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C.I.A. Abuse Cases Detailed in Report on Detainees

By MARK MAZZETTI and SCOTT SHANE
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WASHINGTON —The Justice Department released a [long-secret report](#) Monday chronicling abuses inside the [Central Intelligence Agency's](#) overseas prisons, showing how interrogators choked a prisoner repeatedly and threatened to kill another detainee's children.

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John H. Durham, a veteran Connecticut prosecutor, has been investigating the C.I.A.

In response to the findings, Attorney General [Eric H. Holder Jr.](#) chose John H. Durham, a veteran prosecutor from Connecticut who has been investigating the C.I.A.'s destruction of [interrogation videotapes](#), to determine whether a full criminal investigation of the conduct of agency employees or contractors was warranted. The review will be the most politically explosive inquiry since Mr. Holder took over the Justice Department in February.

The decision was a significant blow to the C.I.A, and Mr. Holder said he would be criticized for undercutting the intelligence agency's work. He said that he agreed with [President Obama's](#) oft-expressed desire not to get mired in disputes over the policies of former President [George W. Bush](#), but that his review of reports on the [C.I.A. interrogation program](#) left him no choice.

"As attorney general, my duty is to examine the facts and to follow the law," [Mr. Holder said in a statement](#). "Given all of the information currently available, it is clear to me that this

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Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. named a federal prosecutor to investigate abuse of prisoners held by the Central Intelligence Agency.

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available, it is clear to me that this review is the only responsible course of action for me to take.”

Although large portions of [the 109-page report](#) are blacked out, it gives new details about a variety of abuses inside the C.I.A.'s overseas prisons, including suggestions about sexually assaulting members of a detainee's family, staging mock executions, intimidation with a handgun and power drill, and blowing cigar and cigarette smoke into prisoners' faces to make them vomit.

The report found that the [interrogations](#) obtained critical information to identify terrorists and stop potential plots and said some imprisoned terrorists provided more information after being exposed to brutal treatment.

But the inspector general's review raised broad questions about the legality, political acceptability and effectiveness of the harshest of the C.I.A.'s methods, including some not authorized by the Justice Department and others that were approved, like the near-drowning technique of [waterboarding](#).

“This review identified concerns about the use of the waterboard, specifically whether the risks of its use were justified by the results, whether it has been unnecessarily used in some instances,” the report said, and

whether the frequency and volume of water poured over the prisoner's mouth and nose exceeded the Justice Department's legal authorization.

The attorney general said his decision to order an inquiry was based in part on the recommendation of the Justice Department's ethics office, which called for a new review of several interrogation cases.

In what appeared to be a response to the Justice Department's release, the C.I.A. later on Monday released previously secret agency reports from 2004 and 2005 that detailed intelligence scoops produced by the interrogation program.

One of the reports calls the program “a crucial pillar of U.S. counterterrorism efforts” and describes how interrogations helped

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unravel a network headed by an Indonesian terrorist known as Hambali. The other report details information elicited from [Khalid Shaikh Mohammed](#), chief planner of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, saying it “dramatically expanded our universe of knowledge on [Al Qaeda](#)’s plots.”

Those reports, which former Vice President [Dick Cheney](#) had sought to have released earlier this year, do not refer to any specific interrogation methods and do not assess their effectiveness.

The inspector general’s report, by contrast, offers details of abusive methods. During one session, a C.I.A. interrogator told Abd al-Rahim al Nashiri, charged with plotting the 2000 bombing of the [Navy](#) destroyer Cole, that if he did not cooperate with his captors, “we could get your mother in here” and “we can bring your family in here.”

According to the report, the interrogator wanted Mr. Nashiri to infer for “psychological” reasons that his female relatives might be sexually abused.

In another session of questioning, the report said, one C.I.A. interrogator told investigators that Mr. Mohammed was told that if there was another attack on American soil, the C.I.A. would “kill your children.” Mr. Mohammed’s young sons were in the custody of Pakistani and American authorities at the time.

Among a litany of C.I.A. tactics, the report describes the “hard takedown,” when a detainee was grabbed and thrown to the floor before being moved to a sleep-deprivation cell. It details baths given to Mr. Nashiri, saying he was sometimes scrubbed with “the kind of brush one uses in a bath to remove stubborn dirt” to induce pain. In July 2002, the report says, a C.I.A. interrogator grabbed a detainee’s neck to restrict the prisoner’s carotid artery until he began to faint. Another officer then “shook the detainee to wake him,” and the “pressure point” technique was repeated twice more.

Interrogators also staged a mock execution in 2002 to intimidate a detainee. C.I.A. officers began screaming outside the room where he was being interrogated. When leaving the room, he “passed a guard who was dressed as a hooded detainee, lying motionless on the ground, and made to appear as if he had been shot to death.”

In 2003, C.I.A. officers began using another technique — called “water dousing” — that involved laying a detainee on a plastic sheet and pouring water over him for 10 to 15 minutes.

According to the report, an interrogator believed this was an effective technique, and sent a cable back to C.I.A. headquarters requesting guidelines.

A return cable explained that a detainee “must be placed on a towel or sheet, may not be placed naked on the bare cement floor, and the air temperature must exceed 65 degrees if the detainee will not be dried immediately.”

Such detailed guidelines reflected concern throughout the C.I.A. about the potential legal consequences for agency officers. Officers “expressed unsolicited concern about the possibility of recrimination or legal action” and said “they feared that the agency would not stand behind them,” the report said.

The C.I.A. director, [Leon E. Panetta](#), issued a statement to employees Monday that carefully avoided defending the brutal treatment while expressing support for the agency’s efforts.

Mr. Panetta wrote that he was not “eager to enter the debate, already politicized, over the ultimate utility of the agency’s past detention and interrogation effort.” He said the program had produced crucial intelligence but added that use of the harsh methods “will remain a legitimate area of dispute.”

Members of Congress from the left and the right criticized Mr. Holder’s decision.

Senator [Ron Wyden](#), Democrat of Oregon and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, criticized the potential focus on interrogators, suggesting that ignoring Justice Department lawyers and senior Bush administration officials in the investigation had echoes of the Abu Ghraib scandal, when “lower ranking troops who committed abuses were hung out to dry.”

But Representative Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said the Justice Department inquiry risked disrupting current counterterrorism operations. He said abuse charges had already been “exhaustively reviewed.”

The choice of Mr. Durham is likely to speed the review’s progress, because his team of [F.B.I.](#) agents and lawyers was already deeply immersed in the details of the C.I.A. program. Since January 2008, they have been investigating C.I.A. officials’ decision in 2005 to destroy videotapes documenting interrogations of [Abu Zubaydah](#) and Mr. Nashiri.

The inspector general’s staff reviewed the 92 tapes before they were destroyed, and the report released Monday revealed that 11 of the videotapes were entirely blank and that two others were almost blank. The report does not indicate whether the videotapes were erased by C.I.A. officers.

David Johnston contributed reporting.

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