

US judge's ruling on force-feeding of prisoner further exposes torture methods at Guantanamo Bay

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A federal judge last week ordered a temporary halt to US authorities' practice of force-feeding a detainee at the Guantanamo military base in Cuba. The order comes on the heels of a large-scale hunger strike by the base's detainees in 2013, protesting the conditions of their ongoing detainment.

According to an injunction ordered by judge Gladys Kessler of the Federal District Court of the District of Columbia, the "force-feedings and forcible cell extractions" of Guantanamo prisoner Mohammed Abu Wa'el Dhiab, a Syrian, must stop until the US government meets with the court on Wednesday for a status conference on the treatment of the detainee. The judge also called for the preservation of all video evidence of Dhiab's forced feeding from April 2013 until February 2014, which authorities will be asked to present to the court at a later date.

"This is a major crack in Guantánamo's years-long effort to oppress prisoners and to exercise total control over the information that comes out about the prison," commented Cory Crider, strategic director for the UK-based human rights group Reprieve. Crider noted that "JTF-GTMO (Joint Task Force-Guantanamo)... has a history of losing inconvenient evidence, including similar tapes of the Gitmo riot squad, so let's hope that these recordings don't go the way of the waterboarding tapes before them."

Last year, Kessler had dismissed a similar request of Dhiab's due to the refusal of the Obama administration to allow courts to intervene in the detainment of prisoners. This was changed with a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that permitted oversight. Last summer, Kessler was quoted calling the practice of

enteral feeding, in which a tube is inserted through the nose of a detainee into the stomach, "painful, humiliating and degrading," as well as being a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In response to the injunction, US Justice Department officials declared, "[Dhiab's] motion is completely devoid of any details regarding specific instances of mistreatment." Pentagon spokespeople, while asserting the forced feeding had been done as a means to protect the detainees' health, stated that the military would comply with the order.

Since the January 2002 opening of the prison camp in Guantanamo, 779 detainees have passed through its gates, many of whom have not had a single charge brought against them.

Dhiab, a father of four, has been held in Guantanamo Bay without charges for more than a decade despite being cleared by the Obama Administration for release in 2009.

The statement and injunction by the federal judge is an indictment of policies carried out under both the Bush administration and Obama, who continued the practices of his predecessor.

Last year, the conditions at Guantanamo Bay drew worldwide revulsion after more than half the camp's detainees launched a hunger strike, protesting the inhumane treatment they had received at the hands of guards, as well as their forced detention, during which many of them had never been charged with a crime. At the height of the protest, nearly a third of the camp's detainees were being forcibly fed at least twice a day as a means to break the strike.

Letters by Guantanamo detainee Emad Hassan,

posted on the *Reprieve* website, detail the brutality routinely meted out by guards at the camp. “One Yemeni is 80 pounds and he was brought to his feeding by the Forced Cell Extraction (FCE) team, Guantánamo’s official riot police,” says Hassan, who adds that, “[y]esterday the FCE team beat him when they came into and out of his cell. He is 80 pounds with one broken arm. He cannot walk, just crawl from his bed to the faucet or toilet once he needs to use it! How can someone with this condition fight 8 armoured guards?”

Despite Obama’s promise of the closure of the illegal camp, few prisoners have been released. In the case of Dhiab, spokespeople for human rights groups have noted that a return to his native Syria has been jeopardized due to the ongoing civil war in that country.

José Mujica, president of Uruguay, has offered asylum to six detainees unable to be repatriated to their homeland. However, due to US demands that any country providing asylum enforce flight restrictions, monitoring and other forms of surveillance of those released, the process has broken down.



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