

SENATE ARMED SERVICE COMMITTEE CELEBRATES AGREEMENT TO SPEND 32 TIMES MORE ON DETAINEES

As Josh Gerstein and Adam Serwer lay out, the Senate Armed Services Committee just passed a new version of the Defense Authorization mandating military detention for terrorists. The language on detention includes the following two paragraphs:

Except as provided in paragraph (4) [which is a national security exception], the Armed Forces of the United States shall hold a person described in paragraph (2) [an Al Qaeda related terrorist] who is captured in the course of hostilities authorized by the Authorization of the Use of Military Force (Public Law 107-40) in military custody pending disposition of the war.

[snip]

No amounts authorized to be appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2012 may be used to construct or modify any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any individual detained at Guantanamo for the purposes of detention or imprisonment in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense unless authorized by Congress.

In other words, unless the government has a really good reason, they have to put accused terrorists caught during the AUMF-authorized war

in military custody. And DOD can't build a prison in the US specifically to house those detainees.

That makes it much more likely we're going to put terrorist detainees at Gitmo, where as Carol Rosenberg recently reported, we spend 32 times as much holding prisoners as we spend in civilian prisons in the United States.

The Pentagon detention center that started out in January 2002 as a collection of crude open-air cells guarded by Marines in a muddy tent city is today arguably the most expensive prison on earth, costing taxpayers \$800,000 annually for each of the 171 captives by Obama administration reckoning.

That's more than 30 times the cost of keeping a captive on U.S. soil.

It's still funded as an open-ended battlefield necessity, although the last prisoner arrived in March 2008. But it functions more like a gated community in an American suburb than a forward-operating base in one of Afghanistan's violent provinces.

[snip]

It's a slow-motion Berlin Airlift – that's been going on for 10 years," says retired Army Brig. Gen. Greg Zanetti, a West Point graduate who in 2008 was deputy commander at the detention center.

Alternately, we could put them in Bagram, the population of which has been ballooning under Obama's Administration.

Today, there are more than 3,000 detainees at Bagram, or five times the number (around 600) when President Barack Obama took office in January 2009. There are currently 18 times as

many detainees at Bagram than at the U.S. military prison at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, naval base, whose prisoner population has dwindled from a peak of 780 to 170.

[snip]

DOD is now reviewing bids from contractors to expand the facility to house up to 5,500 detainees. The project is expected to cost another \$25 to \$100 million when it is completed by the end of 2012.

It's unclear what Bagram costs, per detainee.

But we do know it costs almost \$1.2 million a year to keep a single troop in Afghanistan, for some of the same reasons it costs so much to keep Gitmo running, supply costs. The average federal prison guard in the US is paid about \$55,000 (so figure \$71,500 with benefits). Just the cost of the prison guard alone makes Bagram 16 times more expensive than a federal prison in the US, and that's before you count the \$60 million we've already spent on expanding the prison at Bagram and the \$25 to \$100 million we're already planning on spending. And all those costs are based on a logistics chain through Pakistan, which is getting more and more questionable these days.

Meanwhile, the scary Underwear Bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab spent 21 months of pre-trial detention in a low security prison in MI. Not only did no one get hurt with him in low security custody in the US, but no one nationally even noticed!

This is ridiculous. The Republican insistence that we use military law when civilian law is better and cheaper is going to bankrupt this country. And it's not going to keep us any safer.