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U.S. doctors tied to prisoner abuse

Faked death certificates, report says
Helped design torture at Abu Ghraib

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LONDON—U.S. military doctors and medics at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad were "complicit" in the torture of Iraqi detainees and faked death certificates to try and cover up homicides, says a report in a top British medical journal.

The scathing analysis in *The Lancet* puts the spotlight on the role of medical professionals in a torture scandal that has so far focused on the abuse committed by U.S. soldiers.

The report, written by University of Minnesota professor Steven Miles, says U.S. military doctors, nurses and medics at Abu Ghraib grossly violated medical ethics and international treaties on human rights.

"There was a fundamental breakdown of the military medical system for these prisoners," Miles, a doctor in the university's bioethics centre, said in an interview yesterday. "The medical professionals failed to provide basic medical health care to the prisoners. And not only were they aware of human rights abuses, they were actually complicit in them."

Using evidence from U.S. congressional hearings, sworn statements of detainees and soldiers, and reports from military investigators, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the media, Miles concluded that doctors were involved in the torture from the start.

"The medical system collaborated with designing and implementing psychologically and physically coercive interrogations," Miles writes in this week's edition of *The Lancet*, regarded as a leading international journal on medical ethics.

"Army officials stated that a physician and a psychiatrist helped design, approve, and monitor interrogations at Abu Ghraib."



WASHINGTON POST

In this undated photo, a hooded Iraqi detainee appears to be cuffed at both wrists and collapsed over a rail inside the Abu Ghraib Prison.

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The report cites an example of a "medically monitored interrogation" where the prisoner "collapsed and was apparently unconscious after a beating.

"Medical staff revived the detainee and left, and the abuse continued," the report says, citing the sworn statement of an Abu Ghraib detainee.

In another instance, "a medic inserted an intravenous catheter into the corpse of a detainee who died under torture in order to create evidence that he was alive at the hospital," the report says, citing evidence from a military police officer.

A U.S. military spokesperson told the Associated Press the incidents recounted by Miles came primarily from the Pentagon's own investigation.

"Many of these cases remain under investigation, and charges will be brought against any individual where there is evidence of abuse," said Lt. Col. Barry Johnson. Military officials in Washington also said a high-level army inquiry will cite medical personnel who knew of abuse at Abu Ghraib but did not report it up the chain of command.

The inquiry will also criticize senior U.S. commanders for a lack of leadership that allowed abuses to occur, but finds no evidence they ordered the abuse, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Photographs of U.S. soldiers torturing and humiliating prisoners at Abu Ghraib were first published in April and caused international condemnation.

Miles says he has no idea how many doctors were involved in the Abu Ghraib abuse. But his report suggests medical abuse was widespread, and argues that similar failures occurred in U.S. prisons in Afghanistan.

He says "death certificates of detainees in Afghanistan and Iraq were falsified" and medical investigators "routinely" attributed deaths to natural causes when proof of abuse was glaring.

"In one example, soldiers tied a beaten detainee to the top of his cell door and gagged him," Miles writes, citing an Abu Ghraib case noted by New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"The death certificate indicated that he died of 'natural causes ... during his sleep.' After news media coverage, the Pentagon revised the certificate to say that the death was a 'homicide' caused by 'blunt force injuries and asphyxia.'"

In an interview, Miles said he decided to investigate the role of doctors in the torture scandal because of a nagging question: "Why were the doctors quiet? Why didn't the medical profession blow the whistle?"

The Lancet followed Miles' report with an editorial reminding military medical personnel in Iraq and at the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba that they're doctors first and soldiers second.

"Health-care workers should now break their silence," the journal said. "Those who were involved in or witnessed ill-treatment need to give a full and accurate account of events at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay."

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