PRESS RELEASE

February 27, 2006

Guantanamo Compensation Plan To Be Probed

By KANWAL TARIQ HAMEED

MPs could debate whether or not compensation should be paid to three Bahrainis formerly held at Guantánamo Bay. The proposal will be submitted to parliament next month, MP Shaikh Mohammed Khalid told the GDN.

He said it would also ask the government to take further action to secure the release of the remaining three Bahraini detainees at the US prison in Cuba.

Shaikh Mohammed claimed the three ex-inmates, who returned to Bahrain on November 4, after being held for almost four years without trial, had been "abandoned" by the Bahrain government.

More than three months after their return, one is reportedly still unable to claim his pension and has allegedly been forced to sell his family home because of financial difficulties.

"After maybe three of four weeks, God willing, we can talk about this," said Shaikh Mohammed.

"We are just waiting for agreement from parliament chairman Khalifa Al Dhahrani.

"The three guys who came back were Bahrainis, but these three who are still there are also Bahrainis. They [the government] must not forget them.

"I only want the government of Bahrain to give them some money and a car - some small things - in compensation.

"They came from Guantánamo Bay after four years. They have no cars and in Bahrain you need a car. They also have no houses or money.

"If the government only gives them these things I am sure they will be very happy.

"Just like the political exiles who came back to Bahrain, who the government gave money and jobs to, these are also Bahraini citizens."

Abdulla Majid Al Nuaimi, 24, Adel Kamel Hajee, 40, and Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalífa, 27, returned to Bahrain as "totally free men" Foreign Affairs Ministry officials said at the time of their release.

However, Shaikh Mohammed - a long time campaigner for the release of the detainees - said that in reality this was far from the truth.

All three former detainees have been banned from leaving the country without permission from the Public Prosecution - even though they all hold passports, Shaikh Mohammed claimed.

He said they could not even cross the causeway and travel to Saudi Arabia for Haj if they wanted to.

"I asked them about passports - they have passports, but to travel they have to have an agreement from Public Prosecution," said Shaikh Mohammed.

"It's not that I think they should leave the country right now - I feel they should stay right here.

"But it's like they were taken from one prison to another. From one big Guantánamo, to another smaller one."
Mr Hajee, formerly a civilian employee with the Defence Ministry, has been unable to claim his pension and cannot take a job because he carries the stigma of being a former detainee at Guantanamo Bay, Mr Khalid claimed.

"He just wants to claim his pension," he said.

"What is the problem I don't know. We're hoping the Defence Ministry will give the green light for his money.

"He does not have any money, he has no job and he cannot work anymore.

"I mean, he came from Guantanamo and all the eyes are on him as if he is a thief."

As a result of financial difficulties, Mr Hajee has apparently had to sell his family home in Galali, Muharraq.

Shaikh Mohammed said he was unsure where Mr Hajee, his wife and 15-year-old daughter were living now.

As well as the Guantanamo Bay detainees, MPs hope to discuss the plight of two Bahrainis being held at foreign prisons.

Shaikh Mohammed said one has been held at a Saudi jail since September 2004.

"We will talk about Abdulraheem Al Murbati and there is one Bahraini being held at a prison in Bosnia," he said.

The three Bahrainis still being held at Guantanamo Bay are Isa Al Murbati, 42, Juma Mohammed Al Dossary, 32, and 24-year-old Salah Abdulrasool Al Blooshi.

Al Dossary faces at least another year in Guantanamo Bay after being deemed a "continued threat" to the US by an annual Administrative Review Board (ARB) at the camp.

It is understood that Al Dossary begged the ARB to free him, promising to stay within the walls of his own home "for 75 years".

The GDN recently reported that Al Murbati was brutally assaulted and force-fed by an Immediate Response Force (IRF) team after refusing to end a hunger strike of more than three months.

Tactics used by prison officials included strapping him to a restraint chair, pumping his stomach with large amounts of liquid and laxatives, preventing him from access to the toilet, cutting off water supplies from his cell and removing towels and bed sheets from the cell after turning on the air-conditioner, he said.

Charges against Al Blooshi are the same as those made against the three detainees who have been released, but unlike them he remains in captivity, his lawyers have said.

He has reportedly not been accused of any violence or of supporting a terrorist organisation


SOURCE: Gulf Daily News

February 28, 2006

'Disgraceful'

In the first report of its kind, a team of UN human rights experts says Guantanamo Bay should be closed immediately, reports Tamam Ahmed Jama
Described by the United States Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as the “least worst place” to hold people suspected of having links with Al-Qaeda, Guantanamo Bay has become an emblem of America’s war on terror -- and, for many, everything that is wrong with it. More than four years after the first blind-folded, shackled captives arrived, a team of United Nations special rapporteurs is calling for the immediate closure of the notorious US naval base on the island of Cuba where about 500 terrorism suspects are being held.

“The general conditions of detention, in particular the uncertainty about the length of detention and prolonged solitary confinement, amount to inhumane treatment and a violation of the right to health as well as a violation of the right of detainees to be treated with humanity and with respect to the inherent dignity of the human person,” the five UN human rights experts said in a joint statement on 16 February. In their report, published on the same day, the special rapporteurs say: “the United States government should close the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities without further delay.”

They add that the terror suspects held at the base should be afforded the legal safeguards of criminal procedure enshrined in relevant international law.

"The persons held at Guantanamo Bay are entitled to challenge the legality of their detention before a judicial body in accordance with Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)," the report states. "This right is currently being violated and the continuing detention of all persons held at Guantanamo Bay amounts to arbitrary detention in violation of Article 9 of the ICCPR. The United States government should either expeditiously bring all Guantanamo Bay detainees to trial, or release them without further delay."

The White House quickly dismissed the report, saying it was "largely without merit" because the special rapporteurs have not visited Guantanamo Bay to see the situation on the ground for themselves.

"We have patiently asked for access to Guantanamo Bay detainees for years," Paul Hunt, the UN special rapporteur on the right of detainees to health, told Al-Ahram Weekly. "It is deeply ironic that we should be criticised for not having visited Guantanamo Bay when the reason was that the US authorities denied us access to the facility and detainees."

Hunt and four other human rights investigators -- including the UN special rapporteur on arbitrary detention and the UN special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment -- have been monitoring the situation in Guantanamo Bay since the first detainees were flown there in January 2002. But they have not yet visited the base due to, they say, lack of cooperation on the part of US authorities.

They say they have continuously requested access to the base so that they could gather firsthand information. For the first and only time, the US government invited last October three of the five mandated rapporteurs for a one-day visit -- "to visit the Department of Defense's detention facilities [of Guantanamo Bay]." The invitation stipulated that the visit excluded meeting and conducting private interviews with the detainees. The rapporteurs said that, without private interviews with the detainees, they could not proceed with the visit.

"The only reason that the US is not letting the UN experts talk to the detainees is that the administration has something to hide," Katherine Newell Bierman, counter-terrorism counsel for the US programme of Human Rights Watch, told the Weekly. "There is a wealth of information -- including consistent and credible testimonies of former detainees -- that serious human rights abuses are taking place in Guantanamo Bay. We know from the government’s own documents that there were policy decisions to subject detainees to abuse."

She said the experts were right not to go in the absence of private interviews with the detainees.

"It would have been a sham," she said. "We know that many people have come away from Guantanamo Bay thinking that everything was alright while detainees were being abused."

Bierman herself visited Guantanamo Bay last month, but in a letter she wrote while at the base, she says: "I have reached Guantanamo Bay naval base, but I am as cut off from the men imprisoned here as if I were still in Washington, DC." When she said that people have come away from Guantanamo Bay thinking that all was well, she was apparently referring to something that has been described as "stage-managed" visits. In such visits, journalists, among other visitors, are received by officials, shown around and told anything from how detainees who "cooperate" during interrogations are rewarded with McDonald's "happy meals" to how wonderful the island's weather is -- but never allowed to meet and speak to the detainees themselves.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is permitted to visit the detainees, but it reports its findings only to the detaining authorities.

The UN special rapporteurs based their report on testimonies of former Guantanamo Bay detainees, statements from lawyers representing some of the detainees, reports by NGOs, information contained in declassified official government documents, information provided to the rapporteurs by US officials and media reports.
Hunt said that, had they not reported based on the information that was available to them, they would have failed their obligations as special rapporteurs.

"We carefully collected and considered the testimonies of former detainees and information from elsewhere to arrive at an honest, fair and balanced judgement," he said. "What were we meant to do? Not to do anything would have been a failure of our duty to the United Nations."

A number of detainees have been referred to military commissions. International law requires that states trying prisoners in military commissions apply the same rules that they would use for their own citizens. This is apparently not the case with the US military commissions set up in haste in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks.

"These military commissions significantly depart from US military justice system and the way military commissions have been used historically -- they don't follow the rules of military commissions," Bierman said. "If there is no yardstick for fairness, it is so easy for the government to make up the rules as it goes along." Under the new rules, for instance, an accused may not be able to see all the evidence against him. Also, information obtained under what US authorities may call "harsh interrogation", but widely accepted as plain torture, would be allowed in court as evidence.

The US government justifies the indeterminate detention, without charge or trial, of the men held at Guantanamo Bay by classifying them as "unlawful enemy combatants", and refuses to grant them prisoners of war status. The current administration has characterised them as the "worst of the worst" -- dangerous terrorists who took up arms against America.

"But the government's own documents reveal this is not the case: the vast majority of the men held in Guantanamo Bay were not captured in a battle zone or even in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan," Bierman said. According to Pentagon documents cited by lawyers representing some of the detainees, only eight per cent of the men imprisoned at the base are classified "Al-Qaeda fighters".

Under the rules of war a party to a conflict may hold enemy combatants as prisoners until the end of hostilities. The purpose for the detention in this case is to prevent the prisoners from taking up arms again. The purpose of holding terrorism suspects in Guantanamo Bay is, by the US authorities' own admission, interrogation to extract from them information on the Al-Qaeda network that might be vital for fighting terrorism.

The UN report concludes that the global struggle against international terrorism does not constitute an armed conflict and detention for the purposes of interrogation is not sufficient ground for indefinite deprivation of personal liberty.

A US federal judge also ruled last year that the Bush administration must allow the detainees in Guantanamo Bay to contest their detention in US courts and that the special military reviews established by the Pentagon as an alternative were illegal. "Although this nation unquestionably must take strong action under the leadership of the commander-in-chief to protect itself against enormous and unprecedented threats, that necessity cannot negate the existence of the most basic fundamental rights for which the people of this country have fought and died for well over 200 years," judge Joyce Hens Green said in the ruling. And in a landmark decision in 2004, the US Supreme Court ruled that the detainees had the right to contest the accusations against them and challenge their indefinite detention.

There have been alarming reports about the effects of the prolonged detention, under harsh conditions, on the health of the detainees. Many have gone on a hunger strike months ago and some are reportedly being kept alive through force-feeding.

"The totality of the conditions of their confinement at Guantanamo Bay constitutes a right-to-health violation because they derive from a breach of duty and have resulted in profound deterioration of the mental health of many detainees," the report states. The report also says that interrogation techniques authorised by the US Defense Department for use in Guantanamo Bay constitute a breach of the Convention against Torture.

There is a growing chorus of calls for the closure of Guantanamo Bay. Reacting to the UN report, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that the military prison was an "anomaly" which must be dealt with "sooner or later", but stopped short of saying it should be closed now. Some British MPs have said it should and have reproached the government for not going far enough in its condemnation. After a long government lobbying, nine UK nationals who were formerly held at Guantanamo Bay have been repatriated to Britain and released without charge.

Also reacting to the report in a British radio interview, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa -- who was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1984 for his longtime opposition to apartheid rule ---- said: "I never imagined I would live to see the day when the United States would use precisely the same arguments that the apartheid government used for detention without trial. It is disgraceful. One cannot find strong enough words to condemn what Britain and the United States and some of their allies have accepted."

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12528

SOURCE: Al Ahram
March 01, 2006

First Violation of McCain Torture Amendment Alleged in Emergency

Attorneys File to End Further Torture of Guantánamo Detainee on Hunger Strike
Center for Constitutional Rights and Pro-Bono Counsel from Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan Challenge Treatment of Detainee

NEW YORK - February 28 - The first violation of the McCain torture amendment was alleged in federal court in an emergency injunction to end further torture of Guantánamo detainees. The court made public today an injunction filed on Friday by cooperating attorneys from Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan working with the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which won the landmark Supreme Court case establishing the Guantánamo detainees' right to challenge their detention in U.S. court (Rasul v. Bush).

"If I were Senator John McCain, I would be the angriest man in America today." said Rick Murphy, a partner with Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, which provides pro-bono counsel to detainee Mohammed Bawazir.

After being imprisoned without charges for over three years, Mr. Mohammad Bawazir began a hunger strike in August 2005. As recent news accounts have confirmed, military personnel responded with several actions designed to inflict pain, torture and punishment for the hunger strike. The cruel and inhumane treatment is detailed in today's filing, which alleges that the torture is a flagrant violation of both the McCain torture amendment, which became law as the Detainee Treatment Act, and the Constitution. The filing charges that Guantánamo personnel:

Forcibly strapped Mr. Bawazir into a restraint chair, tying his legs, arms, head, and midsection to the chair.

Inserted of a feeding tube that was larger than the tube that had previously been left in Mr. Bawazir's nose, increasing the pain of the insertion and extraction.

Poured four bottles of water into his stomach through the nasal gastric tube every time he was fed even though Mr. Bawazir has never refused to drink water by mouth.

Restrained Mr. Bawazir in the chair for extended periods at each feeding.

Denied Mr. Bawazir access to a toilet while he was restrained and then for an additional hour or more after he was released from the chair.

Placed Mr. Bawazir in solitary confinement.

"Mere days after signing the McCain Amendment, the Bush Administration engaged in some of the most flagrant acts of torture that have occurred in Guantánamo. The horrific misuse of the emergency restraint chair and the medical abuses served no purpose other than to terrorize nonviolent prisoners into ending their hunger strike." said Gitanjali S. Gutierrez, an attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights. "Senator McCain led an important fight to ban torture, but will he stand up for it now that the Bush Administration is breaking the law?"

CCR and its cooperating attorneys will continue to challenge the torture, mistreatment and illegal detainment of the Guantánamo prisoners in federal court.

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12550

SOURCE: Common Dreams
Police End Probe Into Moroccan Ex-Guantanamo Detainees' Case

By Josh White
Washington Post Staff Writer

Lawyers for a captive at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, say their client was tortured to coerce him into abandoning a lengthy hunger strike, and they contend that tactics used to force-feed detainees explicitly violate a new federal law that bars cruel or degrading treatment of people in U.S. custody.

In a 13-page filing released yesterday, the lawyers say U.S. military officials at Guantanamo Bay used harsh and unnecessary tactics to break a hunger strike that at one point included more than 100 detainees. Invoking a new law principally written by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), the lawyers said the military illegally made the force-feeding process painful and humiliating to coerce cooperation from the detainees.

The new procedures were instituted in early January. They include strapping detainees to a chair, forcing a tube down their throats, feeding them large quantities of liquid nutrients and water, and leaving them in the chair for as long as two hours to keep them from purging the food, according to detainee accounts and military officials. Detainees told their attorneys that the tactics, first reported last month in the New York Times, caused them to urinate and defecate on themselves and that the insertion and removal of the feeding tube was painful.

Mohammad Bawazir, a Yemeni detainee who was the subject of Friday's filing in U.S. District Court in Washington, told his lawyers he began his hunger strike in August and was determined to die in Cuba but stopped resisting the force-feeding last year when he decided it was futile. Bawazir's attorneys said he had been allowing the feedings -- through a tube that was left in at all times -- but the tactics changed dramatically on Jan. 11, when the military strapped Bawazir to a chair and forced a much larger tube into his nose and down his throat, causing him "unbearable pain."

Richard G. Murphy Jr., a Washington lawyer representing Bawazir, said yesterday that military officials "argue it's a life-saving mechanism, but they were already engaged in saving his life, without resistance."

The court filing asks for an injunction to stop the treatment, and Judge Gladys Kessler has scheduled a hearing for tomorrow.

A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment yesterday because the government has yet to file its response. Navy Lt. Cmdr. J.D. Gordon, a Pentagon spokesman, said Defense Department officials "believe that preservation of life through lawful, clinically appropriate means is a responsible and prudent measure for the safety and well-being of detainees."

Army Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, who leads the U.S. Southern Command, told reporters last week that the new techniques were designed to end the strike, but defended strapping detainees to the padded chair. He said detainees had devised a way to siphon the food out of their stomachs after they had returned to their cells, using the feeding tubes left inside them.

The legal filing is designed to test the Detainee Treatment Act, which made it illegal to abuse detainees in U.S. custody. Murphy said yesterday that the military clearly crossed the line when it changed Bawazir's treatment, just days after the law was passed.

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12549

SOURCE: Washington Post

Military Commissions in Context as Guantanamo Enters Its Fifth Year

As the United States enters its fifth year of detention operations at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Guantanamo has become a leading symbol of a badly tarnished U.S. human rights reputation around the world. In just the past month, a number of UN Special Rapporteurs have called for the closing of detention operations at the
base; the U.S. Government has acknowledged the sometimes violent force feeding of hunger striking detainees protesting basic conditions and treatment at the facility; and a recent analysis of official data on Guantanamo detainees showed only 8% of those held were considered by the United States to be al Qaeda fighters.

It is amidst these increasingly urgent international objections that much criticized military commission trials resume for three Guantanamo detainees this week. While the focus in the coming days will be in some respects on the details of pretrial hearings – evaluating the impartiality of the presiding officer and the suitability of defense representation – commissioners, counsel and staff must operate in the face of four years worth of indefinite detentions, cruel treatment and abuse. The trials, once underway, will become a central venue for challenging human rights violations the detainees will contend, with substantial evidence, have made justice impossible at Guantanamo Bay.

The three men facing pretrial hearings this week – Sufiyan Barhoumi, Ghassan Abdullah al Sharbi, and Ali Hamza Ahmed Suleiman al Bahlul – are charged with conspiring with members and associates of Al Qaeda to attack civilian and civilian objects, commit murder, destroy property, and commit acts of terrorism. Very little else is known about the men apart from what the government accuses them of doing. At least two of them were not picked up in the heat of battle, or even in Afghanistan. Al Sharbi and Barhoumi were seized in Pakistan months after the bombings in Afghanistan began. In this respect, they are representative of the vast majority of Guantanamo detainees, described in a recent report analyzing government data as including only 5% directly captured by the United States. The majority of those now in custody were turned over by other parties during a time when the United States was offering large sums for captured prisoners.

In other respects, the accusations against al Sharbi and Barhoumi are similar to those levied against U.S. citizen “enemy combatant” Jose Padilla, who was seized at Chicago’s O’Hare airport in May 2002, and held for over three years in military custody until recently when the government returned him to civilian custody and charged him in U.S. federal court. Yet while Padilla now ostensibly has the right to counsel of his choice, to know all the evidence against him, to have confidential communications with his attorney, and to appeal to an independent civilian court – these three “enemy combatant” detainees still do not.

Indeed, military commission rules leave open the significant chance that information obtained under torture (either from detainees at Guantanamo or those held elsewhere overseas) could be used against defendants in the proceedings. According to their charge sheets, both al Sharbi and Barhoumi were seized with Abu Zubaydah, who is believed to be held by the United States at an undisclosed location and who reportedly has been tortured while in custody; it seems likely that some of the evidence to be used against al Sharbi and Barhoumi will come from interrogations of Abu Zubaydah. For centuries, the United States has roundly rejected the use of confessions or other evidence extracted under torture in a judicial proceeding, finding in case after case that the use of such evidence violates constitutional and other fundamental rights. In the military commissions, however, the question is now open again.

In the meantime, the Supreme Court sits poised to hear the case of Salim Ahmed Hamdan, who has also been charged before the military commissions. Before the Supreme Court is the question whether the recently enacted Detainee Treatment Act of 2005 (also called the Graham-Levin-Kyl Amedment), which amends the habeas statute that has been invoked by Guantanamo detainees in challenging the legality of their detention, deprives the Supreme Court of jurisdiction to hear Hamdan’s case, or the cases of any of those now facing military commission trials. The Court will hear oral arguments in Hamdan’s case at the end of March.

Despite the intense focus on Guantanamo, the reality remains that commission defendants represent a miniscule percentage of all those held indefinitely worldwide by the United States. Almost 15,000 individuals continue to be held by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, and an unknown number of individuals languish in U.S.-run secret locations throughout the world. These detainees remain outside of any independent legal process, even one as heavily flawed as the military commissions. Commission trials are a key testing ground, but will provide at best only a partial answer to the question whether U.S.-held detainees in the “war on terror” will be treated according to the rule of law.

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12546

SOURCE: Human Rights First

Victims of Guantánamo

New revelations of abuse at the U.S. government’s prison camp

NICOLE COLSON looks at the latest revelations about the Bush administration’s prison camp in Guantánamo Bay.
WHEN THE Bush administration first set up its detention camp in Guantánamo Bay for prisoners of the "war on terror," administration officials claimed that only hardened al-Qaeda fighters would be detained. According to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, those jailed at Guantánamo were “very tough, hard-core, well-trained terrorists.”

But recent reports show that not only are most of the 500 prisoners detained at Guantánamo not hardened al-Qaeda fighters--many aren't even accused of committing any act of aggression against the U.S.

Some four years after the U.S. first began operating its camp, a group of five United Nations (UN) envoys recently concluded that prisoners housed at Guantánamo Bay have been subjected to physical and mental abuse that has amounted to torture at times.

According to the report, which was based on interviews with former prisoners, families and lawyers over the course of 18 months, the combination of interrogation techniques, brutal force-feedings of hunger-striking prisoners, withholding of medical treatment, and excessive violence in transporting prisoners constituted inhumane treatment at best, and in some cases rose to the level of torture.

As the report states, "Some of the [interrogation] techniques, in particular the use of dogs, exposure to extreme temperatures, sleep deprivation for several consecutive days and prolonged isolation" caused severe suffering. The report also cited the abuse of prisoners’ religious freedom--including depriving prisoners of religious items like the Koran, and the forced shaving of beards--as well as prisoners being subjected to isolation and solitary confinement for periods of up to 18 months.

"We very, very carefully considered all of the arguments posed by the U.S. government,” UN Special Raporteur on Torture Manfred Novak told the Los Angeles Times. "But we concluded that the situation in several areas violates international law and conventions on human rights and torture.”

The Bush administration dismissed the report out of hand--complaining that UN investigators based their report on interviews with former detainees and lawyers, rather than visiting the camp themselves. “I think it’s a discredit to the UN when a team like this goes about rushing to report something when they haven’t even looked into the facts,” White House spokesman Scott McClellan complained to reporters.

What McClellan failed to add is that when UN investigators requested to look into all the “facts” at Guantánamo, the U.S. prohibited them from speaking directly with prisoners--so the UN refused to visit under those conditions.

But as the report made clear, in addition to interviews with prisoners subjected to force feedings, as well as doctors, nurses and guards, there is also photo and video evidence showing “beating, kicking, punching, but also stripping and force shaving by [guards] where detainees resisted, which have been corroborated by testimonies of former detainees.”

The White House dismisses all allegations of torture and complaints made by detainees as fabrications. “We know that these are dangerous terrorists that are being kept at Guantánamo Bay,” said McClellan. “They are trained to provide false information, and al-Qaeda training manuals talk about ways to disseminate false information.”

But according to a recent study by Seton Hall law professor Mark Denbeaux and lawyer Joshua Denbeaux, Defense Department documents on 517 current and former Guantánamo prisoners show that the vast majority are not connected to al-Qaeda--and most aren’t accused of committing a hostile act against the U.S. or its allies.

According to the definition set out by the Bush administration, an "enemy combatant" is an “individual who was part of or supporting the Taliban or al-Qaeda forces, or associated forces that are engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.”

According to the study, of the 517 “enemy combatants” studied, examples of evidence the government cited as proof that detainees were “enemy combatants” included, in some cases, the possession of a rifle or a Casio watch, and the “wearing of olive drab clothing.”

Overall, just 8 percent of detainees were characterized in government documents as al-Qaeda fighters and 16 percent as Taliban fighters. Thirty percent of detainees were considered “members” of a prohibited organization like al-Qaeda or the Taliban--under a definition so broad that it could apply to anyone believed to have spoken at any time to an al-Qaeda or Taliban member.

A full 60 percent of detainees did not have even this minimum level of contact. Instead, they are listed as “associated with” one of the prohibited organizations.

Records show that the entire case against one detainee--held at Guantánamo to this day--is that he was conscripted into the Taliban as a cook's assistant, and that he fled and later surrendered when this unit came under attack.
And this case is not unique, according to the recent report. “Many of the detainees held at Guantánamo were involved with the Taliban unwillingly as conscripts or otherwise,” the report reads.

The report also raises questions about who has been handed over into U.S. custody. Among detainees where the location of their capture was listed, only 5 percent were captured by U.S. forces. More than 80 percent were captured by Pakistani forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, or by the Northern Alliance, the notoriously corrupt Afghan militia that helped U.S. forces oust the Taliban.

Some were sold to the U.S. by bounty hunters--and it’s unknown how many were victims of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the days during and following the Afghan invasion, the U.S. military blanketed parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan with flyers encouraging people to turn in suspects, in return for large sums of money. “Get wealth and power beyond your dreams,” reads one flyer. “You can receive millions of dollars helping the anti-Taliban forces catch al-Qaeda and Taliban murderers.”

As the Center for Constitutional Rights Legal Director Bill Goodman said in a recent statement, "For five years now, the government has detained prisoners without due process; lied about who these people are; concealed their treatment from the public and denied basic information to the very people who are authorized to represent the detainees."

Green light for CIA torture

THE U.S. government has a green light to torture innocent people. That’s the meaning of a recent decision by Brooklyn District Court Judge David Trager to dismiss a lawsuit against the Bush administration brought by Canadian citizen Maher Arar--who was imprisoned and tortured for months by Syrian authorities, apparently working with the CIA.

In September 2002, Arar--a Syrian-born engineer living in Ottawa--was arrested while changing planes in New York City, on his way home from a vacation in Tunisia. Arar was interrogated for 13 days before being blindfolded, shackled and shipped to Jordan, and then driven into Syria. There, he was beaten--often, he says, with electrical cables--and held in a dank underground cell about the size of a grave.

After 10 months, Arar was finally released--with no charges ever being filed against him.

Today, it’s known that Arar’s arrest, detention and “rendition” to his Syrian torturers was likely arranged by the CIA--and as the Washington Post reported last year, dozens of other prisoners have experienced a similar fate.

Yet Trager, in an 88-page decision handed down last month, refused to allow Arar’s case to go forward--on the grounds that it would damage “national security.”

Trager acknowledged the possibility that Arar had been subjected to torture, citing the U.S. State Department’s own report on Syrian human rights abuses. But, he said, the courts shouldn’t intervene. “A judge who declares on his or her own...authority that the policy of extraordinary rendition is under all circumstances unconstitutional must acknowledge that such a ruling can have the most serious of consequences to our foreign relations or national security or both,” Trager wrote.

As an outraged Arar told the Toronto Star, “If the courts will not stop this evil act, who is going to stop this administration? Where do we go? The United Nations? We--me and others who have been subjected to this--are normal citizens who have done no wrong. They have destroyed my life. They have destroyed other lives. But the court system does not listen to us.”

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12545

SOURCE: Socialist Worker

March 02, 2006

Belgian Senate Chief To Visit Guantanamo Prison

BRUSSELS: The president of the Belgian senate will visit the notorious US prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba this week, according to a communique released on Wednesday.
"The efficiency of the fight against terrorism and the respect of human rights" are the main points of a report that will be produced after Anne-Marie Lizin’s visit on Friday, it said.

Around 500 people are being held at the Guantanamo US naval base. Most were captured in Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Few have been charged or given a trial and some are on hunger strike.

Lizin is also the special representative on Guantanamo in the parliamentary assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which Belgium is chairing this year.

She will submit her report to the annual OSCE general assembly gathering in Brussels in July.

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12573

SOURCE: Pakistan Times

Our American Gulag

By Thomas Wilner

The American prison camp at Guantanamo Bay is on the southeast corner of Cuba, a sliver of land the United States has occupied since 1903. Long ago, it was irrigated from lakes on the other side of the island, but Cuban President Fidel Castro cut off the water supply years ago. So today, Guantanamo produces its own water from a 30-year-old desalination plant. The water has a distinct yellow tint. All Americans drink bottled water imported by the planeload. Until recently, prisoners drank the yellow water.

The prison overlooks the sea, but the ocean cannot be seen by prisoners. Guard towers and stadium lights loom along the perimeter. On my last visit, we were escorted by young, solemn military guards whose nameplates on their shirts were taped over so that prisoners could not identify them.

Very few outsiders are allowed to see the prisoners. The government has orchestrated some carefully controlled tours for the media and members of Congress, but has repeatedly refused to allow these visitors, representatives of the United Nations, human rights groups or nonmilitary doctors and psychiatrists to meet or speak with prisoners. So far, the only outsiders who have done so are representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross — who are prohibited by their own rules from disclosing what they find — and lawyers for the prisoners.

I am one of those lawyers. I represent six Kuwaiti prisoners, each of whom has now spent nearly four years at Guantanamo. It took me 2 1/2 years to gain access to my clients, but now I have visited the prison camp 11 times in the last 14 months. What I have witnessed is a cruel and eerie netherworld of concrete and barbed wire that has become a daily nightmare for the nearly 500 people swept up after 9/11 who have been imprisoned without charges or trial for more than four years. It is truly our American gulag.

On my most recent trip three weeks ago, after signing a log sheet and submitting our bags to a search, my colleagues and I were taken through two tall, steel-mesh gates into the interior of the prison camp.

We interviewed our clients in Camp Echo, one of several camps where prisoners are interrogated. We entered a room about 13 feet square and divided in half by a wall of thick steel mesh. On one side was a table where the prisoner would sit for our interviews, his feet shackled to a steel eyelet cemented to the floor. On the other side were a shower and a cell just like the ones in which prisoners are ordinarily confined. In their cells, prisoners sleep on a metal shelf against the wall, which is flanked by a toilet and sink. They are allowed a thin foam mattress and a gray cotton blanket.

The Pentagon’s files on the six Kuwaiti prisoners we represent reveal that none was captured on a battlefield or accused of engaging in hostilities against the U.S. The prisoners claim that they were taken into custody by Pakistani and Afghan warlords and turned over to the U.S. for bounties ranging from $5,000 to $25,000 — a claim confirmed by American news reports. We have obtained copies of bounty leaflets distributed in Afghanistan and Pakistan by U.S. forces promising rewards — "enough to feed your family for life" — for any "Arab terrorist" handed over.

The files include only the flimsiest accusations or hearsay that would never stand up in court. The file on one prisoner indicated that he had been seen talking to two suspected Al Qaeda members on the same day — at places thousands of miles apart. The primary "evidence" against another was that he was captured wearing a particular Casio watch, "which many terrorists wear." Oddly, the same watch was being worn by the U.S. military chaplain, a Muslim, at Guantanamo.
When I first met my clients, they had not seen or spoken with their families for more than three years, and they had been questioned hundreds of times. Several were suspicious of us; they told me that they had been interrogated by people who claimed to be their lawyers but who turned out not to be. So we had DVDs made, on which members of their families told them who we were and that we could be trusted. Several cried on seeing their families for the first time in years. One had become a father since he was detained and had never before seen his child. One noticed his father was not on the DVD, and we had to tell him that his father had died.

Most prisoners are kept apart, although some can communicate through the steel mesh or concrete walls that separate their cells. They exercise alone, some only at night. They had not seen sunlight for months — an especially cruel tactic in a tropical climate. One prisoner told me, "I have spent almost every moment of the last three years, and eaten every meal, here in this small cell which is my bathroom." Other than the Koran, prisoners had nothing to read. As a result of our protests, some have been given books.

Every prisoner I’ve interviewed claims to have been badly beaten and subjected to treatment that only could be called torture, by Americans, from the first day of U.S. captivity in Pakistan and Afghanistan. They said they were hanged by their wrists and beaten, hung by their ankles and beaten, stripped naked and paraded before female guards, and given electric shocks. At least three claimed to have been beaten again upon arrival in Guantanamo. One of my clients, Fayiz Al Kandari, now 27, said his ribs were broken during an interrogation in Pakistan. I felt the indentation in his ribs. "Beat me all you want, just give me a hearing," he said he told his interrogators.

Another prisoner, Fawzi Al Odah, 25, is a teacher who left Kuwait City in 2001 to work in Afghan, then Pakistani, schools. After 9/11, he and four other Kuwaitis were invited to dinner by a Pakistani tribal leader and then sold by him into captivity, according to their accounts, later confirmed by Newsweek and ABC News.

On Aug. 8, 2005, Fawzi, in desperation, went on a hunger strike to assert his innocence and to protest being imprisoned for four years without charges. He said he wanted to defend himself against any accusations, or die. He told me that he had heard U.S. congressmen had returned from tours of Guantanamo saying that it was a Caribbean resort with great food. "If I eat, I condone these lies," Fawzi said.

At the end of August, after Fawzi fainted in his cell, guards began to force-feed him through tubes pushed up his nose into his stomach. At first, the tubes were inserted for each feeding and then removed afterward. Fawzi told me that this was very painful. When he tried to pull out the tubes, he was strapped onto a stretcher with his head held by many guards, which was even more painful.

By mid-September, the force-feeding had been made more humane. Feeding tubes were left in and the formula pumped in. Still, when I saw Fawzi, a tube was protruding from his nose. Drops of blood dripped as we talked. He dabbed at it with a napkin.

We asked for Fawzi’s medical records so we could monitor his weight and his health. Denied. The only way we could learn how Fawzi was doing was to visit him each month, which we did. When we visited him in November, his weight had dropped from 140 pounds to 98 pounds. Specialists in enteral feeding advised us that the continued drop in his weight and other signs indicated that the feeding was being conducted incompetently. We asked that Fawzi be transferred to a hospital. Again, the government refused.

When we saw Fawzi in December, his weight had stabilized at about 110 pounds. The formulas had been changed, and he was being force-fed by medical personnel rather than by guards.

When I met with Fawzi three weeks ago, the tubes were out of his nose. I told him I was thankful that after five months he had ended his hunger strike. He looked at me sadly and said, "They tortured us to make us stop." At first, he said, they punished him by taking away his "comfort items" one by one: his blanket, his towel, his long pants, his shoes. They then put him in isolation. When this failed to persuade him to end the hunger strike, he said, an officer came to him Jan. 9 to announce that any detainee who refused to eat would be forced onto "the chair." The officer warned that recalcitrant prisoners would be strapped into a steel device that pulled their heads back, and that the tubes would be forced in and wrenched out for each feeding. "We're going to break this hunger strike," the officer told him.

Fawzi said he heard the prisoner next door screaming and warning him to give up the strike. He decided that he wasn't "on strike to be tortured." He said those who continued on the hunger strike not only were strapped in "the chair" but were left there for hours; he believes that guards fed them not only nutrients but also diuretics and laxatives to force them to defecate and urinate on themselves in the chair.

After less than two weeks of this treatment, the strike was over. Of the more than 80 strikers at the end of December, Fawzi said only three or four were holding out. As a result of the strike, however, prisoners are now getting a meager ration of bottled water.
Fawzi said eating was the only aspect of life at Guantanamo he could control; forcing him to end the hunger strike stripped him of his last means of protesting his unjust imprisonment. Now, he said, he feels "hopeless."

The government continues to deny that there is any injustice at Guantanamo. But I know the truth.

Thomas Wilner is a partner at Shearman & Sterling, which has been representing Kuwaiti prisoners in Guantanamo since early 2002.


March 03, 2006

Guantanamo Detainee Gives BBC Interview

A Kuwaiti detainee at Guantanamo Bay has given a rare interview to the BBC. The interview was conducted through a legal representative as journalists are not permitted to speak directly to detainees. The BBC Today programme’s Jon Manel submitted questions for Fawzi al-Odah to his lawyer, Tom Wilner. The BBC was unable to challenge or question any of Mr Odah’s responses.

No-one from the outside world can see you. So describe your physical appearance now.

I am much lighter than I was. I am now about 120 pounds, down from about 150 pounds when I came here. I have become an old man here. I'm only 29, but I have been here four years in isolation and have got old and much weaker.

How's your health?

I'm always tired. I have pain in my kidneys. I have trouble breathing. I have pain in my heart and am short of breath. I have trouble urinating and having bowel movements.

How would you describe your mental health?

I have given up. I am hopeless. I don't care about anything any more. I just want to be released. My health doesn't matter. Death in this situation is better than being alive and staying here without hope. Death would be better if it helped end this situation.

They told me: if you continue the hunger strike, you will be punished. First, they took my comfort items away from me one by one. You know, my blanket, my towel, my long pants, then my shoes. I was put in isolation for 10 days. Then, an officer came in and read me an order from General Hood [commander of Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay].

It said if you refuse to eat, we will put you on the chair - these are special, new metal chairs they have brought to Guantanamo - that you will be strapped up and down very tightly in the chair and that liquid food would be forced into me using a thicker tube with a metal edge. The tube would no longer be left in all the time, but would be forced in and pulled out at each feeding, and that this would happen three times a day. I told him: "This is torture."

He said to me: "Call it whatever you like - this is the way it's going to be: we're going to break this hunger strike."

One guy, a Saudi, told me that he had once been tortured in Saudi Arabia and that this metal chair treatment was worse than any torture he had ever endured or could imagine. They gave these formulas on purpose to make them defecate and urinate and throw up on themselves.

I would still be on this strike if I had any choice. Death is better than continuing life like this.

Did those in charge at Guantanamo agree to negotiate with detainees or hold any discussions in any way?

For a while they did. And there were some changes in conditions, but then it went back.
You must understand that the real problem here is not the horrible conditions - the lousy food, no reading materials, bad medical care, being in isolation.

The real problem is being here without reason, without hope, without a hearing.

I am an innocent person who has done nothing wrong and I have had no opportunity to show that. That is the real problem.

General Hood sent messengers to me and asked to talk to me himself about ending my hunger strike. I refused. I told the messengers to tell him that the problem was not you - you are irrelevant. My issue is with the people in Washington.

They are making the decisions. We need to be released or have the opportunity to show that we are innocent.

**The American authorities say that you are being held because you are a dangerous enemy combatant. What do you say to that?**

It is rubbish. Why don't they charge me then if they really think this is true?

It's absolutely untrue. And I have never had a fair hearing. I left my home to teach and work for needy people on my official leave. I was caught out of the country and couldn't get back. I have never supported terrorism. I hate it. I have never done anything against the United States. I was simply sold by a Pakistani for money to the United States. Why are they afraid of giving me a hearing? I was simply unlucky. I was out of the country and couldn't get back home. Everything else is simply rubbish.

**What do you say to their allegations against you? They allege that you admitted travelling through Afghanistan with Taleban members, that you admitted firing an AK-47 rifle at a training camp near Kandahar, that you admitted staying at a guest house with fighters armed with AK-47s, that you engaged in hostilities against the US or its coalition partners, that you carried an AK-47 through the Tora Bora mountains for 10 to 11 days during the US air campaign in that region and that you were captured with five other men by the Pakistani border. How do you react to those allegations?**

I don't think it is right to discuss these details on radio; I should discuss them at a hearing in court. As you know, they are stupid.

I was out of my country and couldn't get back. I found myself in an area that suddenly became incredibly dangerous, with everyone carrying guns around and hunting Arabs. I was in this place at the wrong time and couldn't get home. And I still can't get home.

The guards will beat you up quickly if you give any problem at all. They are very young people. They think we are terrorists and they treat us that way. They hate us. If anything bad happens to the United States anywhere in the world, they immediately react to us and treat us badly, like animals. It's understandable they would treat us that way. And maybe if we were terrorists they should treat us that way. But we're not.

**Have you been tortured?**

I don't want to repeat it again. No details here. But I was tortured badly in Kandahar. I was tortured here, too. I was beaten up badly at first when I was brought here. Also, when I first started on this last hunger strike, they abused us badly. They pulled the tubes in and out. If I resisted or tried to take the tubes out, they would strap me down, hold my head back and force the tubes in and out causing a lot more pain. It was useless to resist.

A fair court with fair procedures is what I have been asking for. That is all I have asked for from the beginning so that the truth can be known.

**Before all this happened, what was your view of America?**

I loved America. It freed my country from Saddam Hussein. My father fought with America against Saddam. I respected America. It stood for human rights and fairness around the world. America was the country we all looked up to.

**What is your view now?**

It has abandoned all of its own traditions and beliefs which were the cause of my respect for it. As someone who lived in the US, I cannot believe the American people know what is happening down here. This is wrong.
Guantánamo Detainee Seeks Court Action

By NEIL A. LEWIS

WASHINGTON, March 2 — A prisoner at the American-run detention center in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, who says he was tortured when the authorities subjected him to force-feeding in a restraining chair to break his hunger strike, asked a federal district judge Thursday to intervene in his case.

But Justice Department officials said that the forced feeding of the detainee, Mohammed Bawazir, had been humane and that Mr. Bawazir had mostly fabricated any discomfort he suffered. Moreover, government lawyers suggested that the judge, Gladys Kessler, refrain from ruling on the case until higher courts resolved whether a recently enacted law stripped district judges of the power to hear such cases.

The Bawazir case is the latest court test of the law, which Congress enacted late last year and which says district courts may not entertain habeas corpus cases from Guantánamo inmates challenging their detentions. Under the law, the federal appeals courts may review tribunals conducted by the military.

The government said the law, the Detainee Treatment Act, which was enacted after much debate, barred Mr. Bawazir’s suit. It is making that same argument in separate cases before all three levels of the federal judiciary: the Supreme Court, the appeals court and various district courts. The argument is largely over whether the law applies retroactively to detainees, like Mr. Bawazir, who were already in custody when the law was enacted.

The filings in the case provided new details from both the inmate’s lawyers and the government about the use of the detention chair to force-feed inmates.

Mr. Bawazir’s lawyers, in seeking court intervention, had said he cooperated in being fed through a nasal tube when the military “suddenly changed tactics implementing torture to coerce Mr. Bawazir and other Guantánamo Bay detainees to quit their hunger strike.”

They said the authorities had inflicted “unbearable pain” on him by roughly inserting a feeding tube each time; they had not allowed him to use a toilet while filling him with fluids, and he had been forced to urinate and defecate on himself.

In response, the government said it had used only “appropriate and humane means” to ensure Mr. Bawazir’s health after his weight dropped to alarming levels from his hunger strike. He was in the restraint chair for a feeding period of 20 to 30 minutes and was kept there for an additional 60 to 90 minutes on each occasion to prevent him from sabotaging the process by purging. The government said Mr. Bawazir had been allowed use of a toilet before and after the process.

The government also said that the chair had never been used for punishment and that it had been designed “for the detainee’s comfort and protection.”

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By NEIL A. LEWIS
Published: March 3, 2006
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Force-Feeding at Guantánamo Is Now Acknowledged (February 22, 2006)

Tough U.S. Steps in Hunger Strike at Camp in Cuba (February 9, 2006)
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http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12594

SOURCE: New York Times

March 04, 2006

The Legacy of the Hunger Strikes

Bobby Sands and nine other republican prisoners died on hunger strike in Long Kesh 25 years ago. What became of those who survived? Melanie McFadyean finds seven of them and asks: was it all worth it?

In a layby on a country road a few miles outside Belfast are some high, padlocked gates. Beyond the gates, the deserted compounds of Long Kesh jail stretch bleakly into the distance. These days, you can push your way through brambles and disconnected barbed wire and climb into its eerie, grey expanses. The jail is empty, closed in September 2000, its maximum-security fence breachable, its searchlights dismantled. But its fearsome reputation lives on.

For many years, this was the epicentre of the Northern Irish war, the front line where 53 republican prisoners engaged in two hunger strikes, the second of which, in 1981, resulted in the deaths of 10 men.

But what of those who survived? As they look back on its legacy, a quarter of a century on, they say the strikes paved the way for the republican movement’s shift from militarism into electoral politics and peace. The catalyst was the
Fermanagh and South Tyrone byelection on April 9 1981: Bobby Sands, then in his sixth week of hunger strike, stood as an Anti-H-Block/ Armagh Political Prisoner and won with more than 30,000 votes. He died 26 days later, but the nationalist community, identifying with the prisoners' cause, had taken a crucial step towards electoral politics.

Perhaps Sands had an intimation of the reverberations his election and subsequent death would set off. It was a turning point in Northern Ireland's war that culminated last April when Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams called on the IRA to commit to "purely political and democratic activity", a resolve he underlined two weeks ago at the party's annual conference. But the sense of achievement felt by the survivors is tempered by regret. One, Laurence McKeown, says, "Time numbs little of the sorrow and sense of loss we experienced as, one by one, our friends and comrades died on the hunger strike."

In 1969, when British soldiers were drafted on to the streets of Belfast, they were welcomed fleetingly by some nationalists. That mood soon changed. The Provisional IRA came to the fore and stepped up the campaign against the Northern Ireland security forces and British troops. A country whose jail population had been less than a thousand suddenly found its numbers swelling exponentially and Long Kesh, a former RAF base, was opened as a jail in 1971. By 1976 it had expanded into eight H-shaped blocks with a capacity for nearly 800 men. When it closed 24 years later, 10,000 prisoners had been through its gates.

All the prisoners were connected to the armed struggle - or were assumed to be - and republicans always heavily outnumbered loyalists. In 1972, Billy McKee, an IRA prisoner at Long Kesh, initiated the first hunger strike. He was determined not to be treated as a criminal: he won - the then Tory government granted "special category status", PoW status in all but name. In 1976, as the H-blocks were filling up, the Wilson Labour government reversed this decision. Kieran Nugent, a 19-year-old republican, in September 1976 was the first to be denied special category status. He refused to wear prison uniform, saying they'd have to nail it to his back. He was left naked but for a blanket; so began the "blanket protest".

The protest escalated in March 1978 when prisoners were told to remove the towels wrapped around them when they went to slop out. They refused. When prison officers kicked over slop buckets in the cells, the men began to throw their facces through the bars of the windows. This was the "no wash", or "dirty" protest as the outside world called it. Each prisoner had only a blanket and a sponge mattress, no reading or writing materials, radios, letters. Unless they put on prison clothes, they didn't get their monthly visit. For every day on the blanket, one was added to their sentence. In December 1979, prime minister Margaret Thatcher made her position clear: the prisoners, she said, wanted to establish "that their crimes were 'political'; thus giving the perpetrators a kind of respectability, even nobility. This we could not allow."

On October 27 1980, the first hunger strike began. It ended 53 days later, on December 18, following an appeal from the Catholic Primate of Ireland, on the assumption that the British government would make some concessions to the prisoners. It didn't. Nothing was to change.

Three months later, on March 1 1981, Bobby Sands, OC of the IRA in Long Kesh, began the second hunger strike; the blanket protest was called off the day after, to avoid detracting attention from him. Sands died on May 5, 100,000 attended his funeral and his name is now known internationally. The nine who died after are not, but their faces look down from murals in republican Belfast. There were 13 other prisoners who survived that hunger strike (two, Pat McGeown and Matt Devlin, have since died). Seven agreed to be interviewed: Laurence McKeown, Paddy Quinn, Pat Sheehan, Jackie McMullan, Brendan McLaughlin, Gerard Hodgins and Brian (not his real name - his workmates know nothing of his past and his job takes him to loyalist areas). They pass unnoticed in the street; they have slipped into ordinary lives.

All of them grew up amid the civil rights campaign of the 1960s and were in their early teens when the British troops arrived. The army was on their streets, they were regularly searched and their homes raided.

Laurence McKeown is from Randallstown, outside Belfast. He is an intelligent man of great presence. His father was a van driver, an SDLP voter. In his teens, McKeown had ambitions to be an architect and at 15 got a job in a quantity surveyor's office. He grew up with Protestants, "He was a mixed area and we had excellent relations with them. I still did, in jail, in later years." When the Ulster Defence Regiment was set up in April 1970, as a successor to the hated B-Specials, it was, recalls McKeown, "just a larger Protestant militia... Suddenly one side of the community was armed and had the power to harass me, which they did."

McKeown didn't join the IRA lightly. "I was 16. There was a lot of soul-searching. It's not like joining a state army, where someone signs their name, gets a uniform and rifle, and the chaplain blesses them." In 1976, aged 19, McKeown was charged with causing explosions and the attempted murder of a Royal Ulster Constabulary man; he got life.

Pat Sheehan's experience was similar. On the street where he grew up, there were only three other Catholic families. One day, two men came to look for him and fired a revolver. The family moved out. After that attack Sheehan joined
the Fianna, the IRA youth wing, and then the IRA. Like McKeown, by the age of 19 he was behind bars after taking part in a bombing - there were no casualties - at a cash-and-carry.

The street where Jackie McMullan lives, near where he grew up, is quiet now; but, as he dandles his baby on his knee, he remembers when the nearby Falls was burning, Kashmir and Bombay Street were torched by loyalists, and he watched as troops put up barricades around the blackened streets. In August 1971, 2,000 people were interned without trial, all but 107 of them from the nationalist community. It made a deep impression on McMullan. "In my teens I was arrested maybe 20 times. Every male aged 13 to 65 would have been arrested, the vast majority for screening. And every single one of my friends joined the Fianna. We'd be scouting; you wouldn't have participated in firing guns or in ambushes. After school there were riots. The Brits, probably bored out of their skulls, used to drive down the Glen Road every day as schools were getting out."

McMullan arrived in Long Kesh in September 1976. He got life for attempted murder. Like many others, he had refused to recognise the no-jury, special Diplock courts.

Brian joined the IRA at 16. "Every day the army was there, stop, up against the wall, slapped about. I had been reading books my grandfather gave me about Michael Collins and James Connolly." At 19 he was convicted of attempted murder.

In his childhood, Gerard Hodgins was burned out of his home by loyalists. The family moved. He left school at 16 with no O-levels. When he joined the IRA, he was given a warning: within a year, or two, he would be dead or in jail.

You'd imagine a 20-year-old facing a life sentence would be devastated. That's not how McMullan recalls it. "It was September 1976 and the longest anyone was in was five years. You had no conception of life. You were young and full of beans, all your friends were going to jail. There was an air of rebellion, and everybody thought it'd be over in a couple of years." For McKeown, being taken to prison was "that moment when teenage things were gone for ever".

All these men went on the blanket and dirty protests. "The circle [the administrative centre in each block] was where the officers would beat you," says McMullan. "You're made to strip naked, you have eight screws telling you to put your uniform on, you have a slap in the face. You're naked, humiliated, cornered and getting beaten up by these big men in uniform while other screws washed out." Paddy Quinn remembers buckets of scalding water and Jeyes fluid thrown at him in his cell; others describe forced washes in freezing water with hard brushes. Every two weeks, cells and prisoners were forcibly hosed down. "What made it possible to live like that," says McMullan, "was that we were in it together. It was powerful. It was unbreakable in spite of the no wash, and it was absolutely freezing. We had no windows." They smashed them so they could communicate and later to throw out the faeces. Amid the repulsive surroundings of shit-smeared walls, says Quinn, "You'd be sleeping on the sponge mattress on the floor, you'd wake up in the morning and maggots would be stuck to you. You'd have to pull them off. Then they'd turn into flies."

The prisoners looked out for each other. There was bingo and quizzes, shouted through the gaps in the doors. They taught each other Gaelic, gave history lectures, sang songs, recited stories. Bobby Sands relayed the whole of Leon Uris's novel Trinity. It took him eight days.

Every day when McMullan woke up, he would speculate on whether he would get a beating. And there was the nightmare of the monthly visits. He did not see his family for the first 30 months of the protest, because he refused to wear the uniform. "The screws standing beside you, hating you, hating your relatives. Your eyes are bulging because you're locked in a cell 24 hours a day, you have matted hair, you're filthy, you look like a deranged maniac. You go out and try to act normal to your family, putting on a brave face, and so are they."

On the next due visit, he waited to see his mother, Bernadette, who supported the men - she had chained herself to the railings in Downing Street. A priest came instead to tell McMullan she had died.

The pressure was intense and some cracked. These seven endured. The prison officers, Sheehan says, had no restraint. "If a screw was fair, he'd get abuse from his own people. They had orderlies who brought the food round and one who was sympathetic squeezed a half-ounce of tobacco through the door. The screws caught him and gave him a beating. Another orderly was told to do his 'party piece', and got on the table and urinated into the tea urn."

Outside, republican and loyalist groups took revenge - between 1974 and 1993, some 29 prison service employees were murdered. During the Long Kesh years, 50 prison service employees committed suicide. The pressure, recalls one warder, led to "irrational behaviour and heavy drinking". "You could smell it on their breath," Quinn says.

The first hunger strikers had what became known as the Five Demands: the right not to wear prison uniform, the right not to do penal work, the right to associate freely with other prisoners, the right to get one visit, one letter and one
parcel a week, and the restoration of the remission lost on protest. Quinn joined the fast in June, by which time four men were already dead - Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCree and Patsy O'Hara.

On his 19th day, Quinn was taken to the prison hospital. There he heard Joe McDonnell dying and his wife, Goretti, weeping. He remembers Martin Hurson's death on July 13: "I could hear his brother shouting, 'Martin! Martin!' I could hear Martin saying that the lights were out. Then it went quiet. The next day they put me into Martin's cell."

By that time Quinn couldn't keep even water down. "Maybe it crossed your mind to go off the hunger strike, but I wouldn't give up. You always had this thought - Maggie Thatcher wasn't going to criminalise me. Some time around then I came round in the intensive care unit. My lips were swollen, chapped and cut. They said I'd been biting them. I remember hyperventilating, my heart was going that fast, I could hear the scraping and screeching of the blood on the back of my brain, I could feel this terrible pain. A medical orderly was helping me to breathe, but I was hallucinating that the screws were trying to kill me, I could hear the noise in my throat, gasping for breath. You were watching the deterioration of your own body, thinking, 'I have to do this; I'm going to keep going.' It was just pain, day after day. Then one day I went for a shower, I collapsed in the shower, then there was the sickness.

"I remember looking at the jug of water and repeating to myself, 'I'm going to keep it down.' And it did stay down. That's when the walking stopped, I was in a wheelchair. My eyes had gone, all I could see were shadows. I had reached that point that I was looking forward to death. I felt a real sense of contentment. I had accepted I was going to die and I was happy with my decision. That was maybe after 43 days, in and out of consciousness at that stage."

Quinn had told his mother not to take him off the hunger strike when he lapsed into coma: "I says, 'You either back me or you back Maggie Thatcher.' I was weak, it was hard to talk, and she said there was no point going on with it."

McKeown describes the moment when he thought his death was a certainty: "It's like someone who has been on their feet for days without sleep and then gets the chance to lie down but is awakened to be told the house is on fire. They don't want to know, they just want to sleep."

Encouraged by the Catholic clergy, the families intervened, Quinn's mother and McKeown's relatives among them. Quinn thinks his mother was deliberately brought into the hospital when he was close to death. "She heard me roaring. [They] thought I had a couple of hours to live." When he went into a coma, she ordered that he be saved. A few days later he met his mother - he was blind and angry. He's never discussed it with her.

McKeown joined the strike two weeks after Quinn, on June 29. It was a time of waiting, he says. He was hoping someone would materialise with a resolution to the demands. "Nobody on the hunger strike wanted to die," he says. "This martyr notion is nonsense, we were caught in circumstances where we were going to resist to the death rather than capitulate to the criminalisation." When he became unconscious after 70 days, his family took him off the strike.

On July 4, when four men had died and McDonnell was four days from death, the hunger strikers sent out a document. They were not asking for privileges, it said, their five demands should apply to all prisoners. It sparked renewed contact between a representative of the government, known as the Mountain Climber, and the IRA leadership. A source close to the events of that weekend told me that the Mountain Climber was "a high-ranking, unelected Tory."

Thatcher held the public line - "We are not prepared to consider special category status." Meanwhile, the Mountain Climber told Adams that if the hunger strike ended, there would be concessions.

Despite their refusal to negotiate openly, the British wanted an end to the hunger strike. As Sir Ian Gilmour, a minister at the Foreign Office, put it, the hunger strikes were "a great propaganda coup for the IRA". Under Secretary to the Northern Ireland Office Sir Kenneth Stowe said, "Northern Ireland is not a place to grow martyrs if you can avoid it. We were anxious to try to find some way of enabling the hunger strikers to get off the hook."

The Mountain Climber had insisted on secrecy. However, Adams felt compelled to tell the Catholic bishops, who were themselves trying to broker an end to the hunger strike. Once again, there was no deal. The deaths continued.

In his book, Blanketmen, published last year, former prisoner and hunger strike public relations officer Richard O'Rawe maintains that the IRA army council wanted the hunger strike prolonged until the second Fermanagh and South Tyrone byelection, to be held on August 20 and to be contested by a Sinn Féin man. There is no corroboration of O'Rawe's assertion, and other senior republicans deny it.

The strike went on. On August 10, Sheehan refused food. "The hardest part was starting it," he says. "There's all kind of self-doubt... You had to be focused on your own hunger strike, nothing else matters - what's going on in the outside world, what happens within your own family. You have to blank out everything."
Four days before the hunger strike was called off, when Sheehan was on his 51st day, a doctor told him he was jaundiced and might not live even if the strike ended. By the time McMullan began his hunger strike on August 17, nine men had died. "With each death," he says, "we became more angry, more steely. You knew those guys, you were close to them. Closer to them than you would be to your own brothers." For the first 20 or 30 days he was alone in his cell. "There were people on either side, so you'd be up talking at the window or you'd lie down on the floor and speak into the pipe that ran from cell to cell - the sound carried."

By the end he was in the prison hospital, wasting away, sleeping more, always lucid, warding off fear with memories of those who had died and his reasons for going on the strike. He had been on the strike for 48 days when it ended on October 3.

Brian, whose ebullience suggests he could survive anything, joined the strike because he didn't see why "someone else should do something for me if I wasn't prepared to do it myself". He wasn't alone. "You'd be surprised that about 100 put their names forward." But how could he give his life away? "Ask my wife - she'd say it's because I'm bloody thick."

In retrospect, these men say the hunger strikes and the sacrifices were worth it. "If the British had succeeded in criminalising us, we would never have got over it," says Quinn. "If Sinn Féin had remained hard-line and military, then I think the sacrifices made on the hunger strike would have been a complete waste. It was Sinn Féin going into politics that made it worthwhile."

Only one of the men fails to welcome the political path taken by the republican movement. Brendan McLaughlin is still fighting the war in his head. He was on the hunger strike for 20 days, but had to abandon it due to a perforated ulcer. He is confined to a wheelchair in his council house in Gobnascail near Derry after a stroke six years ago. His fresh-faced 12-year-old son comes in and out. McLaughlin's former wife lives a few houses along but they're barely speaking. He's not complaining about that, he's complaining about Gerry Adams. "The Brits have no right to be in this country, never have, never will. McGuinness, Adams, I know 'em all - scum bastards. I fought for a 32-county republic, a united Ireland. They're selling out. I'll never change. The war will never end."

Sheehan disagrees. "There is no need for the IRA any longer. I grew up in a state that was unjust and oppressive. I was vulnerable to attacks because of the area I grew up in. I am proud that I took up arms; I believed it was the right thing to do. The situation is a lot different now." Sheehan got a first in philosophy from the Open University during a second stint in jail. He now runs a small business and is married with a young child.

McKeown works for a national network of republican ex-prisoners. He got together with a woman who visited him during his last years in jail and they have two children. He got a social science degree in jail, and 10 years after the hunger strike compiled numerous prison testimonies. Since then, he's written plays and screenplays, made a documentary, and writes a newspaper column for Daily Ireland. I bumped into him at the opening night of the Belfast Film Festival (which he co-founded), glass in hand, standing beside one of the Corrs, a world away from the seven-stone skeleton he was after 70 days on hunger strike; he was rescued from death by his family, against his will.

Paddy Quinn can't work - he's had a kidney transplant. He lives in a farmhouse in County Down with his wife and their two little girls. His eyesight was permanently damaged by the hunger strike. Has he regrets? "I remember somebody saying to me once, 'You lost 10 years.' I said, 'In those 10 years I probably had more experience than you'll ever have.' "

Gerard Hodgins lives in a flat that looks for miles across Belfast to the hills. When the hunger strike ended, he had been on it for 20 days. He looks back on the four years of protest as a "terrible, despairing time". He occasionally has flashbacks. In and out of jail, he says, "I had hatred and a desire for payback, for revenge against the whole system - screws, RUC, the British army." In 1995, when the prisoners got 50% of their remission back, two years were chopped off his sentence and he was due a week's parole. It was then he met Lorraine, who is now his wife.

After his release in 1996, he got into community work, which led to a post with the Department of Learning and Education as a mentor in a job assistance scheme for people who lack basic skills.

When Jackie McMullan left Long Kesh in 1992, he said it was like arriving from Mars. He found it hard to be in company. He was most at ease with former prisoners. As for women, in his head he was still 20, and women his age - 35 - were married with kids. He was in and out of relationships, couldn't settle. He's not complaining, though. "I've had a brilliant time since I got out," he says, chuckling. Four years ago he met his partner, a teacher. He worked with Sinn Féin on education programmes for ex-prisoners and is still involved with community work.

The hunger strike is always with them, but they have survived, even flourished. "Winning leaves you OK," says McKeown. "They tried to criminalise us but failed - they politicised us." Within days of the end of the hunger strike, James Prior, Northern Ireland secretary, announced a series of measures that went a long way to meeting the five demands.
A Long Kesh mission statement published just before it closed reads: "We will operate a secure, safe and humane regime which recognises the individual and the organisations to which he or she claims allegiance." If that had been the mission in 1976, many lives would have been saved.


SOURCE: The Guardian

Gitmo: The Worst of the Worst?

*A report, based entirely on Defense Department documents, exposes the truth about Guantánamo*

**by Nat Hentoff**

Four years ago, the president was assured by his lawyers in the Justice and Defense departments that, as commander in chief, he had the ultimate power to determine which of our captives in the war on terrorism are "enemy combatants"—and to imprison many of them indefinitely at Guantánamo.

Then, after the Abu Ghraib photographs went around the world (recently, even more repellent pictures from that prison have been internationally distributed), Gitmo became a recruiting tool for our enemies, while causing increasing disquiet among our allies.

On February 16, a British high court judge, Sir Andrew Collins, emphasized: "America's idea of what is torture is not the same as ours and does not appear to coincide with that of most civilized nations."

He was referring to a February 15 report by five independent U.N. special rapporteurs on torture that Guantánamo be closed and its prisoners be tried or released.

What has newly inflamed human rights critics of Guantánamo's treatment of its prisoners—whom Donald Rumsfeld has described as "terrorists" and "the worst of the worst" of the suspected terrorists we have captured—are confirmed reports of the force-feeding of desperate prisoners, held for four years with no end in sight. At one point, 130 had refused food, but that number is now down to four because of the methods used to prevent one or more of the resisters from dying, thereby further shaming the United States.

As described to me by Tom Wilner, a Washington-based attorney for a number of the prisoners, and further detailed in the following February 9 National Public Radio account by Neil Koslowe, another attorney for a detainee there, the hunger strikers are tied down to a metal restraint chair as officers "force open their mouths and then they shove down their mouths through thick tubes in their noses nutritional supplements mixed with milk of magnesia and other ingredients. Removal of the tubes is often violent. The prisoners get nauseous, they vomit. They defecate over themselves. They urinate over themselves."

This goes on for hours a day, and screaming doesn't make it stop.

Responding to this vivid account of what the president has often called the "humane treatment" of prisoners at Gitmo, White House press secretary Scott McClellan brushed aside rising condemnations of the brutal force-feeding:

"We know that these are dangerous terrorists being kept at Guantánamo Bay. They are people determined to harm innocent civilians."

But who actually are these "bad guys," as the president refers to them? Soon, we may find out all their names for the first time. Federal judge Jed Rakoff of New York's Southern District has ordered the Pentagon—following an Associated Press lawsuit—to release uncensored transcripts of the sham hearings the prisoners have had to determine whether they will end their lives at Gitmo or be given more than the current fake "due process" at these hearings. The Pentagon has agreed to the order.

Already, however, we now know much more about how "dangerous" they really are because of a stunning, heavily documented investigation by the Seton Hall (New Jersey) School of Law. Titled "Report on Guantánamo Detainees," it profiles 517 of the prisoners at Gitmo entirely based on "analysis of Department of Defense data." (Emphasis added.) The lead authors are Mark Denbeaux, a professor at the law school and counsel to two of the prisoners, and his son Joshua Denbeaux.

The data "are based on written determination the Government has produced for detainees it has designated as enemy combatants," and contain "the evidence upon which the Government relied on in making its decision that these detainees were (indeed) enemy combatants." (Emphasis added.)

Now dig this about "the worst of the worst" of the "bad guys" intent on killing Americans:
There are now about 490 prisoners at Gitmo, and “55 percent of the detainees are not determined to have committed any hostile acts against the United States or coalition allies.

"Only 8 percent of the detainees were characterized as Al Qaeda fighters. Of the remaining detainees, 40 percent have no definitive connection with Al Qaeda at all and 18 percent have no definitive affiliation with either Al Qaeda or the Taliban.

"Only 5 percent of the detainees were captured by United States forces. [A total of] 86 percent of the detainees were arrested by either Pakistan or the Northern Alliance and turned over to United States custody. This 86 percent of the detainees captured by Pakistan or the Northern Alliance were turned over to the United States at a time at which the United States offered large bounties for capture of suspected enemies." (Emphasis added.)

The Northern Alliance included Afghan warlords—not noted, to say the least, for their concern for any due process in rounding up "suspects" or the quality of the "evidence," if any, connecting their captives with terrorism. But these warlords were attracted by the generous sums the U.S. gave them for these suspects—many of whom were then warehoused at Gitmo.

The Seton Hall Law School report concludes with just two sentences—exposing the Bush administration's cold fraudulence in imprisoning these "enemy combatants" at Gitmo in the name of our national security and in total violation of due process, the basis of American rule of law, along with violating international treaties, including the Geneva Conventions on civilized treatment of prisoners:

"The detainees have been afforded no meaningful opportunities to test the Government's evidence against them. They remain incarcerated."

In a lead editorial on February 17, the British Financial Times said of the Abu Ghraib revelations, and this also applies to what has happened at Gitmo since: "There was no independent investigation and no real accountability: the two most visible privates in the photos were jailed, and a junior general was demoted.

"But responsibility lay—and lies—further up the chain of command, as far as Donald Rumsfeld . . . and officials such as Alberto Gonzales, now attorney general, who devised a framework for circumventing the Geneva Conventions. It is they who should be held to account."

But not the commander in chief?


SOURCE: Village Voice

Guantanamo Man Tells of 'Torture'

A Kuwaiti man being held at Guantanamo Bay has told the BBC in a rare interview that the force-feeding of hunger strikers amounts to torture.

Fawzi al-Odah, who has been held at the base since 2002, said hunger strikers were strapped to a chair and force-fed through a tube three times a day.

His remarks came as a US judge prepared to hear a call to ban force-feeding.

A senior official in the US state department denied the administration was using torture in Guantanamo Bay.

The legal case is being brought on behalf of Mohammed Bawazir, a Yemeni who has also been held there since 2002.

The action is the first test for a new law explicitly outlawing torture of terrorism suspects, which President George W Bush signed in December.

New testimony

The BBC submitted questions for Fawzi al-Odah to his lawyer, Tom Wilner, who has access to the camp, but was unable to challenge Mr Odah's responses.
Mr Odah was one of 84 inmates at Guantanamo who went on hunger strike in December. Just four remain defiant.

**US TORTURE BAN**
Bans cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of terror suspects
Limits interrogation techniques to US Army standards
CIA interrogators have same legal rights as military
Proposed by US Republican Senator John McCain
Initially opposed by White House

Speaking to the BBC, US official Colleen Graffey said all detainees were afforded regular status reviews and offered the opportunity to renounce violence.

Through his lawyer, Mr Odah described his treatment during his hunger strike.

"First they took my comfort items away from me. They put me in isolation for 10 days."

"They came in and read out an order saying that if I refuse to eat I would be put in the chair [for force feeding]."

He told how detainees were given laxatives to empty their bowels and were placed in "the chair" three times a day, where a tube was inserted to administer food.

"One man said he was tortured in Saudi Arabia and that this was worse than anything that happened there," he said.

**New rules**

The BBC's Justin Webb, in Washington, says the legal challenge to the force-feeding may be a shot in the dark.

Some inmates have been at the detention camp since 2002
Under the terms of the new law, it is not even clear whether courts have the right to hear this case. But a judge in Washington has at least begun the process, he adds.

Lawyers for Mohammed Bawazir, who has been at Guantanamo Bay since 2002, said he was strapped in a restraining chair and force-fed through a large tube.

He ended his hunger strike in order to avoid what he regarded as torture.

The lawyers are arguing that the new anti-torture rules which Mr Bush signed in December, after initially opposing them, outlaw this practice.

The UN Human Rights Commission said recently that it regarded force-feeding at Guantanamo as a form of torture.

The Bush administration has said firmly and repeatedly that it is not.


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**March 05, 2006**

**Freedom Plea For Bahraini in Bay Prison**

**By KANWAL TARIQ HAMEED**

LAWYERS have described the continued detention of a Bahraini at Guantanamo Bay as a "miscarriage of justice" and "humanitarian tragedy".
Salah Abdul Rasool Al Blooshi has only met once with US interrogators over the past year, but continues to be held indefinitely at the military base.

He is one of three Bahrainis who continues to be held by the US, but his lawyers say he is a prime candidate for release.

They have now renewed their plea for his release following a decision by a prison Administrative Review Board (ARB) that he should remain at Guantanamo Bay without trial.

The head of the New York-based Dorsey and Whitney legal team representing the Bahraini three, Joshua Colangelo-Bryan, said he received the news during a visit to the prison facility in January. "There is no legal, moral or strategic justification for keeping Salah at Guantanamo," Mr Colangelo-Bryan said.

"We can think of no explanation at all as to why he was not released with our other clients in November."

The 24-year-old, who is currently being held at Guantanamo Bay Camp 4 (reportedly for prisoners who are "not considered a threat"), has not been accused of committing any act of violence or hostility, said his lawyer.

In fact, Al Blooshi was in Afghanistan before the US announced its plans to attack the country to topple the Taliban government after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Mr Colangelo-Bryan added.

He was captured by US forces as he fled Afghanistan in December 2001.

"Everyday that Salah spends at Guantanamo is a miscarriage of justice and a humanitarian tragedy," he said.

"The fact that Salah is in Guantanamo at all underscores the horribly misguided nature of the operation there."

Mr Al Blooshi received the news that he would not be released in a document entitled "Announcement Concerning a Decision of the Administrative Review Board", his lawyer said.

"The Administrative Review Board is the body that, in theory, decides whether detainees are threats to the US and need to be detained," added Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

"Bizarrely, the ARB concluded that Salah should remain detained in Guantanamo."

"The ARB made this decision despite the fact that the military does not in any way even accuse Salah of having any involvement in any hostile action or other violence."

"In fact, the military itself says that Salah went to Afghanistan in August 2001."

"It is plainly obvious that nobody would have gone to Afghanistan at that time in order to engage in hostile action against the US or its allies."

"Further, Salah is being held in Camp 4, which shows that he is not considered a threat to anyone at all in Guantanamo."

"He has met with interrogators only once in the past year and that was a very brief meeting. This shows that the military does not believe that Salah has any information at all."

However, lawyers say they are "powerless" to litigate for the release of detainees while a court battle over a law that has frozen all court proceedings related to Guantanamo detainees is still pending.

The law, passed on December 30, denies detainees access to US Federal Courts and allows the US Government to hold individuals for the rest of their lives based on evidence obtained through torture.

Lawyers insist the only remaining avenue at present is for the Bahrain government to exercise diplomatic negotiations for the release of remaining three.

"There is no better candidate for release than Salah and we hope sincerely that he will be brought home soon," Mr Colangelo-Bryan said.
The three Bahrainis still being held at Guantanamo Bay are Isa Al Murbati, 42, Juma Mohammed Al Dossary, 32, and Al Blooshi.

Al Dossary faces at least another year in Guantanamo Bay after being deemed a "continued threat" to the US by an annual ARB at the camp. There has been no news on the ARB decision regarding Al Murbati, who has claimed that he was brutally assaulted and force-fed by an Immediate Response Force (IRF) team after refusing to end a hunger strike of more than three months.

http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=12643

SOURCE: Gulf Daily News

Details of Some Guantanamo Hearings

By The Associated Press

-- Details from transcripts of "enemy combatant" hearings involving Guantanamo detainees:

_Abdul Rahim Muslimdost was a journalist for newspapers and magazines in Pakistan. U.S. authorities accused the Afghani of belonging to a Muslim militant group. He admitted membership but said he joined to help drive the Russians out of his country. He denied the accusation he had an al-Qaida contact in the province of Herat. Unknown whether still in custody.

Weekly Roundup

The week's events from around the world, captured in pictures.

» VIEW THIS WEEK'S PHOTOS

Diplomatic Dispatches

Nora Boustany's column reporting on Washington's diplomatic community appears each Wednesday and Friday in The Post.

Kurdish Critic and Captive Stages Hunger Strike

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_Mohammed Gul, a farmer and gas station owner in his native Afghanistan, was captured and held on suspicion of links to Taliban forces about six weeks after returning home from Saudi Arabia, where he lived for three years and worked as a driver. He told the tribunal he returned to Afghanistan to take care of his sick wife, and he urged the tribunal to release him. "I don't want to spend any more time here, not one more minute," he said.
_Feroz Ali Abbasi, the British detainee who submitted written complaints that military police had sex in front of him while he was trying to pray, tried repeatedly in his "enemy combatant" hearing to explain why he should be considered a prisoner of war and thus entitled to better treatment. But an Air Force colonel, whose identity remains blacked out, would have none of it. "Your conduct is unacceptable and this is your absolute final warning. I do not care about international law. I do not want to hear the words 'international law' again. We are not concerned about international law," the colonel insisted before having Abbasi removed from the hearing so the military could consider classified evidence against him. Abbasi was freed in January 2005.

_Saifullah A. Paracha, a multimillionaire businessman from Karachi, Pakistan, was arrested on arrival in Thailand in July 2003, held in isolation for 14 months in Afghanistan and then sent to Guantanamo. A computer science graduate of the New York Institute of Technology, he acknowledged meeting Osama bin Laden twice but denied all high-level accusations against him, including making investments for al-Qaida members, translating statements from bin Laden into Urdu, plotting to smuggle explosives into the United States and recommending using nuclear weapons against U.S. soldiers. Told that he eventually would have a chance to pursue his case in U.S. courts, he asks: "I've been here 17 months _ would that be before I expire?" He is told: "I would certainly hope so, especially since you are under the care of the U.S. government."

_Abdul Gappher, an ethnic Uighur from western China, was accused of traveling to Afghanistan to join the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Gappher denied that, saying he was in Afghanistan to "get some training to fight back against the Chinese government" and had nothing against the United States. He testified that his own "people and my own family are being tortured under the Chinese government." He was captured in Pakistan, where he said the police "sold us to the U.S. government."

_Mohammed Sharif, a native of Sherberghan, Afghanistan, was accused of being a guard at a Taliban camp. He denied that and said he had been captured by the Taliban and put to work. He said he feared punishment and retribution against his family if he fled. Sharif denied any knowledge of al-Qaida and asked the tribunal repeatedly to produce the (classified) evidence against him so he might respond. "What could you have possibly done, that we might discover some of those facts?" Sharif is asked. "That's my point," he responds. "There are no facts ... This is ridiculous. I know for a fact there is no proof."

_Abdullah Mohammed Al-Hamiri, of Yemen, was accused of association with al-Qaida; of participating in military training camp in Kandahar, Afghanistan, from July through September 2001; and of speaking with bin Laden at a safe house. He was captured by Pakistani forces with a group of Arab fighters while attempting to flee Afghanistan in December 2001. "All of those charges he said were made up in order to keep him and other Muslims at this camp," his legal representative said.

_Zahir Shah, of Afghanistan, was accused of belonging to an Islamic militant group and of having automatic weapons and a grenade launcher in his house. He acknowledged having rifles for protection but insisted he did not fight American troops.

_Mahbub Rahman, of Afghanistan, was accused of spying on American forces, shooting an Afghan soldier and two civilians, and being caught with two automatic rifles. He told the tribunal he had only one weapon for protection and that the shooting was in self-defense.

_Naibullah Darwaish, of Afghanistan, was accused of being the Taliban-appointed police chief in Afghanistan's Zabol province. Darwaish said he fought for years with the mujahedeen against the Russians, as did the governor who appointed him chief, but denies that he or the governor was associated with Taliban, al-Qaida or Islamic terrorist groups.

_Mesh Arsad Al Rashid said he went to Afghanistan to help Muslims fight against Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former northern warlord now the Afghan army chief of staff, and Ahmed Shah Massood, an anti-Taliban Afghan military commander slain Sept. 9, 2001. "I did not know my training would be considered al-Qaida training. I was trying to help Muslims," said Rashid, who gave no country of origin. "I am not from the Taliban. I'm just a person, a helper."

_Abdul Hakim Bukhary, from Saudi Arabia, denied joining al-Qaida but said he met bin Laden 14 or 15 years ago while fighting a jihad against Russian forces in Afghanistan. He traveled to Afghanistan to participate in jihad against the United States after Sept. 11, 2001, but was jailed by the Taliban before he could fight any Americans. The Taliban suspected him of being a spy after he said he liked Ahmed Shah Massood. After the United States invaded, he was sent to Guantanamo, where he said conditions were much improved. "Prisoners here are in paradise. American people are very good. Really. They give us three meals. Fruit juice and everything!" Still, he said, he wanted to be freed and returned to his family.

_Bisher al-Rawi, a British resident who holds an Iraqi passport, was arrested in Gambia and turned over to U.S. authorities. He and two friends were suspected of links to al-Qaeda and the radical Muslim cleric Abu Qatada. He told the tribunal he had gone to Gambia with his brother to open a peanut processing factory. The detainee, who said he
had provided information about the Muslim community in Britain to the British intelligence agency MI5 in the past, described Abu Qatada as a friend and said he helped the cleric find an apartment.

_British detainee Moazzam Begg refused to attend a tribunal hearing. His personal representative said Begg was tortured by FBI agents in Afghanistan and has been interrogated hundreds of times. Begg was freed in January 2005._


SOURCE: The Guardian