

Guantanamo documents revive debate about risks posed by detainees

BY ANNE E. KORNBLUT

A treasure trove of newly disclosed documents about detainees at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has revived familiar questions: Were too many innocent men incarcerated there over the past decade?

Or did U.S. officials ultimately free too many dangerous detainees?

Advocates on both sides of the debate have new evidence to cite in the documents, obtained by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, which say how the current and former detainees were classified by U.S. investigators.

Some initially considered dangerous were freed after spending years in the facility; others, released because they appeared harmless, later returned to battlefields in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and elsewhere.

The documents — whose overall thrust is consistent with years of reporting on Guantanamo but offer new details — did not shake partisans from long-held positions.

“These documents are remarkable because they show just how questionable the government’s basis has been for detaining hundreds of people, in some cases indefinitely, at Guantanamo,” said Hina Shamsi, director of the ACLU’s National Security Project. “The one-sided assessments are

rife with uncorroborated evidence, information obtained through torture, speculation, errors and allegations that have been proven false.”

The Washington-based National Security Network issued a statement saying that the documents illustrate a “relatively low rate of recidivism among released detainees.” The Center for Constitutional Rights said the documents “provide more public detail on the many innocent men at Guantanamo, many of whom remained and remain there long after the government knew they were innocent.”

“My sense is, each side will pick out evidence to support their side of the story,” said John B. Bellinger III, who served as legal adviser for the National Security Council and then the State Department during the George W. Bush administration. “You are already beginning to see those in favor of closing Guantanamo pointing to evidence to show people were improperly detained. And those who insist Guantanamo should stay open ... are pointing out how dangerous all the people were who’ve been released.”


But release of the material might ultimately move the Guantanamo debate beyond the rhetoric, Bellinger said. “Finally, years later, we have a better snapshot of the people who are actually there, so frankly, the world can judge,” he said.

Obama administration officials continued to object to the documents’ disclosure, as they had to previous installments of the WikiLeaks stockpile. White House spokesman Jay Carney said that it was something the administration would “condemn in the strongest possible terms” and that the White House was “working towards the ultimate closure of the detention facility,” although President Obama has made no progress toward that goal in two years in office.

Carney cautioned against taking the documents’ readings of current detainees too literally after so many years had passed. The documents span two administrations, from 2002 to 2009. “A detainee assessment brief in 2006 may or may not be reflective of the administration or the government’s view of that particular detainee in 2011,” Carney said.

kornbluta@washpost.com

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 A report on intelligence assessments of nearly every one of the 779 people who have been held at Guantanamo Bay is part of ongoing coverage of WikiLeaks disclosures — including photo galleries and graphics — at washingtonpost.com/world.

