

## Thoughts on Releases of Guantánamo Uighurs

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If Bermuda (population 68,000) can accept four detainees, Palau (population 21,000) thirteen, and Albania (population 3.6 million) five, then why can't the U.S. accept any? We are talking about detainees whom **the Bush administration cleared for release** years ago because they posed no threat, although it did not exonerate them from having ever posed a threat. (In eight years, did the Bush administration ever admit to having made a mistake?) Our European allies want to help, but they wonder why they must do all the heavy lifting while the American people scream, "Not in my backyard," and while Congress refuses to budget any money for closing Guantánamo or relocating any detainees.

But at least some Americans are willing. The largest U.S. community of Uighurs, in Fairfax County, Virginia, was prepared last year to take most of the 17 Uighurs who remained at Guantánamo, and an interfaith community in Tallahassee, Florida, was ready to take three. But fear-mongering about the men defeated those efforts, promulgating lies that not only have prevented any cleared prisoners from reaching U.S. homes, but may even keep any convicted detainees out of our SuperMax prisons—from which no prisoner has ever escaped!

Are we really so weak and afraid, or is something else driving the fear-mongering that has convinced so most Americans that everyone at Guantánamo is a dangerous terrorist—no legal proof needed? Could it be posturing by politicians who want to appear tough on terrorism? Could some members of the previous administration have something to hide, and don't want us to meet former detainees face to face, for fear that we might like them, or to try them in federal court, for fear they may be innocent of any crimes?

To hear the fear-mongers talk, you would assume—as too many Americans have—that everyone at Guantánamo Bay is a terrorist, when only a handful have ever been charged and more than 500 of the so-called "worst-of-the-worst" have already been released. Hundreds of detainees, including those remaining, were sold to the US military for bounties that the military handed out without bothering to make sure the people who were handed over as "terrorists" had anything to do with terrorism, the Taliban or al-Qaeda.

Here's a rundown of who's left at Guantánamo.

- **About 56 detainees who have been cleared remain at Guantánamo but cannot return home for a variety of reasons.** Some were stateless to begin with. Many were recognized refugees escaping persecution, torture, or worse, who were sold for bounties while they were traveling in the hope of obtaining visas so they could go somewhere safe.
- **More than 100 other men at Guantánamo have never been charged.** Many of the men's stories are similar to those of the cleared detainees. They deserve to be either charged for crimes and tried in federal court or released. The Obama administration's plan for permanent, preventive detention for some, without charges or trials, is unconstitutional. Permanent, preventive detention is what Guantánamo and Bagram are all about, so let's set aside talk of replacing Guantánamo with more of the same. If the Bush administration tainted the evidence through torture, that does not absolve the current administration of its burden to prove the men's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. It cannot lock people up forever without legal recourse simply because their tortured statements are inadmissible in court.



- **Only 13 men now at Guantánamo have been charged.** They should be tried in federal court or by military courts martial, not military commissions authorized by Congress in the Military Commissions Act of 2006. Hundreds of terrorism suspects have been successfully tried and convicted in federal courts. Classified evidence can be and has been effectively protected in federal court trials. What reason could there be for military tribunals, other than to hide U.S. government abuse?

Matthew Alexander, formerly a senior interrogator in Iraq, assures us that the torture that has taken place at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib are powerful recruitment tools for men who have gone to Iraq to fight Americans, and they have already cost hundreds and possibly thousands of US soldiers in Iraq their lives. (Hear him in this [short video](#) [1].) So, doing the right thing—providing justice for all detainees—is good for Americans as well as for the detainees. But today—a full five months after President Obama signed an executive order to close Guantánamo by January 2010—the percentage of Americans in favor of closing Guantánamo has decreased to below 50 percent.

Let's work together to engage our communities in a fact-based debate about who really is at Guantánamo Bay prison, how they came to be sent there and held there—in many cases for more than seven years—and what our American communities and our federal government must do.

Together, let's replace the current misinformation campaign that has falsely portrayed all Guantánamo Bay detainees as terrorists undeserving of any legal process or even the light of day with a new story about an American people who supported the closing of Guantánamo with justice.

Nancy Talanian is the founder of No More Guantánamos and the founder and former executive director of the [Bill of Rights Defense Committee](#) [2].

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**Links:**

[1] [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfYov5o5\\_2s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfYov5o5_2s)

[2] <http://www.bordc.org>