning human rights groups have gone to court to force the Bush administration to provide each detainee a court hearing at which the government must make the case for continued confinement. The court action has jeopardized an administration plan to detain most terrorist suspects indefinitely to prevent their return to the battlefield.

A Pentagon spokesman said the report was not written as a rebuttal to critics, but as a way to educate the American people on the detainee population.

The report said that at least 10 former detainees the Pentagon knows by name have rejoined the war against coalition forces.

One of them, Abdullah Mahsud, had denied links to al Qaeda and said he was forced to join the Taliban army. Today, Mahsud is back in Afghanistan leading a gang of kidnapers.

The bomb makers picked up in Afghanistan are experts in the same types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that have killed hundreds of coalition troops, including Americans in Iraq.

"One detainee also detailed how pagers and cellular telephones are used to initiate detonations," said the Pentagon report. "Another detainee has been cooperative enough to draw schematic diagrams of the bombs he designed and built. In addition, he has provided his critiques of the design of IEDs being constructed by terrorists in Iraq."

Another prisoner identified 11 other detainees as bodyguards for bin Laden in Afghanistan who received terrorist training at the notorious al Farouq camp.

"This unprecedented body of information has expanded our understanding of al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and continues to prove valuable," the six-page report said.

More than 50 detainees hold college degrees or obtained other higher education. Among the educated are doctors, pilots, engineers, translators, lawyers and computer experts.

A detainee who attended Texas A&M for 18 months "has threatened guards and admits enjoying terrorizing Americans." Others obtained degrees in aviation management and petroleum engineering.

"A detainee who has assaulted [Guantanamo] guards on numerous occasions and crafted a weapon in his cell stated that he can either go back home and kill as many Americans as he possibly can, or he can leave here in a box," the report said. "Either way, it's the same to him."

The capture of these terrorists and others likely deprived al Qaeda of new leaders. "It is likely that many Guantanamo detainees would have risen to positions of prominence in the leadership ranks of al Qaeda and its associated groups," the Guantanamo report said.