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## Ghosts in a legal limbo

Kate Allen  
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THE LONG overdue releases of four Britons from Guantanamo Bay raises more questions than it answers. Will the UK authorities extend their detention or, as happened with releases last year, free them quickly, after little more than perfunctory processing at Paddington Green police station?

Even speedy answers to these questions will leave the deeper issues surrounding Guantanamo Bay untouched. For instance, how long are the other 550-plus detainees going to be held? Recent reports that the US is planning to make a permanent site out of Guantanamo hint at a future where War on Terror suspects are held indefinitely with minimal rights, if any.

The US Government is even now fighting a Supreme Court ruling that Guantanamo prisoners should be able to challenge their detention in the federal courts. The rule of law is, it seems, something that should not be allowed to reach the shores of Cuba. After years of (quite rightly) criticising Castro's regime for trampling over his people's human rights, the irony of America doing much the same on Cuban soil seems to be lost on Washington.

One of those set to be released alongside the four British men is an Australian, Mamdouh Habib. Documents recently released relating to the controversial nomination of Alberto Gonzales as US Attorney-General have revealed that Habib was the victim of a US "rendition" — secret movement without legal safeguards. After he was arrested by Pakistani Forces in 2001, Habib was handed over to US agents who sent him to Egypt. There he was allegedly hung from hooks and beaten for months. Later he was taken to Guantanamo Bay and only now returns to the outside world of proper charges, defence lawyers and family access.

US officials have acknowledged that rendition of War on Terror detainees to countries in the Middle East and elsewhere does exist. The really worrying thing about Guantanamo Bay is that it may be just the visible part of a much bigger network constituting America's War on Terror detention system.

Just how many ghost detainees are trapped inside this structure is the burning question. Even closing down Guantanamo Bay will probably not end the secret detentions, the secret prisoner movements and secret torture. But it would be a start.

Kate Allen is director of Amnesty International UK