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## **U.S. Says Looking at Alternatives to Guantanamo**

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LONDON, March 12 (Reuters) - The United States is seeking ways to repatriate terrorism suspects held in Guantanamo Bay, a move that could eventually lead to the closure of the detention camp, a senior U.S. official said on Sunday.

"We have no intention of operating Guantanamo any day longer than we have to," U.S. State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Colleen Graffy told Reuters. "If there is another viable alternative to deal with these detainees then that's something we are obviously always looking at."

She said there was no immediate plan to close the camp but that there were ongoing considerations about what to do with the detainees in the long term.

Her comments followed last week's visit to London by U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, whom the Independent on Sunday reported had asked British ministers about their attempts to deport terrorism suspects to their home countries.

About 490 foreign terrorism suspects, many of them suspected Islamist militants, are being held at the naval base in Cuba.

Most have been detained for three years or more and only 10 have been charged with a crime.

Organisations across the world have condemned Washington's use of indefinite detentions without charge and want Guantanamo to close as soon as possible.

The United States argues it has the right to hold people it describes as enemy combatants because it is effectively at war with al Qaeda.

Citing U.S. legal sources, the Independent on Sunday said senior White House officials want to send most of the detainees, including senior aides to Osama bin Laden, to be imprisoned in their home countries.

Britain is trying to sign agreements with states in the Middle East and North Africa to obtain guarantees that anyone deported to those countries would not be tortured.

Asked if Washington was talking to Britain about how to repatriate prisoners and close the camp, Graffy told BBC television: "There's continuous discussion about that".

"Hopefully, over the years, we will find a way to either release them to their country of origin or they will declare that they no longer want to kill us," she said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is under pressure at home to take a harder line with his Iraq war ally U.S. President George W. Bush over Guantanamo.

But Blair will not publicly go beyond saying the detention camp is an "anomaly" which must at some point end.