



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 6, 2013

Obama's Pledge to Close Gitmo — More Smoke and Mirrors?

Though President Obama [renewed](#) his pledge to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay last week, many recognize this as his latest attempt to pretend to have a different foreign policy from his predecessor. Despite the president's strong claims against Guantanamo Bay, there appears to be no indication that the Guantanamo Bay hunger strikers — a majority of those imprisoned at Guantanamo — are any closer to freedom, even the ones already formally cleared for release. Any discussions of closing the facility seem to be nothing more than attempts to assuage voters who are starting to ask questions about campaign promises that have yet to be fulfilled.



On April 30, President Obama announced that Camp Delta is no longer ensuring America's safety and has in fact become counterproductive in that extremists are pointing to it as a reason to unite and recruit.

President Obama told reporters that the detention center is “contrary to who we are,” and that it is a “lingering problem.” “It is inefficient, it hurts us in terms of our international standing, it lessens cooperation with our allies on counter-terrorism efforts, it is a recruitment tool for extremists, it needs to be closed,” said Obama. “I think it is critical for us to understand that Guantanamo is not necessary to keep America safe.”

The president pointed to detention centers in Iraq and Afghanistan, most notably Abu Ghraib and the Bagram prison, that were either closed or handed over to local authorities as examples that the United States should be following.

But until significant changes are made to the Obama administration's policies impacting Guantanamo Bay, there is no evidence that the facility will be closed. As [observed](#) by PBS:

The administration put a freeze on any transfers after the 2009 attempt by a Nigerian man to bring down a US airliner. The man, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, is believed to have been inspired by a Yemeni branch of Al Qaeda, and many of those cleared for release are from Yemen. The administration was concerned about returning them to a country besieged by terrorists.”

The White House remains committed to its “[moratorium](#)” on releasing Yemeni prisoners back to Yemen. Additionally, the State Department's announcement in January that it was closing the office of the special envoy who had been assigned to work on the closing of Guantanamo further indicates that closing the facility is not on the agenda.



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PBS also notes that the administration's policy of force-feeding those on the hunger strike is a violation of medical ethics, according to the American Medical Association. And ultimately, it ignores the underlying reason for the hunger strike — desperation — proving once more that the Obama administration is disinterested in addressing the detention of these individuals.

Furthermore, the administration's preservation of "indefinite detention" necessitates facilities like Guantanamo Bay to remain open.

Still, some are hopeful that the president may stay true to his pledge. Morris Davis, former chief prosecutor in Guantanamo Bay military commissions, has [renewed](#) his call for President Obama to close Gitmo, citing a variety of reasons.

"Fiscally, it makes no sense. From a legal perspective, the thread's getting thin," Davis, a former Air Force colonel, told ABC News in a phone interview last Thursday. "If you look at the cases that have been generated out of Guantanamo ... it's made bad law. We haven't had any good law come out of Guantanamo. It's just been a black eye legally."

Davis had resigned from his post in October 2007, after he had written an opinionated piece in the *New York Times* asserting that the conditions at Gitmo were not as bad as alleged. More recently, however, he has been calling for Guantanamo Bay to be closed entirely.

When asked about Obama's grade in his efforts to close the detention center, Davis responded, "It would have to be a solid 'F' at this point. I think he was genuine and sincere in 2007 and 2009."

Davis explains that part of his support for Obama in 2008 surrounded Obama's pledge to close Guantanamo Bay. "When I retired [from the military], it was the first time in 25 years I got to actively participate [in politics]. I put an Obama sign in my yard. Somebody set it on fire, so I put up another one," Davis told ABC News. "I was really excited when he got elected that we were going to end this era."

President Obama's pledge to renew efforts to close Gitmo has few people convinced that it will be accomplished, serving instead as a significant reminder of his failures to maintain another one of his campaign promises.

Following Obama's news conference renewing his pledge once more, night-time comedic host Jay Leno joked, "President Obama held a press conference earlier today, and he said he still wants to close the Guantanamo Bay prison facility, but he doesn't know how to do it. He should do what he always does: declare it a small business and tax it out of existence. It will be gone in a minute. Be gone in a minute! One month! Be out of there!"

There have been several factors that have impacted the closing of Gitmo, including the administration's resistance to repatriating detainees to Yemen, which Davis contends would be better, despite fears surrounding the Yemeni government.

ABC News explains various other issues:

Perhaps the stickiest point, however, is what to do with detainees the administration doesn't want to release, but doesn't want to try in commissions or court — those considered dangerous, but for whom incriminating evidence may be inadmissible or may involve intelligence matters too sensitive to air publicly.

The trouble with this, however, is that it requires the American people to take the administration at its word, a dangerous precedent indeed.



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It is particularly difficult to do so when the evidence seems to assert that a majority of the detainees at Gitmo are innocent. According to a [blog entry](#) published by Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, of the hundreds of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, approximately two dozen “might well be hardcore terrorists.”

According to Wilkerson, the prisoners rounded up at Guantanamo Bay are victims of the Bush’s administration’s “detain everyone” strategy, which he described as an

ad hoc intelligence philosophy that was developed to justify keeping many of these people, called the mosaic philosophy. Simply stated, this philosophy held that it did not matter if a detainee were innocent. Indeed, because he lived in Afghanistan and was captured on or near the battle area, he must know something of importance (this general philosophy, in an even cruder form, prevailed in Iraq as well, helping to produce the nightmare at Abu Ghraib)... The detainees’ innocence was inconsequential. After all, they were ignorant peasants for the most part and mostly Muslim to boot.

The most dangerous of the detainees have already been sent to Bagram Air Force Base’s “Salt Pit” prison. So who is sitting in Gitmo indefinitely? Seemingly, innocent individuals who have been unjustly denied due process protections.

As many Americans likely remember, closing Guantanamo Bay had been one of President Obama’s passionate promises. In August 2007, then-Senator Obama declared, “As president, I will close Guantanamo, reject the Military Commissions Act and adhere to the Geneva Conventions. Our Constitution and our Uniform Code of Military Justice provide a framework for dealing with the terrorists.” He reiterated that promise a number of times throughout his campaign.

Two years ago, President Obama signed an executive order that established review procedures for detainees that would determine if continued detention was necessary. The process was to begin with hearings before an interagency Periodic Review Board, which were to begin in March of 2012. But no hearings have been announced thus far.

According to Obama spokesman Jay Carney, the administration is planning to get the board moving, “which has not moved forward quickly enough.” Carney adds that the president is considering the reappointment of a special envoy at the State Department for the closing of Gitmo.

Without Congress, however, the efforts seem futile. “We have to work with Congress and try to convince members of Congress that the overriding interest here, in terms of our national security as well as our budget, is to close Guantanamo Bay,” Carney said.

But there is bipartisan opposition to the closure of Guantanamo Bay. Republican South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham remarked on the individuals detained at Gitmo, “They’re individuals hell-bent on our destruction and destroying our way of life.”

Senate Intelligence Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, (D-Calif.), has written the president urging him to reconsider his opposition to having detainees transferred to Yemen.

Carney asserts that is one of the Guantanamo policies under review.



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