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Guantánamo Detention Site Is Being Transformed, U.S. Says

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 5 - In a few years, Pentagon officials say, the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, will have undergone a radical transformation.

The sprawling detention site known as Camp Delta, with its watchtowers, double-wide trailers housing rows of steel cells and interrogation rooms will be mostly demolished.

Instead, a sharply reduced inmate population of those the military considers the most hard-core will inhabit two nearby hard-walled modern prisons. The newest of those, which is still under construction, is modeled on a modern county jail in Michigan and is designed to counter international criticism of Guantánamo as inhumane and, to some, a symbol of American arrogance.

The first step in changing the character of Guantánamo, officials say, is to relocate many of the 520 detainees. As part of that effort, Defense and State Department officials said this week that they had reached agreement with Afghanistan to transfer 110 Afghan detainees to their home country. Eventually, the population will be reduced to 320, the capacity of the permanent prison buildings.

Under the agreement, the United States will help the Afghan government build new prisons and train correction personnel; in return, the Afghan government has pledged to ensure that the transferred prisoners are not freed to fight against the United States or allied governments.

"We know that there will be a number of individuals that cannot be released because of a high degree of certainty they would return to the battlefield," Bryan Whitman, a senior Pentagon spokesman, said on Friday. "We're looking for ways to share that responsibility with our coalition partners," he said.

The agreement with Afghanistan is the first such understanding. The Defense and State Departments are also negotiating to move many inmates to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because it involved diplomatic negotiations said those talks had not yet progressed to the same stage as those in Afghanistan.

Mr. Whitman said the Afghan agreement also covered 350 Afghan prisoners now being held by American forces at a detention center at the Bagram air base in Afghanistan.

The United States has transferred more than 200 Guantánamo prisoners to their home countries, some of whom were then released and some of whom were reimprisoned. The new transfers to Afghanistan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia would be explicitly for those countries to take over the detention and not release any individuals immediately.

Mr. Whitman said that Afghan government officials would have the authority to release any of those prisoners eventually, but that they had agreed "to take necessary steps under Afghanistan law to prevent any of these individuals from returning to the battlefield."

Amnesty International, a group that presses human rights concerns on behalf of prisoners throughout the world, sharply criticized the Pentagon's plans to transfer custody of many detainees to Afghanistan.

The group said on Friday that the detainees might face torture and other human rights abuses at the hands of the Afghan government.

"No government should force people to return to a country where they may be at risk of human rights abuses," said Sharon Critoph, an Amnesty International official.

The State Department's annual reports "show serious human rights violations in all three of the countries to which it is planning to return detainees," Ms. Critoph said.

Some detainees are already housed in one of the new prisons at Guantánamo known as Camp Five, which has the capacity for 100 detainees. Camp Six, with a capacity of 220, is not yet complete.

Camp Six is modeled after the jail in Lenawee County, Mich., and unlike Camp Five and most of Camp Delta, the prisoners will, for the most part, sleep and eat in a communal setting.

Cmdr. Anne M. W. Reese, the construction chief for the Guantánamo command, said in a recent interview that the new prison would have "more compliance with the Geneva Conventions."

"It will have more concern for the quality of life" than Camp Delta, Commander Reese said.

The building, for example, will have its own medical and dental clinic, she said.

Under current American policy, the prisoners at Guantánamo can be held indefinitely without being charged with a crime, although that issue is being litigated in federal courts.

Commander Reese said the prison would comply with guidelines for American correctional facilities. Camp Delta, she said, was decaying beyond repair because of its exposure to the elements and because it was built on unstable coral.

Brig. Gen. Jay W. Hood, the commander of the Guantánamo detention operation, visited the Lenawee County Jail in January, county officials said.

Capt. Jack Welsh, the administrator of the Michigan jail, said it generally resembled dormitories. Convicts may only serve up to a year in the jail because it is a county facility, Captain Welsh said.