

Obama, Pentagon outline latest plan to close Guantanamo, move prisoners to US

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The Pentagon is expected to send Congress a plan this week detailing the closure of the infamous Guantanamo Bay detention camp. President Barack Obama stated in remarks made Tuesday from the White House that he wishes to complete the closure of the facility by the end of his term next year.

The recent move, made at the end of Obama's career, is a cynical ploy aimed at assuaging the fears and discontent of the American populace over the horrific crimes committed in the name of the so-called War on Terror.

The prison has become a symbol of all the crimes of US imperialism over the last fifteen years. Revelations about Guantanamo and the torture program carried out at various "black sites" by the CIA have exposed the true face of the War on Terror.

The Pentagon's most recent proposal, crafted in close collaboration with President Obama, will transfer some inmates to foreign countries while relocating the remainder to detention facilities within the borders of the United States. Even if this proposal is somehow able to overcome the fierce opposition from the Republican-controlled Congress, it will legitimize the illegal and indefinite detainment in the United States of anyone suspected of terrorism.

Guantanamo founded in 2002 by President George W. Bush amidst a massive curtailment of democratic rights following the September 11 attacks, has held a total of 779 detainees. As many as 22 detainees were detained when they were under the age of 18. Many had never even been accused of a crime. It is now known that the CIA oversaw "widespread sexual abuse and torture" at the camp for years.

Both the Bush and Obama administrations have justified the mass detention at Guantanamo, describing prisoners as "enemy combatants." This term, invented

to deny individuals any rights either under the US Constitution as criminal defendants or under the Geneva Conventions as prisoners of war, has been used for the last decade and a half to justify the most monstrous crimes of US imperialism.

Since the prison's inception, the US government has falsely imprisoned and tortured hundreds, only to later release them with little or no explanation as to why they had been taken from their friends and families in the first place.

The story of innocent men such as Australian citizen David Hicks, who spent five and a half years in Guantanamo after being captured in Afghanistan by the Northern Alliance in 2001 and sold to the US government on trumped up "terrorism" charges, is all too common.

In fact, a report prepared by the Center for Policy and Research at Seton Hall University Law School demonstrated that over 80 percent of the 571 detainees remaining at Guantanamo in 2005 had not been captured by US military-intelligence forces, but rather, by Afghan or Pakistani forces that exchanged them in return for bounties. At the time, the US government offered \$5,000 for every captured prisoner.

President Obama, elected on the mandate of the closure of Guantanamo, has played an important role throughout his presidency in keeping the facility open.

In 2012, the Obama administration prosecuted CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou after he exposed the capture and brutal interrogation of Al-Qaeda suspect Abu Zubayda. Later that year, Obama's Attorney General Eric Holder closed a three-year probe investigating the torture and murder of inmates by the CIA with no charges against any of those involved. As recently as last November, Obama supported a \$607 billion Pentagon spending bill which mandated

Guantanamo stay open.

In 2009, Obama made his first empty call for the prison to be closed. At the time, the prison still held 242 detainees. Over the following years, detainees were transferred to various different countries, leaving 91. A number of the detainees are not eligible for transfer, and Congress banned moving them into the United States via a defense bill passed at the end of 2010. The current Congress shows no intention to revoke the bill.

Thirty-five of the 91 inmates are expected to be transferred to foreign countries by the end of the year. Of the remaining 56, ten have either been convicted on terrorism charges or are currently facing pending cases by the military commission created to prosecute terrorism suspects. The 46 other detainees find themselves in a perverse limbo—neither convicted nor facing pending cases, but still ineligible for transfer. Under the current proposal, these detainees would be relocated to prison facilities in Kansas, South Carolina or Colorado.

Three of the five US prisons currently under consideration by President Obama and the Pentagon are military prisons. All five range between medium and “supermax” security levels.

The Midwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a military prison currently in the running to take detainees, held Private Chelsea Manning from 2011 to 2014. Manning, a US military whistleblower who gave information to Wikileaks detailing war crimes in Iraq in 2010, endured brutal treatment in the US military prison system.

Lawyers representing Guantanamo inmates have stated that as many as ten of these detainees would be willing to plead guilty to charges such as providing material support to terrorism or conspiracy to commit terrorism. American officials are also considering the possibility of sending detainees to other “allied countries” that would be willing to prosecute them, including the Al-Sisi dictatorship in Egypt or even the Saudi monarchy.

An editorial in the *New York Times* Tuesday presented the toothless argument that the transfer of prisoners would “make the cost of running the overseas prison increasingly hard to justify” and result in the closure of the camp. It is likely, however, that no decision regarding Guantanamo will be made within the year, leaving a decision on the ultimate fate of the

prison camp to the next president.

Previous proposals to transfer detainees to detention centers in the United States have elicited strong opposition from the political establishment, particularly amongst Republicans. “As far as I’m concerned, every last one of them can rot in hell, but as long as they don’t do that, they can rot in Guantánamo Bay,” Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas said last year.

For its part the Obama administration has moved away from the widely unpopular program of extraordinary rendition and detention by dramatically expanding the illegal drone assassination program initiated by Bush.

Instead of capturing and detaining terrorism suspects, the military-intelligence apparatus now uses drone strikes to murder anyone deemed an “enemy combatant.” Since Obama’s inauguration, anywhere from 2,497 to 3,998 have been killed by drone missile strikes. According to a report published by *The Intercept* last October, nearly 90 percent of people killed in recent drone strikes in Afghanistan were not the intended target.

Obama has publicly asserted the right to assassinate and carried out assassinations of American citizens using drone strikes in the interest of “national security.” The best-known instances of Americans being murdered were in 2011, when Anwar al-Awlaki, an imam accused of supporting Al-Qaeda, was killed in a drone strike in Yemen. His sixteen year old son Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, also an American citizen, was killed two weeks later in another drone strike.



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