



alleged to be part of a British Al Qaeda cell - at a time when he was 11 years old and living in Saudi Arabia"!

President Bush has repeatedly defended Guantánamo Bay as a necessary means of holding those who would "do great harm to American citizens". There are growing numbers of people who disagree. A Labour MEP, Arlene McCarthy, who visited the prison said, "There is a complete failure by the US administration to see why this is not the right way to deal with suspected terrorists".

After all, no human being (even so-called "terrorists") can indefinitely withstand the psychological torment of a legal no man's land, where there is no prospect of fair trial and no recourse of any kind. As the head of Human Rights Watch has stated "These people are despairing because they are being held lawlessly." Clearly, the anti-anxiety drugs given to detainees were prescribed for a reason!

To make matters much, much worse, the figures just don't add up. Lawyers have said that only 10 of the 465 inmates at Guantánamo have been formally charged with a crime. Based on the military's own documents, 55% of the prisoners are not alleged to have committed any hostile acts against the US and 40% are not accused of affiliation with Al Qaeda! The same documents suggest that only 8% of prisoners are accused of fighting for a terrorist group, and that 86% were captured by the Northern Alliance or Pakistani authorities "at a time when the US offered large bounties for suspected terrorists" (UK Independent).

The US military states that one of the dead inmates participated in a Taliban uprising at a prison in Afghanistan, another was a member of Jamáat al-Tableeg (an Islamic group the military considers terrorists), and the third was a "mid-to high-level" Al Qaeda operative.

Given the figures mentioned above, it is hard to take these statements at face value. Clive Stafford Smith, a British lawyer who represents 36 of the inmates at Guantánamo Bay, does not mince his words, "From what I have seen, just a little scratching of the surface proves the allegations to be false... One client of mine was

The response of some US officials to the suicides has been disturbing, to say the least. Initially, the deaths were dismissed as nothing more than a "good PR stunt", by senior officials. Rear Admiral Harry Harris, the prison commander, claimed that the men died in acts of "asymmetrical warfare against us", not out of desperation. Perhaps somebody should tell him that not everything in the world is about the "us" that he so confidently refers to! And indeed, if those who are described as America's enemies are supposedly killing themselves (and only themselves!) in the process of conducting their war against the US, surely that would be a welcome, if somewhat self-defeating, tactic...

After that initial, highly cynical response, however, the Bush administration has backtracked, stating that "We are always concerned when someone takes his own life. Because, as Americans, we value life, even the lives of violent terrorists who are captured waging war against our country"! I'm sure that will be a great consolation to those "violent terrorists" in Guantánamo Bay against whom no charges have been brought to date.

President Bush's fear that some of the inmates of this prison could cause great harm to Americans, if freed, might be a self-fulfilling prophecy. And that is the tragedy of it. If there are any innocent men in Guantánamo Bay - and there is reason to believe that there might well be - they will now have a legitimate grievance against the US government. Let us hope that if they are ever freed, they will decide to pursue that grievance in a peaceful way.