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## Un-American by Any Name

Editorial  
New York Times  
June 5, 2005

Now that the Bush administration has made clear how offended it is at Amnesty International's word choice in characterizing the Guantánamo Bay detention camp "the gulag of our times," we hope it will soon get around to dealing with the substantive problems that the Amnesty report is only the latest to identify. What Guantánamo exemplifies - harsh, indefinite detention without formal charges or legal recourse - may or may not bring to mind the Soviet Union's sprawling network of Stalinist penal colonies. It certainly has nothing in common with any American notions of justice or the rule of law.

Our colleague Thomas L. Friedman offered just the right solution a few days back. The best thing Washington can now do about this national shame is to shut it down. It is a propaganda gift to America's enemies; an embarrassment to our allies; a damaging repudiation of the American justice system; and a highly effective recruiting tool for Islamic radicals, including future terrorists.

If legitimate legal cases can be made under American law against any of the more than 500 remaining Guantánamo detainees, they should be made in American courts, as they should have been all along. If, as the administration says, some of these prisoners are active, dangerous members of a conspiracy to commit terrorism against the United States, there must be legitimate charges to file against them. Those prisoners with no charges to face should be set free and allowed to go home or to another country. The administration must not ship them off to cooperative dictatorships where thuggish local authorities can torture them without direct American accountability - as they have reportedly done recently in places like Uzbekistan, Syria and Egypt.

What makes Amnesty's gulag metaphor apt is that Guantánamo is merely one of a chain of shadowy detention camps that also includes Abu Ghraib in Iraq, the military prison at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and other, secret locations run by the intelligence agencies. Each has produced its own stories of abuse, torture and criminal homicide. These are not isolated incidents, but part of a tightly linked global detention system with no accountability in law. Prisoners have been transferred from camp to camp. So have commanding officers. And perhaps not coincidentally, so have specific methods of mistreatment.

Over more than two centuries of peace and war, the United States has developed a highly effective legal system that, while far from perfect, is rightly admired around the world. The shadowy parallel system that the Bush administration created after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks has by now proved its inferiority in almost every respect. It does not seem to have been effective in finding and prosecuting the most dangerous terrorists, and it has been a disaster in undermining America's reputation for fairness, just treatment of the guilty and humane treatment of the innocent.

It is time to return to the basic principles of justice that served America so well even in the most perilous times of the past. Shutting down Guantánamo is just a first step. But it is a crucial step that would pay instant dividends around the world, not only toward repairing America's reputation but also toward enhancing its overall security.