

U.S. Says Mexico Tortured American in Custody

BY NICHOLAS CASEY

The U.S. Justice Department has determined that an American convicted in Mexico of drug trafficking was tortured by authorities while in Mexican custody, a move that immediately freed him from prison and added troubling official allegations of abuse in Mexico's drug war.

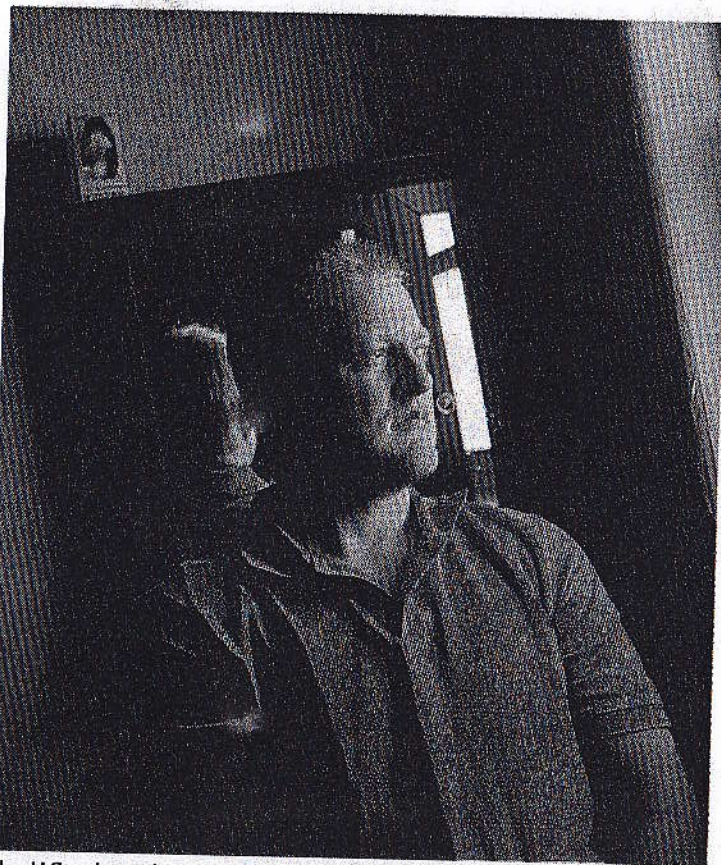
The Department's Parole Commission, an agency that sets release dates for Americans convicted of crimes abroad and transferred home, said that Shohn Huckabee, 24, was "tortured in foreign custody" after Mexican soldiers said they discovered marijuana in his car. Mr. Huckabee denies the charges.

The parole board reduced the five-year sentence given to him by a Mexican judge, and released him with "time served," or 26 months, under a treaty signed between the two countries. The commission didn't comment on the marijuana charges.

"I'm definitely happy to be back with my family but the two years lost were very hard, both for me and for our family, and there's no recouping the time," said Mr. Huckabee Tuesday from his home near El Paso, Texas.

The Dec. 1 finding could raise tensions between Washington and Mexico City over how Mexico is pursuing the drug war. Un-

Dominic Bracco // Prime for The Wall Street Journal



The U.S. released Huckabee, shown Tuesday at his home near El Paso.

der terms of the Merida Initiative, the \$1.4 billion aid package given to Mexico and Central American governments to fight drugs, Mexico could lose 15% of the aid if there is evidence of hu-

man-rights violations.

A spokesman for Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R., Texas), warned Tuesday that the State Department "should be very carefully vetting Merida fund-

ing," and asked that it "investigate the reported torture of Shohn Huckabee."

The finding adds credibility to mounting accusations by rights groups that the Mexican army and police forces have resorted to tactics like torture and disappearances in pursuing drug cartels and trying to stop the country's spiraling violence.

Last week, Human Rights Watch, a New York-based advocacy group, issued a report on Mexico's conduct of the drug war saying it found credible evidence of the participation of security forces in at least 170 cases of torture.

Mexican President Felipe Calderón's office has said it is investigating allegations of rights abuse, but insists that rights groups should be focusing their accusations against drug gangs themselves, who routinely kill rivals and innocent victims.

The torture allegations, reported in a 2010 Wall Street Journal article, stem from a December 2009 incident in which Mr. Huckabee and his friend Carlos Quijas were arrested while returning home after a day spent across the border.

The Mexican military, who stopped the men just as they were reaching a border bridge, said they found two suitcases of marijuana in their vehicle. After

briefly questioning the men at a barracks, the pair was taken to be booked by civil authorities, the military said at the time.

The Americans offer a different account. They say the military planted the marijuana in their vehicle after stopping them. The men say they were then taken to the military base, where they were beaten, subjected to electric shocks and threatened with death.

During the trial, three window washers who witnessed the arrest testified that they had seen the army put suitcases into their vehicle; a doctor's report indicated that they had been bruised while in military custody. Nonetheless, a Mexican civilian court convicted the two men.

Mr. Huckabee was transferred to the U.S. to serve out his sentence in September, and Mr. Quijas is awaiting a similar transfer.

In a statement last year the army said it didn't harm the men. The Mexican president's office declined to comment.

Johanna Markind, assistant general counsel of the parole commission, said that in cases involving international transfers such as Mr. Huckabee, the foreign government provides documentation of the case, but is not typically asked for its version of events even if there is an allegation such as torture.

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in Parliament on Wednesday that the cabinet's recent decision to allow foreign supermarkets to

same as in November, to 4.25%.

James Glynn

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expanded 2.1% in the third quarter compared with the 2010 third