

Da Afghanistan 23 Oct 04 Prisoner abuse in Afghanistan

A SORDID tale is unfolding in Kabul where three Americans have been charged with kidnapping, running a private jail and torturing prisoners. While refuting the torture allegations, one of the men, Jonathan Idema, a former member of the US Special Forces, said that his operations were fully backed by the Pentagon and that he was in touch with the office of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Denying links with Mr Idema's group, the State Department has portrayed the men as mercenaries running their own counter-terrorism operation — although, in the latest twist to the story, the US military has admitted that it had, in fact, detained a suspected terrorist delivered by Mr Idema.

If Mr Idema's revelations prove correct — and he says that he has evidence to corroborate his claims — Washington will come in for severe flak on account of its deteriorating human rights record in foreign countries,

especially Iraq where criticism of the Abu Ghraib jail scandal has not died down yet. Here, 'democratic' America was seen at its worst, and it is feared that if reports are true, Afghan prisoners, at the mercy of American jailers, may witness a repeat of what happened at Abu Ghraib. For, it is not only the undercover world of 'bounty hunters' in Afghanistan who are perpetrating horrendous kinds of torture on their victims to obtain information before handing them over to the authorities. The American military itself is in charge of private jails where harsh interrogation tactics are routinely employed on prisoners to extract confessions. Media reports speak of severe beatings and sexual humiliation of the prisoners, some of whom have died in custody, and no legal counsel is extended to the detainees. Somehow, attempts at self-investigation — lately in the form of a report on prisoner atrocities — appear hypocritical.