

CIA forced Bush hand on secret prisons

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The Bush administration had to empty its secret prisons and transfer terror suspects to the military-run detention centre at Guantánamo this month in part because CIA interrogators had refused to carry out further interrogations and run the secret facilities, according to former CIA officials and people close to the programme.

The former officials said the CIA interrogators' refusal was a factor in forcing the Bush administration to act earlier than it might have wished.

When Mr Bush announced the suspension of the secret prison programme in a speech before the fifth anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks, some analysts thought he was trying to gain political momentum before the November midterm congressional elections.

The administration explained its decision in light of the legal uncertainty surrounding permissible interrogation techniques following the June Supreme Court ruling that all terrorist suspects in detention were entitled to protection under Common Article Three of the Geneva Conventions.

But the former CIA officials said Mr Bush's hand was forced because interrogators had refused to continue their work until the legal situation was clarified because they were concerned they could be prosecuted for using illegal techniques.

In an interview with the Financial Times, John Bellinger, legal adviser to the state department, said there had been "very little operational activity" on CIA interrogations since the passage last December of a bill proposed by Senator John McCain outlawing torture and inhumane treatment of prisoners.

Key figures among the 14 prisoners transferred to Guantánamo, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, had been held in secret centres for three years or more.

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