



C.I.A. Held Qaeda Leader in Secret Jail for Months

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WASHINGTON, April 27 — The [Central Intelligence Agency](#) held a captured Qaeda leader in a secret prison since last fall and transferred him last week to the American military prison at [Guantánamo Bay](#), Cuba, officials said Friday.

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Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, an Iraqi Kurd who is said to have joined [Al Qaeda](#) in the late 1990s and ascended to become a top aide to [Osama bin Laden](#), is the first terrorism

suspect known to have been held in secret C.I.A. jails since President Bush announced the transfer of 14 captives to Guantánamo Bay last September.

The Pentagon announced the transfer, giving few details about his arrest or confinement.

Mr. Iraqi's case suggests that the C.I.A. may have adopted a new model for handling prisoners held secretly — a practice that Mr. Bush said could resume and that Congress permitted when it passed the Military Commissions Act of 2006.

Unlike past C.I.A. detainees, including the Sept. 11 plotter [Khalid Shaikh Mohammed](#), who was held by the agency for several years after being seized in Pakistan in 2003, Mr. Iraqi was turned over to the Pentagon after a few months of interrogation. He appears to have been taken into C.I.A. custody just weeks after Mr. Bush declared C.I.A. jails empty.

Last fall, Mr. Bush declared the agency's interrogations "one of the most successful intelligence efforts in American history." But its secret detention of terrorism suspects has been widely criticized by human rights organizations and foreign governments as a violation of international law that relied on interrogation methods verging on torture.

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Intelligence officials said that under questioning Mr. Iraqi had provided valuable intelligence about Qaeda hierarchy and operations. It appears he gave up this information after being subjected to standard interrogation methods approved for the Defense Department — not harsher methods that the C.I.A. is awaiting approval to use.

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A debate in the administration has delayed approval of the proposed C.I.A. methods.

Military and intelligence officials said the prisoner was captured last fall on his way to Iraq, where he may have been sent by top Qaeda leaders in Pakistan to take a senior position in Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. That group has claimed responsibility for some of the deadliest attacks in Iraq, including the bombing last year of the Golden Mosque in Samarra.

In a message to agency employees on Friday, Gen. [Michael V. Hayden](#), the C.I.A. director, called the capture “a significant victory.” He said C.I.A. operatives had played “a key role in efforts to locate” Mr. Iraqi. Though American officials would not say where or when he had been captured, they said it was not in Pakistan or Iran, countries where he was known to have operated in recent years.

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Human rights advocates expressed anger that the United States continued a program of secret detention, and some wondered why the C.I.A. claimed it needed harsh interrogation methods to extract information from detainees when it appeared that Mr. Iraqi had given up information using Pentagon interrogation practices.

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“The C.I.A. can’t seem to get its story straight, said John Sifton of [Human Rights Watch](#). “If they can get good intelligence without using abusive techniques, why do they so desperately need to use the abusive techniques?” But he said that there was no way to know whether Mr. Iraqi had been mistreated, because “no independent monitors have been able to see him since his arrest.”

In his message on Friday, General Hayden said that the agency always operated “in keeping with American laws and values.”

American officials have long been worried about efforts by Qaeda leadership in Pakistan to exert control over its Iraqi offshoot, known as Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and the dispatch of Mr. Iraqi to help run the Iraqi affiliate has raised concern among American military officials that the links between the groups are growing.

“We do definitely see links to the greater Al Qaeda network,” Gen. [David H. Petraeus](#), the top American commander in Iraq, told reporters at the Pentagon on Thursday.

But the relationship between Qaeda fighters in Iraq and the top leadership has appeared to

wax and wane over the years, often over tactical disagreements.

In 2005, [Ayman al-Zawahri](#), Al Qaeda's second in command, wrote a letter to [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#), then the top Al Qaeda operative in Iraq, urging him to refrain from killing Shiites. But since then, terrorist experts have said that they see Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia as largely independent of the organization hub in Pakistan.

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