

US Attorney General Sessions praises Guantanamo as a “very fine place”

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US Attorney General Jeff Sessions Thursday indicated that he will recommend to President Donald Trump that new “enemy combatants” be sent to the infamous detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for incarceration and trial by so-called military commissions.

Responding to questions from right-wing radio host Hugh Hewitt, Sessions described Guantanamo as “just a very fine place for holding these kind of dangerous criminals.” He added that the US government had “spent a lot of money fixing it up” and insisted that “a lot of the criticisms have just been totally exaggerated.”

Fifteen years after the first prisoners were brought to the island detention camp after being drugged, hooded and shackled, 41 remain imprisoned there. All but ten of them have never been charged with any crime, much less brought to trial. A number of them have been classified as “forever prisoners,” who the government does not want to be release but cannot try because of the criminal torture to which they were subjected by US interrogators.

Since it was opened in January 2002, the Guantanamo detention center has stood as an international symbol of US imperialist aggression and criminality. Those detained there have provided chilling testimony of a regime of physical and psychological torture, sexual assaults and humiliation meted out by US military and CIA personnel under the orders and supervision of the Bush White House.

Torture continued under the Obama administration with the brutal forced feeding of detainees on hunger strike.

Sessions had declared his support for keeping the Guantanamo detention center in operation during his Senate confirmation hearings in January, while leaving open the possibility that American citizens alleged to be tied to terrorism could be brought before military commissions.

Asked in the Thursday interview whether he would recommend to Trump to send new “enemy combatants”

to Guantanamo, Sessions replied: “Yes. Oh, there’s plenty of space. We are well equipped for it. It’s a perfect place for it. Eventually, this will be decided by the military rather than the Justice Department. But I see no legal problem whatsoever with doing that.”

While a total of 780 prisoners have been held at Guantanamo since the detention camp’s opening, the last time that a new prisoner was brought there was in 2008.

Sessions’ interviewer pressed him on the failure of the military commissions at Guantanamo to successfully try more than a handful of detainees, asking whether he expected to “accelerate that process” and was in favor of “expediting” it.

The attorney general responded in the affirmative, declaring, “We’ve got to get the military on board” in order “to get this thing figured out and start using it in an effective way.” He reiterated his belief that those deemed “enemy combatants” should be tried by the military at Guantanamo rather than “bringing these people to federal court in New York and trying them in federal court where they get discovery rights to find out our intelligence and get court-appointed lawyers and things of that nature.”

The drumhead tribunals at Guantanamo violate virtually every right a genuine court affords to a defendant under the US Constitution, allowing the introduction of evidence extracted through torture as well as secret evidence concealed from the accused. Defense attorneys are placed under what amounts to military discipline, while the juries deciding the fate of the accused are composed of military officers, who need only a two-thirds majority to convict.

These kangaroo courts were codified into law under President Barack Obama, who vowed on his first full day in office to close down Guantanamo, but over the course of eight years in the White House signed one Pentagon funding bill after another that mandated that the detention camp remain open.

Now this barbaric legacy has been handed by the Obama administration to Trump, whose attorney general wants to “streamline” and “expedite” a wholly illegitimate and makeshift system of “military justice.”

A draft of an executive order circulated within the administration last month calls for the US to “continue detention operations at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay” for “enemy combatants” captured in “armed conflict with Al Qaeda, the Taliban and associated forces, including individuals and networks associated with the Islamic State.”

With the Trump administration steadily escalating US military interventions in Iraq and Syria, and the Pentagon calling for stepped up operations in Afghanistan, the number of prisoners sent to the concentration camp in Cuba could grow rapidly.

While justified, along with mass domestic spying, the crackdown against immigrants, drone-missile assassinations and military aggression abroad, in the name of an unending “war on terror,” the defense of Guantanamo and military tribunals is also directed at preparing domestic repression.

During his election campaign, Trump crudely vowed that he would keep Guantanamo open and “load it up with some bad dudes.” He added that he would have “no problem” with sending American citizens to Guantanamo and trying them before military commissions.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer was asked at a press conference last month whether Trump intended to send US citizens to Guantanamo. Spicer replied: “He believes Guantanamo Bay does serve a very healthy purpose in our national security in making sure we don’t bring terrorists to our seas, but I’m not gonna get into what we may or may not do in the future.”



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