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Close Guantanamo Now

Editorial
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IF THIS COUNTRY'S necessary war on terrorism is to succeed, its outlaw jail in Guantanamo Bay must close. The time is long past when the rough treatment and denied rights for prisoners can be justified.

The U.S. Supreme Court, Congress, key U.S. allies and now a United Nations team have all scalded the Pentagon's treatment of some 750 detainees ferried through the military base since 2002. The brig has become a synonym for jail-cell mistreatment and the denial of human rights.

Because the base is in Cuba and off American soil, legal protections in the U.S. Constitution don't apply. The Pentagon says that terrorists aren't part of conventional armies covered by international norms and aren't entitled to the rights given captured enemy combatants.

That sham reasoning shouldn't last another day. Close the base and move the prisoners where public hearings and due process can illuminate their condition and expose their beliefs.

A U.N. report this week shows how low America's image has sunk. Borderline torture treatments, such as solitary confinement, exposure to heat and cold, sleep-depriving noise and light and forced feedings are reportedly used, according to investigators. One rough tactic calls for painfully jabbing of food tubes through the nose of hunger strikers strapped in restraint chairs.

Guantanamo's defenders claim such complaints are exaggerated or untrue. But jailers refuse to give outsiders an unfettered look, furthering the image of the jail as a lawless and cruel outpost. The result undercuts the credibility Washington badly needs in making the case for U.S. norms of democracy and civil liberties.

The war against terrorism will take time, patience and skill. Locking up combatants who would injure this supportable cause makes sense. But mistreatment and the denial of basic rights, courtesy of the Pentagon, is a gift to this country's enemies. It's time to close down Guantanamo in the name of winning the war on terrorism.