

Washington prepares international network of permanent detention camps

Rick Kelly**5 January 2005**

The Bush administration is crafting a series of measures to secure the permanent detention without trial of alleged terrorists and those it designates as enemy combatants, the *Washington Post* reported Sunday. In gross violation of international law, detainees may soon be held in new US-constructed prisons in Guantanamo Bay, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, without access to lawyers or family members.

“The Pentagon and the CIA have asked the White House to decide on a more permanent approach for potentially lifetime detentions, including for hundreds of people in military and CIA custody whom the government does not have enough evidence to charge in courts,” the *Post* reported. “The outcome of the review, which involves the State Department as well, would also affect those expected to be captured in the course of future counterterrorism operations.”

One measure under consideration is the transfer of Afghan, Saudi and Yemeni detainees currently held in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp to prisons built by the US in their home countries.

These prisons may also be used to detain those currently held by the Central Intelligence Agency. Almost nothing is known about how many prisoners are in the hands of the CIA, or the conditions under which they are kept. The CIA reportedly maintains secret detention facilities on ships at sea, and at military bases in Afghanistan and on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia.

The *Post* noted that these detainees represent the Bush administration’s “toughest detention problem,” and that the CIA “has been scurrying since Sept. 11, 2001, to find secure locations abroad where it could detain and interrogate captives without risk of discovery, and without having to give them access to

legal proceedings.” A proposal of the intelligence agency to operate its own secret prison was rejected as impractical.

Local authorities will run the new prisons, while the State Department will reportedly monitor operations, ensuring compliance with “recognized human rights standards.”

Such assurances are hardly credible. The Bush administration has systematically flouted human rights conventions in the name of the war on terror. The use of torture has been sanctioned at the highest levels of the government, and, as leaked Red Cross reports have demonstrated, US authorities routinely inflict torture upon Guantanamo Bay prisoners.

Claims regarding the protection of human rights are particularly cynical, given that the new measures are deliberately designed to violate long-established legal rights and norms. Anyone the government designates an enemy combatant now faces life imprisonment, without trial, without access to legal advice, and without any hope of appeal or review. Detainees are dropped into a legal black hole, and face totally unchecked interrogation methods.

The international prison system will effectively entrench and systematize the CIA’s illegal practice known as “rendering.” This is where the intelligence agency secretly transfers detainees to various third countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Rendering has been used to employ local security forces’ use of extreme torture and brutality, while evading US and international law.

The Bush administration’s proposals again demonstrate the brazen criminality of its “war on terror.” Despite all of the extremely damaging revelations of US abuse of detainees in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay that emerged last year, the

government is plunging ahead with a new system that will inevitably lead to further abuse and torture.

The plan has already led to disquiet among those in the political establishment who fear adverse long-term consequences for the US's international position if the present course is maintained. "It's a bad idea," Senator Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declared. "So we ought to get over it and we ought to have a very careful, constitutional look at this."

The *Post* referred to an unnamed senior administration official who noted that the new detention proposals were necessary because "the current detention system has strained relations between the United States and other countries." But rather than alter any of the features of the current system that has provoked so much international opposition—contravention of international law, secret detention without trial, abuse, torture, etc.—the government has evidently concluded that the problem lies in excessive public and judicial review of its operations.

The Bush administration's move to shift detainees from Guantanamo Bay has been provoked, in part, by a Supreme Court ruling earlier this year that allowed prisoners to challenge their detention in federal court.

While this decision did not challenge the government's right to imprison whomever it deems an enemy combatant, the Bush administration views any measure of judicial oversight over its operations as an unwarranted irritant. It is highly unlikely that the US judiciary could claim any jurisdiction over those detainees transferred to the nominal control of authorities in their home countries.

It is unclear whether the Red Cross would have access to detainees held in the new prisons. Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Afghanistan all have atrocious human rights records. In Yemen, the Red Cross suspended prison visits last year after the government refused access to prisoners held by its Political Security department.

Detainees who remain in Guantanamo Bay will soon be held in a \$25 million, 200-bed prison, dubbed "Camp 6," replacing the existing makeshift detention facilities on the American base. The prison complements the already constructed 100-cell "Camp 5." The Pentagon is also preparing to replace the

mostly reservist force currently guarding the facilities with a 324-member military police battalion.

Unnamed defense officials told the *Washington Post* that the new facility will be used for those "who are unlikely to ever go through a military tribunal for lack of evidence." This admission again demonstrates the wholly fraudulent nature of the Bush administration's attempt to create the appearance of judicial review for detainees through the use of these tribunals.



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