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## **Cheney Says Ex-Prisoners Are 'Peddling Lies' About U.S. Treatment**

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WASHINGTON - Vice President Dick Cheney emphatically defended the handling of detainees at Guantánamo Bay in an interview to be broadcast tonight, saying that they had been "well treated, treated humanely and decently" and that some accusations to the contrary were "lies."

The vice president largely dismissed assertions that guards or interrogators at the American naval base in Cuba had mishandled the Koran or beaten detainees. He said that freed Guantánamo prisoners were now "peddling lies."

Mr. Cheney's remarks, made in a weekend interview taped for tonight's broadcast of the CNN program "Larry King Live," represented one of the more unconditional administration defenses of American activities at Guantánamo.

Last week, the human rights group Amnesty International compared Guantánamo to a brutal gulag-style camp. Asked about that characterization, Mr. Cheney replied, "Frankly, I was offended by it," according to a transcript.

He said that many Guantánamo detainees were "individuals who have been actively involved as the enemy, if you will, trying to kill Americans," and that some had provided "significant amounts of intelligence" to their interrogators.

Mr. Cheney added, "What we're doing down there has, I think, been done perfectly appropriately."

In the wide-ranging interview, the vice president also said that the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, was "one of the world's more irresponsible leaders" and that China needed to press him harder to renounce his nuclear program. He also predicted that the Senate would easily confirm John Bolton as ambassador to the United Nations, and he described himself as feeling "more optimistic than I've been at any time in the last four years" about prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Asked whether the United States had ever been close to capturing Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, Mr. Cheney replied, "I can't say that we've ever been close to bin Laden."

On the domestic side, the vice president defended the White House position in the controversy over stem cell research. President Bush has said that he will, if necessary, cast his first presidential veto to block a bill to expand federal financing for human embryonic stem cell research.

Several Republicans have broken with the president on the issue, saying that such research could lead to life-saving cures for diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Mr. Cheney, appearing to aim his appeal to the center of the debate, said that while President Bush opposed federal funds for research that would destroy embryos in order to create new stem cell lines, he favored well-financed research on existing lines.

"We have nearly doubled in the last four years the amount of money that's being expended, federal money, for this purpose," Mr. Cheney said.

On another matter that has sharply divided Congress - the Bolton nomination - Mr. Cheney said he felt sure that Republicans could marshal the votes needed for confirmation when the Senate returns from a weeklong break.

Calling Mr. Bolton "a superb public official," the vice president brushed aside Democrats' requests for more information on the nominee. "I think it's just an excuse," he said. "There's nothing being hidden from them."

Some of his more urgent comments dealt with the Guantánamo accusations of Koran abuse, which have been blamed for rioting in several Muslim countries. Mr. Cheney noted that the Pentagon had "found that nearly all of those reports were not true."

One detainee's earlier report that a Koran had been flushed down a toilet, he said, had been shown to be "totally bogus." That was a reference to a Newsweek report early this month - since retracted - that investigators had confirmed that an American had tossed a Koran into a toilet at Guantánamo to rattle a Muslim prisoner.

Attention to accusations of Koran abuse resurged on Wednesday after the F.B.I. released summaries of Guantánamo interviews in which several detainees complained of beatings, mistreatment or Koran desecration.

A day later, the Pentagon said that the man behind the toilet accusation had recently been reinterviewed and had backed away from his earlier account.

The vice president's appearance on CNN was not entirely serious. His wife, Lynne, joined him late in the interview and suggested in a lighthearted moment that while Senator Hillary Clinton was a possible Democratic candidate for president in 2008, Laura Bush would make a worthy adversary.

"If we want to have a Bush dynasty, let's get Laura Bush," said Lynne Cheney.

Her husband declared this "a great idea," adding, after a pause, "And I think I know who would win, too."