

March 20, 2013

Statement from Captain Robert Durand, Director of Public Affairs, JTF-Gutananamo (via email):

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The mission of Joint Task Force Guantanamo is the safe, legal, humane and transparent care and custody of detainees. We carry out this mission daily, and we take any allegation of misconduct very seriously.

The recent allegations by detainees that conditions at GTMO have deteriorated or that guard have abused detainees or the Quran are patently false. The JTF takes its duty to treat detainees humanely very seriously and seeks to ensure we conduct ourselves in accordance with the highest standards, and we remain under continual scrutiny, oversight, and inspection.

Recent detainee allegations about incidents in the camps include outright falsehoods and gross exaggerations. The claims of a mass hunger strike and an incident in which the Quran was mishandled are simply untrue. First, we take extraordinary care to respect the Quran and categorically deny any claims of abuse, desecration or mishandling. Detainees have colluded among themselves to fabricate incidents and claim misconduct where there has been none. Detainees have acted out individually, recently splashing guards with various bodily fluids and excrement, but there have not been any large-scale incidents. These are coordinated acts specifically designed to attract media attention.

The medical staff continuously monitors and provides outstanding medical care to detainees in our custody. The health and well-being of detainees is their primary mission and they take this duty as seriously as they would a duty to treat our own service members or any patient in their care. The reports of hunger-strike related deteriorating health and detainees losing massive amounts of weight are simply untrue.

Regardless of these most recent allegations, we will continue to carry out our mission to provide a safe and humane environment for the detainees, and ensure the safety of our guard force.

Regarding the Quran:

There have been no incidents of mishandling the Quran by guards or translators.

Per SOP (standard operating procedures), JTF-Guantanamo guards are to avoid touching any detainee's Quran at any time. The Quran is treated with the utmost respect..

Each detainee has available a personal Quran. Detainees are also provided religious articles, such as prayer mats and beads that are used during the practice of their faith. Prayer times are posted in the camp, and silence is maintained by the guards and staff during prayer times. Understanding the detainees' religious practices and cultural norms is an essential part of training for all who work with detainees.

Regarding searches:

There has been no change to our cell or block search SOPs. We routinely conduct searches for contraband that could be used to harm guards, medical personnel, translators, instructors, attorneys or detainees. Contraband items found can include improvised weapons, communication devices,

unauthorized food and medicine, and other items which detainees could utilize to harm themselves or others.

Our search procedures reflect our mission to treat detainees humanely. We respect both their religious and cultural norms with regard to the Quran, personal privacy and physical contact.

Detainees who follow camp rules have access to satellite television, personal DVD players, video games and more than 25,000 books, CDs, movies and TV shows. They also have many comfort items, including materials for crafts and extra food that detainees can store for snacks or treats in between meals. Allowing these items provides incentives for the detainees to comply with well-established camp rules, but also provides them the opportunity to create and hide contraband.

Detainees who violate camp rules may have privileges suspended as a consequence. This may include moving from a communal block to a single cell, and loss of comfort items. Detainees know the rules, understand the consequences, and can regain their privileges by complying with camp rules. Detainees in single cell confinement have basic issue items for clothing, hygiene and religious observances.

Detainees are never held in solitary confinement. At no time is a detainee deprived of the basic elements of humane treatment: food, water, religious articles, hygiene items, medical treatment, or physical recreation opportunities.

We do not comment on the number of detainees in any specific camp at any time.

Regarding hunger strike protocols:

Hunger striking carries with it significant health risks, and detainees are counseled about the potential effects of hunger striking, both in the short term and long term. The medical staff continuously monitors and provides outstanding medical care to detainees in our custody. The health and well-being of detainees is their primary mission and they take this duty as seriously as they would a duty to treat our own service members or any patient in their care. The reports of hunger-strike related deteriorating health and detainees losing massive amounts of weight are simply untrue.

Joint Task Force Guantanamo follows protocols similar to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons protocols regarding hunger strike management and involuntary feeding of hunger strikers. There are multiple criteria for designation as a hunger striker. Refusing nine consecutive meals is one criteria. We also monitor for "stealth" hunger striking, where detainees will refuse alternate meals, or take meals and not eat them.

Detainees who choose to engage in a hunger strike are closely monitored for health, food and water intake and are advised of the potential adverse health effects of hunger striking. We do not discuss the medical status of individual detainees.

Designation as a hunger striker does not automatically place a detainee on the enteral feeding protocol. Designating a detainee as a hunger striker or for enteral feeding is done by the Joint Task Force Commander, based on a recommendation by the commander of the Joint Medical Group. The Joint Detention Group commander is not involved in this or any medical decision. Enteral feeding is used only to ensure sufficient nutrition, fluid and calorie intake.

Regarding possible motives:

The detainees appear to have chosen a routine search in early February as a rallying point. We do not dispute that a search took place, however, the search was conducted in accordance with our standard procedures and the Quran was not mishandled or touched by any guard.

Some detainees are engaging in protest activities, such as refusing to attend classes (art, language, keyboarding, and other classes provided for the detainees' mental stimulation and enrichment), refusing to attend medical or legal appointments, and creating and posting signs. These activities are not unprecedented. Some detainees have acted out individually, recently splashing guards with various bodily fluids and excrement, but there have not been any large-scale incidents.

While only 25 of the 166 detainees are currently designated as hunger strikers, we have seen more detainees support the hunger strike, particularly as they see coverage of the hunger strike on satellite TV news. Detainees and their supporters use the media, including social media, to spread false rumors of abuse and mistreatment to gain sympathy and attention. These tactics have been employed off and on since Joint Task Force Guantanamo opened in 2002. These are coordinated acts specifically designed to attract media attention.