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Guantanamo Detainee List Released by Pentagon

Government names 558 labeled 'enemy combatants' in response to FOIA suit

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico -- The U.S. government released the first list of detainees held at the GuantanamoBay prison today -- the most extensive accounting yet of the hundreds of people held there, nearly all of them labeled enemy combatants.

In all, 558 people were named in the list provided by the Pentagon in response to a Freedom of Information lawsuit by the Associated Press. They were among the first swept up in the U.S. global war on terrorism for suspected links to al-Qaida or the Taliban.

Those named are from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and 39 other countries. Many have been held at the U.S. prison at GuantanamoBay for more than four years. Only a handful have faced formal charges.

Some names are familiar, such as David Hicks, a Muslim from Australia charged with fighting U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Lesser-known detainees on the list include Muhammed al-Qahtani, a Saudi who reportedly was supposed to be the 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Although his presence at Guantanamo had been reported, the military had previously declined to confirm it.

Others, such as an Afghan identified only as "Commander Chaman," remain mysterious.

In all, the detainees on the list came from 41 countries. The largest number -- 132 -- came from Saudi Arabia. Afghanistan followed with 125, then Yemen with 107.

Partial lists of GuantanamoBay detainees have been compiled in the past by news organizations and others, but the U.S. had declined to release the names except those of the 10 who have been formally charged.

Even with the latest release, the Pentagon has never given the names of all the more than 750 prisoners that the military says have passed through Guantanamo.

The release of the list, ordered by a federal judge, came amid wide criticism of the almost total secrecy surrounding the GuantanamoBay detention center, where the United States now holds about 490 detainees.

"This is information that should have been released a long time ago, and it's a scandal that it hasn't been," said Bill Goodman, legal director of the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which has helped coordinate legal efforts on behalf of Guantanamo detainees.

The combatant status hearings at GuantanamoBay were held from July 2004 to January 2005 after the Supreme Court ruled that the detainees had the right to contest their status before a judge or other neutral decision-maker.

All detainees at the prison during that period had such a hearing. Of the 558 detainees who received one, the panels classified 38 as "no longer enemy combatants" and the military later

approved the transfer of 28 of those detainees from Guantanamo. A military spokesman said he had no information about the other 10.

The names of many GuantanamoBay detainees were disclosed publicly for the first time on March 3, when the Pentagon released some 5,000 pages of transcripts to the AP.

More names came in subsequent releases of documents -- but always buried within the text of transcripts that often contained only partial information about the detainees.

With the list released today, which was accompanied by some 500 more pages of transcripts that the Pentagon said it inadvertently omitted from earlier releases, the Pentagon went further than ever in identifying who has been held at the high-security detention center on a U.S. Navy base at the southeastern edge of Cuba.

The new information will help lawyers for detainees and human rights groups who have tried to monitor GuantanamoBay, said Mark Denbeaux, a law professor at SetonHallUniversity in New Jersey who has analyzed previous GuantanamoBay documents released by the Pentagon.

"Lawyers have been asking for this stuff for 2 1/2 years," he said.