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The Huffington Post

Afghanistan Secret Prisons Confirmed by US

4/8/2011

The CIA's infamous secret network of "black site" interrogation centers is gone. But suspected terrorists in Afghanistan are being held and interrogated for weeks at temporary sites, including one run by the elite special operations forces at Bagram Air Base, according to U.S. officials who revealed details of the detention network to The Associated Press.

The Pentagon has previously denied operating secret jails in Afghanistan, although human rights groups and former detainees have described the facilities. U.S. military and other government officials confirmed that the detention centers exist but described them as temporary holding pens whose primary purpose is to gather intelligence.

The Pentagon also has said that detainees only stay in temporary detention sites for 14 days, unless they are extended under extraordinary circumstances. But U.S. officials told the AP that detainees can be held at the temporary jails for up to nine weeks, depending on the value of information they produce. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the program is classified.

The most secretive of roughly 20 temporary sites is run by the military's elite counterterrorism unit, the Joint Special Operations Command, at Bagram Air Base. Working together with CIA and other intelligence officers at the site, JSOC questions high-value targets, the detainees suspected of top roles in the Taliban, al-Qaida or other militant groups.

The site's location, a short drive from a well-known public detention center, has been alleged for more than a year.

The secrecy under which the U.S. runs that jail and about 20 others is noteworthy because of President Barack Obama's criticism of the old network of secret CIA prisons where interrogators sometimes used the harshest available methods, including the simulated drowning known as waterboarding.

Human rights advocates say the severest of the Bush-era interrogation methods are gone, but the conditions at the new interrogation sites still raise questions. Obama pledged when he took office that the United States would not torture anyone, but former detainees describe harsh treatment that some human rights groups claim borders on inhumane.

The secrecy surrounding both the site and the rules governing how long such high-value targets can be kept shows that two years into the Obama administration, the White House still hasn't set definitive detainee policy, especially when it comes to how a high-value target like al-Qaida fugitive Osama bin Laden would be treated if caught alive.

CIA Director Leon Panetta said in February that bin Laden would be taken to Bagram first, then probably to Guantanamo Bay.