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At Jail in Bagram, A Detainee Protest

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Indefinite Incarceration by U.S. at Issue

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The prisoners at the largest U.S. detention facility in [Afghanistan](#) have refused to leave their cells for at least the past two weeks to protest their indefinite imprisonment, according to lawyers and the families of detainees.

The prison-wide protest, which has been going on since at least July 1, offers a rare glimpse inside a facility that is even more closed off to the public than the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, [Cuba](#). Information about the protest came to light when the International Committee of the Red Cross informed the families of several detainees that scheduled video teleconferences and family visits were being canceled.

Representatives of the ICRC, which monitors the treatment of detainees and arranges the calls, last visited the Bagram prison on July 5, but inmates were unwilling to meet with them.

"We have suspended our video telephone conference and family visit programs because the detainees have informed us they do not wish to participate in the programs for the time being," said Bernard Barrett, a spokesman for the organization.

Although the prisoners are refusing to leave their cells to shower or exercise, they are not engaging in hunger strikes or violence. Ramzi Kassem, an attorney for Yemeni national Amin al-Bakri, said detainees are protesting being held indefinitely without trial or legal recourse.

"We don't want to hold detainees longer than necessary," said a U.S. military official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "We engage in regular releases and transfers when we feel a detainee's threat can be sufficiently mitigated to warrant being released or transferred. Of course, there will continue to be some detainees whose high threat level can only be successfully mitigated via detention, but we review their status regularly to assess whether other options are available."

Unlike at Guantanamo Bay, where detainees have access to lawyers, the 620 prisoners at Bagram are not permitted to visit with their attorneys. Afghan government representatives are generally not allowed to visit or inspect the Bagram facility.

President Obama signed an executive order in January to review detention policy options. The Justice Department is leading an interagency task force examining the issue and is set to deliver a report to the president on Tuesday.

In recent years, Bagram became the destination for many terrorism suspects as Guantanamo Bay

came under more scrutiny through legal challenges. The last significant group transfer from the battlefield to the prison in Cuba occurred in September 2004, when 10 detainees were moved there; in September 2006, 14 high-value detainees were transferred to Guantanamo Bay from secret CIA prisons. Since then, six detainees have been moved there.

The Bagram prison population, meanwhile, has ballooned. U.S. officials are building a bigger facility there that will hold nearly 1,000.

The Bagram facility includes inmates from Afghanistan as well as those arrested by U.S. authorities in other countries as part of counterterrorism efforts. The prison now holds close to 40 detainees who are not Afghan citizens, many of whom were not captured in Afghanistan.

In April, a D.C. district judge ruled that the Supreme Court decision that extended habeas corpus rights to detainees at Guantanamo Bay also applied to a certain set of detainees held at Bagram -- those who were not arrested in Afghanistan and who are not Afghan citizens. The Justice Department has appealed the decision.

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