

## 18 months on, Guantánamo bay still open

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A Humvee patrols Guantánamo Bay. The facility remains open despite Obama's promises. Image credit: The US Army

Around nine months ago, Barack Obama missed his self-imposed deadline for closing the U.S. prison camp at Guantánamo Bay.

He had set the deadline a year previously, and had originally promised the closure as one of his major election campaign policies. Now it seems the facility may not be closed before 2013, or even later

The long delay appears to be resulting from a combination of political obstacles, legal debate and dwindling motivation amongst the Democrats. The Senate has opposed attempts to implement a basic translation of the current Cuban-situated arrangement to a maximum security jail in Illinois.

This is despite Obama declaring his intention to conduct this move in the Presidential Memorandum of December 2009.

The completely un-superfluous matter of deciding on the best method for trying the 176 inmates of the crimes they may eventually be charged with is also contentious.

Trial in civilian courts is seen as being fairer and in greater accord with international law than the alternative of potentially secretive and partial military commissions. However, this would render much of the little evidence held against the terror suspects unusable due to the circumstances of its obtainment.

The Obama administration also appears to have downgraded Guantánamo's closure as a priority as the idea becomes less popular with the electorate.

The dramatically reduced urgency being exhibited by a man once ideologically concerned with repealing the illiberal measures of the Bush presidency is being appeased by an effective media silence around Guantánamo.

In small part this is being enforced by the US military, which recently prevented a group of Canadian

journalists from reporting on the trial of a Canadian citizen being held at the camp. This was following the printing of the name of a witness which was already in the public domain.

The accused was 15 and legally a child when it is alleged he committed the war crime of killing an American soldier, making the trial unfair.

Yet it is largely the media having become bored of the story that has allowed it to escape the public gaze in recent times. A quick search reveals that there has been only one deployment of the word 'Guantánamo' on guardian.co.uk in the last month, and even that was sadly out of context.

It may be true that the interrogation techniques likened to torture of the early years of the War on Terror have now ceased to be employed by US intelligence operatives.

However, the fact remains that over a hundred foreign nationals are still being detained and have not been tried of any crime because of the paucity of evidence against them. Many have been incarcerated for several years and will therefore have been subject to such coercive procedures as 'waterboarding'.

Even if Obama's preferred solution to the problem of the inmates' future is taken up, and they are transferred to the US mainland, it is by no means certain that the Government will not continue to view their indefinite detention without trial as an option.

Despite the setbacks in the Senate, Obama and the media should not let the issue of closing Guantánamo fade away. The biggest blockade to mar Obama's tennure so far has been the Senate.



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