



## U.S. ABUSE OF IRAQI PRISONERS THREATENS AMERICAN IMAGE ABROAD

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*U.S. officials have launched a major public relations campaign to counter images of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners at a notorious detention facility near Baghdad. The images have stirred furor in Arab countries and around the world.*

U.S. officials are trying to control the fallout over graphic images released last week of American military police abusing Iraqi prisoners in a notorious facility near Baghdad that once housed Saddam Hussein's torture chambers.

The U.S. military has used the prison on the western outskirts of Baghdad, called Abu Ghraib, since the fall of Saddam's regime last year.

The graphic images, which were first broadcast on CBS television, show a hooded prisoner with wires attached to his body being threatened with electrocution. A second image shows smiling U.S. guards standing over naked prisoners piled on top of each other.

### **International criticism**

The controversy over the images and allegations of physical and sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib has caused a furor in the Iraqi and other Arab media, and foreign officials have accused the Americans of being hypocrites for claiming to liberate Iraqis then abusing them.

U.S. embassies in Europe, South America and the Middle East have asked the Pentagon for help in responding to criticism in their host countries, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

"There are certainly a lot of people who are very disturbed by the pictures and the reports that are coming out," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

The Pentagon has been investigating abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib since January when allegations of beatings, torture and sexual abuse surfaced, according to the Reuters news service. U.S. officials blame the abuse on lack of training and have pointed the finger at the soldiers directly involved. Secretary of State Colin Powell called the soldiers' behavior "despicable."

But many in Congress and in Iraq have criticized the top U.S. leadership for not cracking down on the abuses earlier and for only reacting after the photos were published, months after the actual incidents.

"If you wanted to write a script or a scenario as to how you undermine the credibility of the United States in the Middle East today, you couldn't have done a better job," Hisham Melhem, a

correspondent for the Beirut newspaper As-Safir, said on Monday's NewsHour. "I think one could argue if you have any illusions about winning hearts and mind in Iraq and the Arab world for that matter, you should forget that."

Facing continued criticism at home and abroad President Bush appeared on two Arab news channels Wednesday, condemning the alleged abuse as "abhorrent" and pledging to punish those involved.

"There will be investigations, people will be brought to justice," the president said. He also said what happened in Abu Ghraib does not represent "the America I know."

### **Rules of protection for prisoners**

Prisoners at Abu Ghraib are protected under the Geneva Convention, a document signed by 47 countries including the United States that outlines the rules of war and occupation. Because of this, the soldiers responsible for the abuse could be charged with war crimes.

"Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the detaining power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present convention," Article 13 of the convention reads.

"In particular, no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are not justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the prisoners concerned and carried out in his interest.

"Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity," according to the convention.

The Uniform Code of Military Justice, the American armed forces' criminal laws, also prohibits the abuse of prisoners in military custody, according to Georgetown University professor and retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. Gary Solis.

"Common sense, good judgment and one's basic humanity should be your guides as to what you can and cannot do. Once you cross that line, once you begin to torture people, once you begin to pose them in photographs like this, then you have committed offenses not only under the Geneva Convention but the Uniform Code of Military Justice and humanitarian treaties as well," Solis told the NewsHour.

### **Ongoing investigations**

The military is still investigating the allegations at Abu Ghraib. Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the U.S. commander in Iraq, has said six of the soldiers who supervised the prison during the time the abuse took place would face punishment.

Army officials on Tuesday also said a criminal investigation is under way into the deaths of ten prisoners in U.S. custody at other facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*By Kristina Nwazota, Online NewsHour*

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