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Guantanamo Staffing to Be Reduced About 20%

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The size of the military task force at the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, will be reduced by nearly 20 percent, the result of better security measures at the prison, a defense official said yesterday.

Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, who leads the U.S. military's Southern Command, told defense reporters yesterday that the Guantanamo Bay force will decline by about 400 from the current 2,000 during a phased rotation that begins next month. The decrease, he said, is because of improvements in security infrastructure, such as better fencing and electronic security features.

The number of detainees at Guantanamo Bay also continues to decline. Craddock said he hopes that State Department negotiations with detainees' home countries continue so that many of the nearly 500 captives there can be transferred out of U.S. custody.

Some detainees are likely to remain at Guantanamo "for quite some time," Craddock said, and future apprehensions of al-Qaeda suspects around the world could mean more detainees arriving at the prison, where a second modern prison building is under construction. No new detainees have been brought to Guantanamo Bay since September 2004.

"The best solution over the years and years," Craddock said of the detainees at Guantanamo, "would be return with continued detention in other countries."

-- Josh White