

\$40 million cable project points to Guantánamo's permanence

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A report that the Pentagon has budgeted \$40 million to lay a fiber-optic cable from Florida to the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba is an indication of Washington's plans to maintain its infamous detention camp there indefinitely.

"It only makes sense to do if we're going to be here for any period of time," Navy Capt. Kirk Hibbert, the outgoing base commander, told the *Miami Herald*, whose reporter Carol Rosenberg broke the story on the planned cable.

According to the report, laying the cable and building infrastructure on both its Cuban and Florida ends will not begin for another year, while getting communications up and running on the cable would not take place until two years after that.

The *Herald* report continues: "But the American military has already notified the Cuban military to expect a surveyor ship, the USNS Zeus, off the base's coastline this summer—a first step toward getting the program funded and then out to bid."

The Cuban government has little choice in the matter. While it has opposed the presence of the base since shortly after the 1959 revolution, the United States has refused to relinquish the 45 square miles it occupies on the southeastern Cuban coast. It claims it has a right to the territory under a 1903 lease dictated to Cuba, then a semi-colonial protectorate of the US. Washington goes through the formality of issuing monthly checks for the lease amounting to \$4,085. The Cuban government has refused to cash the checks for more than five decades.

Captain Hibbert explained to the *Miami Herald* that the growing transmission of data from the base had "stretched satellite access from the outpost." The increased communications have stemmed from the intelligence unit of the prison camp created at the facility in 2002 under the Bush administration and the

so-called "war courts" which have come back into session in recent months under the Obama administration.

A Pentagon spokesman told the *Herald* that the \$40 million cost of the cable project had been determined through an already completed "feasibility study" and had been placed in the fiscal 2013 military budget.

The information on the proposed fiber-cable link to Guantánamo has surfaced just one month after NBC News reported that the detention center, which Barack Obama repeatedly vowed to close during his 2008 election campaign, is "quietly undergoing millions of dollars of upgrades that could allow it to remain open for years as a prison for suspected terrorists."

Among these infrastructure projects, according to this report by NBC's correspondent Michael Isikoff, are a new headquarters for the facility's military guard and a new hospital, which was then still in the planning stage. Also added to the facility was a new soccer field, built at a cost of three-quarters of a million dollars.

NBC quoted the detention camp's commander, Adm. David Woods, as saying that he didn't "anticipate the closure of the facility any time soon."

"As far as being able to close down the operation. I could do that ... in a couple of months, the buildings and the people," said Woods. "We have removed these belligerents from the battlefield and our job is to detain them, and we do that very well."

Some 779 detainees have been held at Guantánamo since it was opened over a decade ago. Today, 169 remain there, imprisoned for 10 years without charges or trials. According to the US government's own assessment, 92 percent of those held at the detention facility have no affiliation to Al Qaeda. Of those still held, 89 have been cleared for release, but are still detained, and 46 have been slated for indefinite

detention without charges or trials, with the government claiming that they can neither be tried nor released.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration has resumed the “war courts” or military tribunals that candidate Obama had condemned and vowed to shut down in favor of trying terrorist suspects in US federal courts.

Pre-trial hearings have been held by a military tribunal in the case of Khalid Sheik Mohammed and four other defendants charged in connection with the September 11, 2001 attacks. Another war court is holding hearings in preparation for a military trial of Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, accused of organizing the 2000 attack in Yemen on the US Navy destroyer, the USS Cole.

In both cases, the use of torture, both at Guantánamo and in CIA secret prisons, overshadows the proceedings. Sheik Mohammed was subjected to waterboarding—a method of induced drowning—183 times, and Nashiri 83 times, along with other brutal and illegal methods of physical and psychological torture inflicted over years.

While Obama pledged to close down the Guantánamo detention facility during his first year in office, it not only remains open three and a half years after his inauguration, but has been codified into law with the Military Commissions Act of 2009. It has become a permanent fixture of the US judicial set-up in which basic constitutional rights are cast aside in drumhead tribunals, with verdicts rendered by juries of uniformed US military officers. Even in the unlikely event of an acquittal, the government reserves the right to continue imprisoning a defendant in the interests of national security.

The National Defense Authorization Act signed into law at the end of last year authorizes the indefinite detention without trial of US citizens on “suspicion of providing substantial support” to groups deemed to be engaged in hostilities with the US government, which means the system created at Guantánamo can be employed against domestic opposition.

Under these conditions, the Pentagon’s projects designed to provide for the Guantánamo detention camp’s functioning for many years to come pose a threat that these facilities for indefinite detention and military tribunals will be used against the American working class.



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