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Detainee's Lawyers to Get Interrogation Tapes

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A federal judge on Monday disclosed the existence of videotapes that may reveal potentially abusive interrogations of a Guantanamo Bay detainee, and ordered the government to provide copies of the tapes to the man's lawyers.

Lawyers for the detainee, Mohammed al-Qahtani, say they think the tapes will show that their client made incriminating statements only because he was tortured.

A top Bush administration official, Susan J. Crawford, conceded in January that Qahtani, 30, had been subjected to techniques that included sustained isolation, sleep deprivation, nudity and prolonged exposure to cold.

She said at the time that such treatment, which took place in late 2002 and early 2003 at the U.S. military prison in Cuba, placed Qahtani in a "life threatening situation."

"We tortured" Qahtani, Crawford said at the time. She said she would not allow his military-commission trial to go forward.

The detainee's attorneys, who work for the nonprofit group Center for Constitutional Rights, are challenging the prisoner's confinement in a federal lawsuit.

The government alleges that Qahtani, a Saudi, planned to participate in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks but was denied entry to the United States in August of that year. Authorities are justifying Qahtani's continued confinement based on incriminating statements he made after the abusive interrogations stopped.

Qahtani's lawyers say the tapes, which document an earlier interrogation period, will shed light on why their client later confessed to being sent to the United States by the mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks.

He now denies those allegations, his lawyers say.

"Once the abuse and torture started, any subsequent statements he made were tainted by the earlier torture, the damage it caused and the fear of further torture," said one of his lawyers, Gitanjali S. Gutierrez.

Gutierrez was seeking all videotapes made by the military starting in August 2002. In her order, U.S. District Judge Rosemary M. Collyer said the government had to turn over videotapes documenting interrogations that took place between Nov. 15 and Nov. 22. That is just before the military began keeping written records of the detainee's interrogations.

A Justice Department spokesman said the government was reviewing the order.

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