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## 7. 25 prisoners have died in U.S. custody

Craig Gordon, NY Newsday, 5 May 2004

WASHINGTON -- Twenty-five prisoners have died in U.S. custody in Iraq and Afghanistan, including two that Army officials believe were killed by American captors.

That new revelation by the Pentagon yesterday came as congressional officials warned that the prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq is deeper than already revealed.

The CIA confirmed that the agency's inspector general had "several investigations" under way of alleged abuses of Iraqi prisoners by its personnel. One of the CIA's investigations, said a U.S. official, involved the death of an Iraqi Republican Guard general who was being questioned by the CIA in November.

Nearly a week after the photos of Iraqi prisoners being humiliated and sexually abused were made public, the Bush administration yesterday faced a raft of new questions about how the incidents occurred, why top officials didn't respond more quickly and why Congress wasn't notified as investigations pointed up serious problems in the Iraqi detention system.

The revelation of the criminal investigations comes on top of allegations already outlined in a March 3 military investigative report prepared by Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba. Taguba's report -- which is still classified -- said that "numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on several detainees" at Abu Ghraib between October 2003 and December 2003.

Taguba's report and the graphic photos -- have created the most serious crisis for U.S. officials in Iraq since the war began, and it comes less than 60 days before they are scheduled to hand over power to an Iraqi interim government.

Already, six soldiers face criminal charges stemming from the incidents at Abu Ghraib prison, and six others were given letters of reprimand expected to end their military careers. The commander of the prison at the time of the incidents, Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, head of the Uniondale-based 800th Military Police Brigade, has been suspended awaiting final disciplinary action.

In addition, Army officials confirmed that 20 criminal investigations are ongoing, including 10 death cases and 10 for prisoner assault. Twelve others were closed because the deaths were believed due to natural causes.

In Iraq, the outcry continued. Iraq's U.S.-appointed human rights minister said yesterday he had resigned this week to protest abuses of Iraqi detainees by American guards. Abdul-Basat al-Turki said he feared that the abuses were not an isolated incident, as American officials say, but that "the violations are a common act."

A second Iraqi official, the nation's interior minister, said Iraqis should be allowed to participate more in the running of the prisons.

Threats, humiliation detailed Taguba's report cites a series of allegations made by Iraqi prisoners -- allegations that Taguba said were found credible based on the investigation.

Prisoners charged that their U.S. guards threatened them with a 9mm pistol, beat them with a broom handle and chair, threatened male detainees with rape and sodomized a prisoner with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick.

The report also lists several of actions seen in the now widely publicized photographs, including forcing detainees into sexually explicit positions, arranging naked male detainees in a pile, and positioning a naked detainee on a box with a bag on his head and wires attached to fingers, toes and penis "to simulate electrical torture," the report said.

Taguba's report, first reported by the New Yorker magazine, found that a lax command atmosphere in the prison contributed to the abuses.

In addition, that atmosphere allowed military intelligence officers -- those who do the actual interrogations -- to lobby military police guards to inflict humiliations upon detainees to break them down before questioning.

Symbol of abuse Abu Ghraib was one of Saddam Hussein's most notorious prisons and torture centers -- exactly the kind of place that U.S. officials have said was put out of business when they deposed Hussein. But now it has become a symbol of what many Iraqi perceive as American abuses -- so much so that Rumsfeld was forced yesterday to draw a distinction between American practices there and Hussein's, calling the abuses in the photos an isolated incident.

"The pattern and practice of the Saddam Hussein regime was to ... to murder and torture. And the killing fields are filled with mass graves. And equating the two I think is a fundamental misunderstanding of what took place," Rumsfeld said at a Pentagon news conference.

Still, Rumsfeld acknowledged that the abuses "damaged" the trust U.S. officials were trying to build in Iraq, saying it was "clearly ... unhelpful in a fundamental way."

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said President George W. Bush "will speak directly to the Arab world," and other officials said he would do interviews with Arab television stations to underscore his feelings about the photographs of naked prisoners and gloating U.S. soldiers.

Army: 2 deaths unjustified The Army also revealed for the first time the extent of its own criminal investigations in the region, saying it has investigated 25 deaths and 10 prisoner assault cases since December 2002, mainly in Iraq. The Army supervised more than 40,000 detainees at the post-war peak, and now oversees about 10,000.

Of three prisoner deaths, one was found to be a justifiable homicide, when a prisoner was killed while trying to escape.

But senior Army officials say they have concluded two of the prisoner deaths were not justified. One soldier was court-martialed for shooting a detainee at a detention center in the field in September 2003 after the detainee was throwing rocks at the guard.

The second case, according to the Army, involves a CIA contract interrogator at Abu Ghraib prison in November 2003. A senior Army official said its criminal investigation determined the charge was "founded," but said the Army has no jurisdiction over CIA activities and had to refer the charges to the Justice Department.

The CIA also said it was investigating this case, but said there has been no final conclusion that the death was not justified, contradicting the Army version.

In the other CIA fatality, a senior U.S. official said the prisoner in question, Abed Hamed Mowhoush al-Mahalawi, was a general with Hussein's Republican Guard. Al-Mahalawi was detained in an October 2003 raid near the Syrian border but died the following month while under American interrogation.

A CIA official yesterday denied that the CIA had any role in the sexual mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison.

Outrage on Capitol Hill After a briefing with Pentagon officials on Capitol Hill, some senators said they were outraged that the Pentagon had failed to notify them last month about the Army report outlining abuses at Abu Ghraib. Others questioned why neither Bush nor Rumsfeld had yet to read the entire report or view the photos before they were made public.



Also, two senators, Republican John Warner of Virginia and Democrat Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, both said they believed there were other incidents of prisoner abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan that have yet to come to light. And Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) said an independent probe may be warranted.

The new commander of U.S.-run prisons in Iraq, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, said yesterday he would cut in half the number of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib, and bar some interrogation techniques considered humiliating, such as hooding prisoners.

Staff writer Knut Royce contributed to this story.

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