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New Guantánamo prison funds sought

The Bush administration is seeking \$41.8 million to build a permanent terror prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

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The Bush administration has included nearly \$42 million in its special war on terror budget to build a long-term prison for detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The funding is included in the fiscal 2006 supplemental budget, which ostensibly funds temporary, anti-terror activities; yet the language tucked inside the Army Military Construction section makes clear that the prison is anything but temporary.

"This proposal would provide funds to construct a permanent detention facility and security fence at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba," said the \$41.8 million item, part of the \$81.9 billion proposed budget.

LITTLE DEBATE LIKELY

The move also means there will likely be little debate -- in the budgetary process at least -- over the Bush administration's plan to make a permanent terror prison.

"It's a fact of life that, because the vast bulk of the money is legitimately tied to the welfare of forces in the field, it will go through on a fast track," said Pat Towell, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a think tank.

The supplemental budget funds far-flung expenditures, for example a new \$645 million U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. And, just a page away from the prison for terror suspects, the Pentagon seeks \$32.4 million for new Navy housing in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa.

Towell called the Guantánamo money ``chump change."

The funding request comes as the prison in southeast Cuba is mired in its worst torture scandal -- investigated both by the Justice Department and an Army general for harsh tactics by military interrogators that FBI agents reported in internal e-mails.

EXPANDED CAMP SIX

The supplemental budget includes \$37 million for a proposed expansion to the prison called Camp Six, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Alvin Plexico, a Pentagon spokesman.

Prison camp commanders have described Camp Six as a building with 200 single cells, video-monitored interrogation booths and a medical clinic. On Nov. 9, a prison statement issued in Guantánamo estimated the price of Camp Six at ``approximately \$24 million."

Plexico could not account for the sudden \$13 million spike, but in an e-mail he described the earlier price tags as ``pre-decisional."

In an interview in January, Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood, the prison commander, said he needed "about \$4 million" for a state-of-the-art fence to replace reserve infantry soldiers who guard the prison's seafront approach.

Thursday, Plexico said that the cost of the fence had risen to \$5 million, again without explanation.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told a Senate committee Wednesday that the new prison was meant to comply with portions of the Geneva Convention.

Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, added that the Pentagon is moving ahead with the construction even as federal courts weigh the legality of holding captives at the base as enemy combatants.

"What we're doing is transitioning to a long-term detention mission, because there are some there that are bad enough that you do not want to release them," said Myers. "They are going to have to be detained in some location. And no matter how the courts come out, that's probably going to be the location."