

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

## **Prisoners, now and forever**

Editorial  
Baltimore Sun  
January 17, 2005

THE DEFENSE Department is asking what it should do with people it wishes to detain permanently. How about trying and convicting them, then sending them to real prison?

The Pentagon is asking for money to build a prisoner-of-war style jail at the Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The jail, which could allow for group meals, better recreation and easier policing, would be an improvement over the solitary confinement now employed, and light years from the open-air cages used when the internment started. The department has held most of the 500-some men at the prison for more than three years now, and it doesn't appear that a significant number of releases will occur anytime soon.

So building a more humane prison is a reasonable request, if one assumes it is reasonable for a government to imprison citizens of other lands for reasons it won't share with them, their home countries or anyone else. The new prison would hold men deemed not eligible for a military tribunal or civil trial because their captors -- that would be the United States -- lack the evidence to convict, according to sources cited in The Washington Post recently. They would just sit, apparently until the United States decides its "war on terror" is over. Good luck with that.

As the administration says, this is a new kind of war. Yet its plan to keep an old POW rule -- hold suspects until the war's over -- while denying these men its other rules -- no torture, access to international observers -- is unreasonable. If they are soldiers, they should be treated as such. If they are not soldiers, perhaps they would be better considered gangsters and prosecuted in civilian courts. And if they are simply drivers, accountants and other civilians caught up in the terrorism dragnet, why not release them?

Creating a new category of human being so vile its members can never be released is simply unjustifiable. Whatever their nationality, however many they may have killed, these prisoners deserve the processes of law, not of dictatorship.