

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

## America's Guantánamo quagmire

by *The Week* Staff on June 11, 2016

*President Obama came into office vowing to close the notorious prison at Guantánamo Bay. Why didn't he succeed? Here's everything you need to know:*

### How many prisoners are left?

There are still 80 "enemy combatants" being held at the Guantánamo Bay military detention center at the U.S. naval base in Cuba. That's down from the total of 779 inmates imprisoned there since the Bush administration created the detention center as part of the "war on terror" in January 2002. When President Obama took office in 2009, 242 inmates remained, most of whom hadn't been charged with a crime; days later, he signed an executive order requiring Guantánamo to be closed within the year. But Obama's efforts to empty the facility and transfer remaining inmates to federal prisons have been stymied by adamant Republican opposition. Guantánamo correspondent Carol Rosenberg was assigned by *The Miami Herald* to cover the prison's closure more than 12 years ago. "As it stands," says Rosenberg, "it could be that we will just be waiting for the last guy to die before it closes."



### Why does Obama want to close it?

The Bush administration purposely sent the detainees to Guantánamo because it represented an "island outside of the law," free from U.S. constitutional protections. Obama and other Guantánamo critics believe this indefinite detention of prisoners without trial — some of whom have staged hunger strikes in protest and have been force-fed to keep them alive — represents a "stain" on America's reputation. Critics also say Guantánamo serves as a propaganda tool for terrorists who claim Muslims have been unjustly persecuted by the West. Osama bin Laden himself cited the "ugly crimes" committed at Guantánamo during interrogations, and in horrific videos recorded in 2014, ISIS dressed several Western hostages in the prison's distinctive orange jumpsuits before beheading them.

### Who has left the prison?

About 540 inmates were released without charge by Bush. Many of them, it turned out, weren't actually al Qaeda terrorists, but Afghans and Pakistanis who had been sold to the U.S. for a \$5,000-per-head bounty. The Obama administration has released another 158 — sending them to 58 nations stretching from Latvia to Bermuda. Those former detainees are usually held in rehabilitation centers and banned from traveling for at least a year. A major sticking point for people who oppose Guantánamo's closure, however, is that many detainees have returned to terrorist activities after their release. Republican Sen. John McCain puts that recidivism figure at 30 percent, the Obama administration at 17 percent. Some have been involved in the killing of Americans. Another, a former driver for Osama bin Laden who was released to Sudan in 2002, has since appeared in an al Qaeda video calling on jihadists to "light up the ground beneath the feet of the Crusaders."

### Who's still there?

The most prominent inmate is alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who along with four alleged co-conspirators is awaiting trial under the military tribunal system set up by

Bush. Another 28 inmates, most of them from Yemen, have been cleared for release, but the Obama administration doesn't want to send them home because Yemen remains a hotbed of al Qaeda activity. A final group of about 43 detainees, the so-called "forever prisoners," are deemed too dangerous to release but impossible to prosecute, because any evidence against them was obtained through waterboarding and other since-prohibited "enhanced interrogation techniques," and is therefore tainted. Their presence has forced Obama to shift tactics.

### **What is Obama's latest plan?**

Under a proposal sent to Congress in February, the Obama administration recommends transferring at least 13 forever prisoners north to U.S. facilities — potentially to military prisons in Kansas or South Carolina or to a federal supermax in Colorado. The proposal could save the Pentagon \$140 million a year, but congressional Republicans blocked it, and refused to reconsider the legislation they passed in 2015 that forbids the use of federal funds to transfer Guantánamo detainees to U.S. soil. "Most of the remaining Guantánamo detainees are the worst of the worst terrorists," said Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), who contends it's not safe to house them in the U.S. The Obama administration points out that American prisons already hold 443 convicted terrorists with no apparent threat to the public.

### **What else can Obama do?**

The White House has said it's considering using an executive order to close the prison — though that would require defying the will of Congress and the majority of the American public, according to polls. Even then, Obama's victory would be pretty hollow, says South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who has opposed moving any inmates to prisons in her state. America would still be imprisoning accused terrorists indefinitely, and without trial, she argues — just on home soil. "They will be held under the same legal authority, by the same country, in the same manner, for the same duration, and for the same reasons. Why does the ZIP code matter?"

### **Life after Guantánamo**

Shackled and still wearing their orange Guantánamo jumpsuits, six former detainees arrived in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo in the middle of the night in 2014. Four Syrians, a Tunisian, and a Palestinian had been welcomed to the tiny South American nation by then-President José "Pepe" Mujica, a former political prisoner himself. But as with many former detainees who have been dumped in foreign countries by the Bush and Obama administrations, the social experiment quickly turned sour. None of the men knew any Spanish, and all had completely lost their ability to function in a normal society — let alone one with an unfamiliar language and culture. They struggled to find work, and two have since been arrested on domestic violence charges. "[America] wronged people for 13 years in the prison of Guantánamo," said one of the former detainees, "and in the end, it just abandons them, just like one would throw away bones after eating the meat." Another inmate still in Guantánamo, Mohammed Ali Abdullah Bwazir, was recently cleared for release after 14 years inside. He was offered the chance to relocate to a European country where he has no friends or relatives. He chose to stay behind bars.

### **Possible response options:**

- Do you agree with those who say that America's "prison outside the law" is a stain on our reputation in the world? Explain.
- Should America do more to help inmates re-adjust to normal life after Guantanamo? Explain.
- Choose one passage and respond to it.