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Exclusive

Top Bush aides pushed for Guantánamo torture

Senior officials bypassed army chief to introduce interrogation methods

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US military chief General Richard Myers. Photographer: Khalil Mazraawi/AFP

America's most senior general was "hoodwinked" by top Bush administration officials determined to push through aggressive interrogation techniques of terror suspects held at Guantánamo Bay, leading to the US military abandoning its age-old ban on the cruel and inhumane treatment of prisoners, the Guardian reveals today.

General Richard Myers, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff from 2001 to 2005, wrongly believed that inmates at Guantánamo and other prisons were protected by the Geneva conventions and from abuse tantamount to torture.

The way he was duped by senior officials in Washington, who believed the Geneva conventions and other traditional safeguards were out of date, is disclosed in a devastating account of their role, extracts of which appear in today's Guardian.

In his new book, *Torture Team*, Philippe Sands QC, professor of law at University College London, reveals that:

- Senior Bush administration figures pushed through previously outlawed measures with the aid of inexperienced military officials at Guantánamo.
- Myers believes he was a victim of "intrigue" by top lawyers at the department of justice, the office of vice-president Dick Cheney, and at Donald Rumsfeld's defence department.
- The Guantánamo lawyers charged with devising interrogation techniques were inspired by the exploits of Jack Bauer in the American TV series 24.
- Myers wrongly believed interrogation techniques had been taken from the army's field manual.

The lawyers, all political appointees, who pushed through the interrogation techniques were Alberto Gonzales, David Addington and William Haynes. Also involved were Doug Feith, Rumsfeld's under-secretary for policy, and Jay Bybee and John Yoo, two assistant attorney generals.

The revelations have sparked a fierce response in the US from those familiar with the contents of the book, and who are determined to establish accountability for the way the Bush administration violated international and domestic law by sanctioning prisoner abuse and torture.

The Bush administration has tried to explain away the ill-treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by blaming junior officials. Sands' book establishes that pressure for aggressive and cruel treatment of detainees came from the top and was sanctioned by the most senior lawyers.

Myers was one top official who did not understand the implications of what was being

done. Sands, who spent three hours with the former general, says he was "confused" about the decisions that were taken.

Myers mistakenly believed that new techniques recommended by Haynes and authorised by Rumsfeld in December 2002 for use by the military at Guantánamo had been taken from the US army field manual. They included hooding, sensory deprivation, and physical and mental abuse.

"As we worked through the list of techniques, Myers became increasingly hesitant and troubled," writes Sands. "Haynes and Rumsfeld had been able to run rings around him."

Myers and his closest advisers were cut out of the decision-making process. He did not know that Bush administration officials were changing the rules allowing interrogation techniques, including the use of dogs, amounting to torture.

"We never authorised torture, we just didn't, not what we would do," Myers said. Sands comments: "He really had taken his eye off the ball ... he didn't ask too many questions ... and kept his distance from the decision-making process."

Larry Wilkerson, a former army officer and chief of staff to Colin Powell, US secretary of state at the time, told the Guardian: "I do know that Rumsfeld had neutralised the chairman [Myers] in many significant ways.

"The secretary did this by cutting [Myers] out of important communications, meetings, deliberations and plans.

"At the end of the day, however, Dick Myers was not a very powerful chairman in the first place, one reason Rumsfeld recommended him for the job".

He added: "Haynes, Feith, Yoo, Bybee, Gonzalez and - at the apex - Addington, should never travel outside the US, except perhaps to Saudi Arabia and Israel. They broke the law; they violated their professional ethical code. In future, some government may build the case necessary to prosecute them in a foreign court, or in an international court."

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"Torture at Guantánamo was sanctioned by the most senior advisers to the president, the vice president, and the secretary of defense, according to the international lawyer and professor of law at University College London Philippe Sands, who has conducted a forensic examination of the chain of command leading from the top of the administration to the camp at Guantánamo," Vanity Fair will report. on newstands today. The article directly contradicts the administration's account to Congress, which placed responsibility on military commanders and interrogators on the ground for the pract