

Closing Gitmo Not Prudent, Says VFW

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. said today's presidential decision to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is not a prudent course of action during a time of war.

"The detention facility is a valuable tool in the fight against terrorism because it provides useful intelligence information and it keeps our enemies off the battlefield," said Glen M. Gardner, Jr., a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas, just north of Austin.

President Obama's executive order will begin an immediate case-by-case review of 245 remaining detainees, and close the detention facility within a year. The decision is being applauded by human rights organizations and criticized by the families of 9/11 victims, who know that admitted 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed is one of the detainees.

"The VFW is not convinced that closing the detention facility is the right course of action," said Gardner, who traveled to Guantanamo in November 2007 to witness a trial as an objective observer. "Guantanamo is not Abu Ghraib. It is well kept, professionally run, and respectful of human rights."

The detention facility once held as many as 775 enemy combatants, but through proper and thorough legal proceedings, the total detainees now in custody is 245, some of whom are so bad that many of their home countries have reportedly said they won't accept them back.

Gardner is asking for the administration to thoroughly examine its real options, because the executive decision generates more questions than answers, such as how and where will remaining detainees be kept while awaiting trial, how to make convictions stick, and how to ensure those released do not return to the battlefield.

"We must never forget that those in custody are members of an extremist organization that wear no uniform and swear allegiance to no country," said Gardner. "We must never forget that the only reason 3,000 innocent civilians died on a quiet September morning in 2001 was because this new enemy didn't have the means to kill 30,000 or 300,000 or 3 million people.

"That must never be allowed to happen."

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