



## Guantanamo Bay: A Devil's Island

By

**Usman Zaheer**

President, PCFA

Guantanamo Bay has acquired a nefarious recognition of an international detention center, administered by the United States. Contrary to the will and pleasure of Cuba, United States illegitimately maintains a naval base there. It houses more than 500 prisoners from about 30 countries as the fall out of "war on terrorism" in the Guantanamo base.

Guantanamo Bay is one of the largest bays of Cuba. Just a tad of 64 km from Santiago—the second largest city of Cuba, It is spread out in an area of 117.6 km<sup>2</sup> (49.4 of mainland and the rest of water and marshes). It delimits a coastline of 17 square kilometers. Its strategic value has frittered away, it has good distinctiveness, vis-à-vis, depth, security and capacity though.

It is both painful and interesting that the prisoners were taken into custody by Pakistani and Afghan warlords and delivered to the US for bounties ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Their charges comprise only the flimsiest accusations or hearsay that would never stand up in court, such as, some have been seen talking to suspected Al Qaeda members on the same day — at places thousands of miles apart. The primary evidence against some were that they were captured wearing a particular Casio watch, which many terrorists wear.

### **PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**

**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)

Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724



Oddly, the same watch is being used by US security guards at Guantanamo.

Those classified as illegal combatants are held under arbitrary military regulations that permit the torture of prisoners and place them beyond the reach of habeas corpus and similar legal rights.

They can be held without specific charge indefinitely, while their lawyers' work is impeded by various restrictions. They are not allowed to call certain witnesses. A defendant who asks for defending counsel other than the military defender assigned to him must first plead guilty, thereby blatantly denying the principle of the presumption of innocence.

This aberration and affront to justice and human dignity involves imprisonment without charge or trial for an indefinite period, incarceration in small cells for up to 24 hours a day, remaining handcuffed during the extremely short exercise period allowed, cruelty to the relatives caused by the uncertainty as to the fate of their loved ones, repeated interrogation without access to a lawyer and the possible prospect of execution after an unfair trial with no appeal.

Days in and days out, civilized international community and civil society groups reiterate their condemnation of the massive, flagrant and systematic violations of human rights being perpetrated on the illegal detainees by the US at Guantánamo.

**PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**  
**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan  
WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)  
Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724



Guantanamo Bay has previously been irrigated from lakes on the other side of the island, but Cuba cut off the water supply years ago. So today, Guantanamo produces its own water from a desalination plant. The water has a distinct yellow tint. All Americans drink bottled water imported by the plane load. Until recently, prisoners drank the yellow water.

The world community is witness to the cruel methods US applies in the base to feed those detainees who often times go on hunger strikers by force, making them bleed and vomit.

Notions such as those of "illegal combatants" or the setting up of judicial aberrations such as the so-called "ad-hoc military tribunals", devised by the United States to justify the dehumanizing treatment meted out to its prisoners of war, fly in the face of international law and the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

These courts are empowered to impose the death sentence and there would be no appeal. They lack any vestige of independence and would infringe the rights of the defendants to choose a lawyer or otherwise arrange a proper defense. They admit evidence potentially obtained under torture or duress.

Most prisoners are kept apart, although some can communicate through the steel mesh or concrete walls that separate their cells. They exercise alone, some only at night. They don't see sunlight for months — an especially cruel tactic in a tropical climate. Some prisoners spend days and nights taking their meals in small cells in bathrooms. Other than Holy Quran, prisoners have nothing to read.

**PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**  
**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)

Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724



Every prisoner is badly beaten and subjected to treatment that is over and above torture by the functionaries of the champion of rights—human rights, democracy and justice. They are hung and beaten, stripped naked and march before female guards, and given electric shocks.

The detainees are tortured by taking away their comfort items one by one: the blanket, towel, pants, and shoes. They are put in isolation. When this fails to persuade to end the hunger strike they are forced onto the chair. The defiant prisoners are strapped into a steel device that pulls their heads back, and that the tubes are forced in and wrenched out for each feeding.

Prisoners sleep on a metal shelf against the wall, which is flanked by a toilet and sink. They are allowed a thin foam mattress and a gray cotton blanket. Thus Guantanamo Bay, in eastern Cuba, has become a symbol of torture and violation of human rights.

Very few outsiders are allowed to see the prisoners. The government has orchestrated some carefully controlled tours for the media and members of Congress, but has repeatedly refused to allow these visitors, representatives of the United Nations, human rights groups or nonmilitary doctors and psychiatrists to meet or speak with prisoners.

**PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**  
**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan  
WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)  
Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724



So far, the only outsiders who have done so are representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross — who are prohibited by their own rules from disclosing what they find — and lawyers for the prisoners.

The United States has taken upon itself to tread the board as the arbiter of human rights records of other countries. Every now and then, President Bush also blurts out about freedom, democracy and the rule of law. His government is trampling all values of civilized society under foot without restraint. Human rights are not just a promise unfulfilled but a promise betrayed. Word for word, the 'war on terror' appears more effective in eroding international human rights principles than in countering international 'terrorism'.

A dangerous new agenda, which couches human rights and torture in deceptive language is emerging.

Governments are betraying their promises on human rights. A new agenda is in the making with the language of freedom and justice being used to pursue policies of fear and insecurity. This includes cynical attempts to redefine and sanitize torture.

Apart from the question of the US's illegal occupation of Guantánamo, Cuba is also adding its voice to that of the international community in justly demanding an end to using the bay as a detention center. Thus, this serious precedent must not be allowed to continue. The war on terrorism cannot be fought by using counter

**PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**

**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)

Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724



terrorism—by denying rights or by the exercise of the so-called unilateral right to make war.

Like all previous presidents, President Bush has repeatedly asserted that the USA was dedicated to the cause of human dignity. Yet human dignity continues to be far off from the global human rights values. If the only super power—the champion of human rights and democracy—starts going backwards and forget the vision of its founding fathers, what can be expected of vulnerable and developing states?

**PAK – CUBA Friendship Association**  
**Head Office:** Bashir Mansion 2-Turner Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan  
WWW: [www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](http://www.pakcubafriendshipassociation.org)  
Email: [info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org](mailto:info@pakcubafriendshipassociation.org) Fax: 92-42-6660991 Cell: 92-321-4622724