Senior lawyers in the Obama administration are deeply divided over some of the counterterrorism powers they inherited from former President George W. Bush, according to interviews and a review of legal briefs.

The rift has been most pronounced between top lawyers in the State Department and the Pentagon, though it has also involved conflicts among career Justice Department lawyers and political appointees throughout the national security agencies.

The discussions, which shaped classified court briefs filed this month, have centered on how broadly to define the types of terrorism suspects who may be detained without trials as wartime prisoners.

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