

INTERNATIONAL
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Red Cross monitors barred from Guantánamo

By William Glaberson

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A confidential 2003 manual for operating the Guantánamo detention center shows that military officials had a policy of denying detainees access to independent monitors from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The manual said one goal was to "exploit the disorientation and disorganization felt by a newly arrived detainee," by denying access to the Koran and by preventing visits with Red Cross representatives, who have a long history of monitoring the conditions under which prisoners in international conflicts are held. The document said that even after their initial weeks at Guantánamo, some detainees would not be permitted to see representatives of the International Red Cross, known as the ICRC.

It was permissible, the document said, for some long-term detainees to have "No access. No contact of any kind with the ICRC."

Some legal experts and advocates for detainees said Thursday that the policy might have violated international law, which provides for such monitoring to assure humanitarian treatment and to limit the ability of governments to hold detainees secretly.

The document, a two-inch-thick operations manual, was first posted on Wikileaks, a Web site that encourages posting of leaked materials. Military officials said that the manual appeared genuine but described outdated policies and that all Guantánamo detainees could now see Red Cross monitors. In response to critics' assertions that the detention camp in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, may have violated international law, a spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Bush III, said, "I am in no position to speculate about what happened in 2003."

Simon Schorno, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the organization was aware that it was not seeing all Guantánamo detainees from 2002, when the detention camp was opened, to 2004. He said the policies outlined in the manual "run counter to the manner in which the ICRC conducts its detention visits at Guantánamo Bay and around the world."

He added that Red Cross officials worked with American officials "to resolve this issue confidentially, since gaining access to all detainees in full accordance with its standard practice was paramount."

The Red Cross has been critical of Guantánamo, saying publicly in 2003 that keeping detainees indefinitely without allowing them to know their fate was unacceptable and, in confidential reports, that the physical and psychological treatment of detainees amounted to torture.

The manual is a detailed directive of standard operating procedures at Guantánamo intended for use by the hundreds of people involved in running the detention camp. It provides one of the most complete portraits of the rules of the camp in its early days, when it was a largely closed place where detainees were not publicly identified.

In some instances, the manual echoed the arguments then being advanced by Washington officials as they fended off criticism of Guantánamo. The manual described point-by-point instructions for many camp procedures, including feeding and restraining detainees, and forced extraction of inmates from their cells by military troops. It said a major goal was to foster detainees' dependence on their interrogators, in part by isolating them. In a section labeled "psychological deterrence," the manual said military working dogs should be walked in the camp "to demonstrate physical presence to detainees."

The spokesman, Bush, said Thursday that dogs were no longer used at the detention camp.

Some international law experts said Thursday that they were startled that military officials had put in writing a policy of denying the Red Cross access to prisoners.

"The world recognizes that the ICRC should get access" to prison camps, said Richard Wilson, a law professor at American University who was until recently a lawyer for a Guantánamo detainee.

Deborah Pearlstein, a visiting scholar at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, said international principles were aimed at preventing governments from "disappearing" opponents. "ICRC access and the obligation to record and account for detainees is very clear under international law," Pearlstein said.

The military spokesman, Bush, said: "All I can tell you is what we do today. And the absolute policy now, today, is that the ICRC is granted access to everything."

Correction:

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