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Associated Press



## U.S.: 3 Gitmo Inmates Hanged Themselves

By ANDREW SELSKY and JENNIFER LOVEN, 06.10.2006, 07:28 PM

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Three Guantanamo Bay detainees hanged themselves with nooses made of sheets and clothes, the commander of the detention center said Saturday. They were the first reported deaths among the hundreds of men held at the base for years without charge.

The suicides, which military officials said were coordinated, triggered further condemnation of the isolated detention center, which holds some 460 men on suspicion of links to al-Qaida and the Taliban. There has been growing international pressure on the U.S. to close the prison.

Two men from Saudi Arabia and one from Yemen were found dead shortly after midnight Saturday in separate cells, said the Miami-based U.S. Southern Command, which has jurisdiction over the prison. Attempts were made to revive them, but they failed.

"They hung themselves with fabricated nooses made out of clothes and bed sheets," Navy Rear Adm. Harry Harris told reporters in a conference call from the U.S. base in southeastern Cuba.

Gen. John Craddock, commander of the U.S. Southern Command, said in the conference call that the three had left suicide notes, but refused to disclose the contents.

One of the detainees was a mid- or high-level al-Qaida operative, Harris said, while another had been captured in Afghanistan and participated in a riot at a prison there. The third belonged to a splinter group. Their names were not released.

He said all three had engaged in a hunger strike to protest their indefinite incarceration and had been force-fed before quitting the protest action. Military commanders said two were participating in the hunger strike as recently as last month, and described one of them as a long-term hunger striker who had begun the protest late last year and ended it in May.

Bush, who was spending the weekend at Camp David, expressed "serious concern" about the incident, White House press secretary Tony Snow said.

His immediate concerns were making sure that an investigation was being conducted and that the bodies were "treated humanely and with cultural sensitivity," Snow said.

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Meanwhile, the State Department was consulting with the governments of the home countries of the three prisoners.

Amnesty International said the apparent suicides "are the tragic results of years of arbitrary and indefinite detention" and said the prison was a blight on the Bush administration.

"Today's reported suicides of detainees in Guantanamo should serve as a wake up call to President Bush and his administration that Guantanamo is not just a public relations problem, but instead an indictment on its deteriorating human rights record."

Barbara Olshansky of the Center for Constitutional Rights said in a telephone interview from New York that those held at Guantanamo "have this incredible level of despair that they will never get justice. And now they're gone. And they died without ever having seen a court."

Olshansky's group represents about 300 Guantanamo detainees. She appealed to the Bush administration "for immediate action to do the right thing. They should be taken to court or released. I don't think this country wants the stain of injustice on it for many years to come."

Pentagon officials said the three men were in Camp 1, the highest maximum security prison at Guantanamo, and that none of them had tried to commit suicide before.

That camp was also the location where two detainees tried to commit suicide in mid-May, when a riot broke out at the facility. The two men, who took overdoses of an anti-anxiety medication they hoarded, were found and received medical treatment and were recovering.

The military said in a statement that "all lifesaving measures had been exhausted" in the attempt to revive the detainees. The remains were being treated "with the utmost respect," an issue important to Muslims. A cultural adviser was assisting the military.

The statement defended the prison, saying detainees pose a danger to the United States and its allies.

"They have expressed a commitment to kill Americans and our friends if released," it said. "These are not common criminals. They are enemy combatants being detained because they have waged war against our nation and they continue to pose a threat."

Though the military termed the deaths suicides, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service was investigating to establish the official cause of death.

Guantanamo Bay has become a sore subject between Bush and U.S. allies who otherwise are staunch supporters of his policies.

A U.N. panel said May 19 that holding detainees indefinitely at Guantanamo violated the world's ban on torture and the United States should close the detention center.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and British Prime Minister Tony Blair are among those who also recently have urged the United States to close the prison.

On Friday, after the prison came up during a meeting with Fogh Rasmussen at Camp David, Bush said his goal is to do just that.

"We would like to end the Guantanamo - we'd like it to be empty," Bush said. But he added: "There are some that, if put out on the streets, would create grave harm to American citizens and other citizens of the world. And, therefore, I believe they ought to be tried in courts here in the United States."

Bush said his administration was waiting for the Supreme Court to rule on whether he overstepped his authority in ordering the detainees to be tried by U.S. military tribunals.

In a sign of the administration's concern over the diplomatic fallout from the suicides, there was an extraordinary round of global outreach by officials from the White House National Security Council, the State Department and Bush's congressional liaisons.

Among those contacted within hours by the Bush administration were the United Nations, the European Union, most European nations individually,

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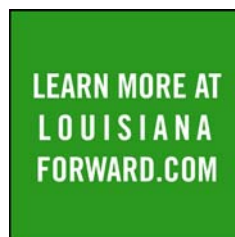
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the embassies of Mideast and near-Mideast countries, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Snow said.

Josh Colangelo-Bryan of the Center for Constitutional Rights discovered one of his clients attempting to hang himself last year when he visited Guantanamo, and said he feared there would be more suicides.

Colangelo-Bryan said one detainee recently told him: "I would simply rather die than live here forever without rights."

Moazzam Begg, 37, a British Muslim who spent three years in U.S. detention, including two years at Guantanamo before being released in 2005, told The Associated Press: "We all expected something like this but were not prepared. It's just awful. I hope the Bush administration will finally see this is wrong."

A total of 759 detainees have been held in Guantanamo, with about 300 released or transferred.

There have been increasing displays of defiance from the prisoners, with many claiming their innocence.

Until now, Guantanamo officials have said there have been 41 suicide attempts by 25 detainees and no deaths since the U.S. began taking prisoners to the base in January 2002. Defense lawyers contend the number of suicide attempts is higher.

On May 18, in one of the prison's most violent incidents, a detainee staged a suicide attempt to lure guards into a cellblock where they were attacked by prisoners armed with makeshift weapons, the military said. Earlier that day, two detainees overdosed on antidepressants they collected from other detainees and hoarded in their cells. The men have since recovered.

There also has been a hunger strike among detainees since August. The number of inmates refusing food dropped to 18 by last weekend from a high of 131. The military has at times used aggressive force-feeding methods, including a restraint chair.

Associated Press reporters Paisley Dodds in London and Jennifer Loven and Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed to this report.

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