

FAQs About: U.S. Military Actions in Response to Abuses at Abu Ghraib Prison

In the fall of 2003, LTG Sanchez, U.S. commander in Iraq, ordered MG Ryder, the Army Provost Marshal, to conduct an investigation into the U.S. run prison system in Iraq, and to make recommendations to improve it. Ryder reported in November that there were potential human rights, training, and manpower issues system-wide that needed immediate attention. Ryder said that he had serious concerns about military intelligence teams encouraging MP units guarding the prisoners to “set favorable conditions for subsequent interviews” of the detainees by the military intelligence teams. However, Ryder concluded that “no military police units purposefully applied inappropriate confinement practices”.¹

In January, 2004, Specialist Darby, an MP, got a CD from one of the MPs in the 372nd Military Police (MP) Company (part of the 320th MP Battalion, 800th MP Brigade) assigned to guard detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison and came across pictures of naked detainees. Darby turned the CD over to an agent of the Army Criminal Investigative Division, telling them that what was shown in the pictures was very wrong.² Three days later, LTG Sanchez ordered MG Taguba to conduct a major investigation into the Army’s prison system in Iraq.³ The Pentagon announced its investigation to the media on January 16th.⁴ MG Taguba completed his investigation in late February, submitting a 53 page report.

MG Taguba concluded that between October and December, 2003, there were numerous incidents of “sadistic, blatant, and criminal abuses” by soldiers of the 372nd Military Police Company and members of the intelligence community at the Abu Ghraib prison.⁵ He also stated that contrary to the findings in MG Ryder’s report, personnel assigned to the 372nd MP Company were directed to change facility procedures to set the conditions for military intelligence interrogations.

MG Taguba recommended that COL Pappas, commander of one of the Military Intelligence brigades, receive non-judicial punishment and a letter of reprimand, and that LTCOL Jordan, the director of the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center be relieved of duty and reprimanded. He also recommended that two civilian Army contractors working with military intelligence to be fired, reprimanded and have their security clearances revoked for lying to the investigating team and ordering or allowing military police to set conditions for interrogations.

MG Taguba found that BG Karpinski was rarely seen at the prison she was supposed to be running. He concluded that many of the problems inherent in the brigade were caused or exacerbated by poor leadership and the refusal of its chain of command to both establish and enforce basic standards and principles among soldiers. He recommended that BG Karpinski and 7 brigade military police officers be relieved of command and formally reprimanded. BG Karpinski was relieved of command and given a general officer letter of admonishment.⁶

17 soldiers were implicated in the investigation into abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. 14 of them were from the 372nd Military Police Company. They face either criminal or administrative charges.⁷

After a separate criminal investigation, criminal charges were filed in March against six soldiers from the 372nd MP Company alleging abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.⁸ By late April, three pretrial hearings had been completed, all recommending trial by court-martial. The other three were delayed at the request of defense counsel to allow them more time to prepare.⁹

LTG Sanchez has notified six commissioned and noncommissioned officers of his intention to give each a general officer memorandum of reprimand. A seventh officer was notified that he or she would receive a letter of admonishment. One of those receiving a letter of reprimand was LTC Phillabaum, the commander of the 320th MP Battalion. In his report, MG Taguba criticized Phillabaum, calling him “an extremely ineffective commander and leader”.¹⁰

Early in March, the Army also sent a 24 member Mobile Training Team composed of military police experienced in running detention facilities to Iraq to shore up training and supervision.¹¹ All U.S. military guards and interrogators in Iraq have now received additional instruction in international rules governing the treatment of detainees.¹²

As a result of the Abu Ghraib allegations, the Army Inspector General’s office opened a separate investigation in February of other U.S. detention operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the head of the Army Reserve is reviewing training of reservists assigned to detention facilities.¹³

By early May, the military police and intelligence units at the Abu Ghraib prison were replaced, and a single MG placed in charge of all detainee operations in Iraq.¹⁴

The U.S. holds nearly 8,080 detainees in Iraq as security threats. These are people who have been captured as a consequence of anti-coalition or anti-Iraqi activity. About 4,000 of these are held at Abu Ghraib prison. In March, the U.S. completed the turnover of approximately 7,000 criminal suspects to the new Iraqi government ministry overseeing law enforcement. In addition, the coalition is holding fewer than 30 Iraqi prisoners of war (PWs). All other PWs have been released.¹⁵

¹ Seymour M. Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib”, *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2004.

² Hersh.

³ “Probes of Detainee Deaths Reported”, *Washington Post*, May 5, 2004, 1.

⁴ “Rumsfeld Backs Military’s Handling of Abuse Scandal”, *Washington Times*, May 12, 2004, 15.

⁵ Hersh, Seymour.

⁶ Hersh, Seymour

⁷ “Families of the 372nd Tormented by Stories of POW Abuse in Iraq”, *Baltimore Sun*, April 30, 2004.

⁸ “Iraq Prison Supervisors Face Army Reprimand”, *Washington Post*, May 4, 2004, 1.

⁹ “G.I.’s Are Accused of Abusing Iraqi Captives”, *New York Times*, April 29, 2004.

¹⁰ “Iraq Prison Supervisors Face Army Reprimand”, *Washington Post*, May 4, 2004.

¹¹ “U.S. Sends Specialists to Train Prison Units”, Washington Post, May 4, 2004, 1.

¹² “Probe of Detainee Deaths Reported”, Washington Post, May 5, 2004, 1.

¹³ “Iraq Prison Supervisors Face Army Reprimand”, Washington Post, May 4, 2004, 1.

¹⁴ “Probes of Detainee Deaths Reported”, Washington Post, May 5, 2004, 1.

¹⁵ “Most Prisoners in Iraq Jails Called ‘Threat to Security’”, Washington Times, May 6, 2004, 1.