

# Force-feeding continues at Guantánamo with approval of Obama administration

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The Obama administration continues to tacitly support the force-feeding of hunger strikers at Guantánamo Bay, despite a recent ruling confirming that authority to end the practice, which clearly amounts to torture, resides with the president.

Last Monday, a federal judge rejected an attempt by detainees to end the force-feeding, but stated in a four-page order that the practice is “painful, humiliating, and degrading.” US District Judge Gladys Kessler made clear that President Barack Obama could halt the feedings if he so chooses, describing Obama as “the one individual who does have the authority to address the issue.”

Evading the question of continued force-feeding, President Obama repeated a longstanding, long-unfulfilled promise that he will seek to transfer some of the prisoners held at Guantánamo to their respective countries of origin. White House spokesman Jay Carney told CNN this week that the president wants the facility closed, yet his administration has utterly failed to achieve this end.

Speaking in May, Obama lamented: “Look at the current situation, where we are force-feeding detainees who are holding a hunger strike... Is that who we are? Is that something that our founders foresaw? Is that the America we want to leave to our children? Our sense of justice is stronger than that.”

Far from pushing for the prison’s closure, however, the Obama administration has presided over the shutting down of the office that would have resettled detainees who had been released. Furthermore, the Pentagon is currently considering \$200 million in renovations to the prison camp to increase capacity. One hundred sixty-six prisoners remain at Guantánamo Bay, where most of them have been held for more than a decade without trial.

The current hunger strike at Guantánamo began on February 6, with the number of participants quickly rising above 100, or two-thirds of the facility’s prisoners. The strike began in response to abusive practices by the guards and the authorities’ insistence on holding detainees indefinitely without charges or prospect of being released. As of Thursday, the US military reported 104 captives still on hunger strike, with 45 scheduled for nightly force-feeding.

In early February, camp guards confiscated “comfort items.” Prisoners’ lawyers have reported other abuses, including the firing of rubber pellets by guards into the prisoners’ recreation yard.

Pardiss Kebriyaii of the Center for Constitutional Rights referenced the new policy of “genital pat downs,” saying that it is likely “part of the campaign of the camp to break the hunger strike.”

Lawyers representing the detainees have cast doubt on claims promoted by the corporate-controlled media that the strike is coming to an end. “All I hear from my clients is that they are going to keep going and they are not going to stop,” said David Remes, who represents five prisoners who are being force-fed. As of Saturday, 96 prisoners were still officially counted as hunger strikers, though many inmates evidently consumed a meal on Friday, possibly in relation to the Ramadan holy month.

Wells Dixon, an attorney for Djamel Ameziane, an Algerian detainee, denied that the strike had ended. “Eating an occasional meal doesn’t mean that you are not on a hunger strike,” he said. Ameziane is one of 86 inmates who have been cleared for release but remain in detention nevertheless.

Dixon said the government has been “manipulating the numbers from the beginning” and that he remains “very skeptical” of reports of an end to the strike.

“The hunger strike in his case is driven by complete and utter desperation.” Dixon said.

Carlos Warner, who serves as counsel on behalf of 11 prisoners, said: “They [the authorities] have tried to downplay this from the beginning.”

Clive Stafford Smith, lawyer for Shaker Aamer, an inmate at Guantánamo Bay who has been imprisoned 11 years without being charged, told the Guardian: “What is the US government trying to hide? This is just one of a host of measures the staff at Guantánamo have engaged in to try to conceal the strike and break the strikers.” President Obama could start releasing cleared hunger-strikers like Shaker from Guantánamo tomorrow if he had the political courage.”

In reality, the camp’s continued operation is fundamentally a product of the criminal character of US foreign policy and the ruling elite’s endless wars of conquest. Since 9/11, the US government has authorized torture at its own overseas prison facilities and established countless black sites around the world where captives are “rendered” extra-legally to be tortured.

Aamer claimed in a June 14th letter that the number of hunger strikers is in fact higher than 104: “I know for sure the number of hunger strikes is more than 120,” he wrote. Aamer is among the large number of detainees who have been officially declared as not threatening the US, yet remain at the prison nonetheless.

Omar Farah, a lawyer with the Center for Constitutional Rights, has said the strike will likely continue indefinitely. “Conditions at Guantánamo are appalling... the image of 41 men strapped to restraint chairs, gagging from the pain of nasal-tube feedings, ought to compel the president to resume transfers. Until that happens, we will continue to hear chilling news from Guantánamo,” he said.

A report in the British *Independent* described the force-feeding: “Twice a day, the 23 most weak are taken into a room,” the newspaper reported. “Their wrists, arms, stomach, legs and head are strapped to a chair and repeated attempts are made to force a tube down their noses to their stomachs. It is an ugly procedure as they gag and wretch, blood dripping from their nostrils.”

Comments made on national television by Marc Thiessen, who served as a speech writer for George W.

Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, is currently a columnist for the *Washington Post*, and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institution, illustrated the fascistic outlook of the US political establishment: “Most of the people who receive the force-feeding were actually very happy to receive the force-feeding and didn’t resist and they were even given their choice of which flavor of liquid,” Thiessen stated.

He continued, “they actually have a smell [of the nutritional liquid] and they choose strawberry or chocolate or vanilla or the rest. And they’re actually very pleased to be getting it because it absolves them of their responsibility to participate but they’re also getting the nutrition they want.”

In reality, the force-feedings are intended as punitive measures against the hunger strikers, geared to discourage resistance to the harsh conditions imposed on detainees at the prison camp. Their broader aim is to intimidate all those who would oppose American militarism.



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