

SOUTHCOM COMMANDER CALLS GITMO HUNGER STRIKES “A JOKE”

The government has made 10 of the videos showing the force-feeding of Abu Wa’el Dhiab available to his lawyers. They are reportedly watching the video this weekend.

In a piece seemingly meant to diminish concerns about the claims the government tortured detainees, in the guise of force-feeding them, to break up a large hunger strike last year – and to pre-empt whatever claims his attorneys will make after viewing the videos – Southern Command Commander Marine Gen. John F. Kelly gave an interview to the AP. In it, he made the absurd claim that Gitmo does not force feed anyone.

Military officials, who call the hunger strike a propaganda stunt, reject the phrase “force-feeding.” They say the video will show nothing more than guards and medical personnel doing their jobs in a difficult situation.

“We don’t force feed anyone,” said Marine Gen. John F. Kelly, who oversees the prison as commander of U.S. Southern Command.

Worse, in an apparently effort to redefine hunger strike as he also redefined force feed, Kelly called hunger striking “a joke.”

“The whole hunger strike thing was kind of a joke anyway before. Now it’s based on nutrition and a medical exam as opposed to missing meals,” he said.

The general said “very few” detainees now qualify for the feeding procedure and he believes none are truly on hunger

strike – “if the definition of a hunger striker is someone who is no-kidding attempting to hurt themselves by starvation.”

Of course, the hunger strikes aren't about “attempting to hurt themselves by starvation.” They are attempts to regain some sort of autonomy and dignity and – yes – to call attention to the injustice of detaining men who could be released for over a decade.

Whether a judge will ultimately rule that force feeding, as done to the men most committed to hunger striking, amounts to the water torture or not, Kelly's disdain for the hunger strikers lays bare the coercion involved.