



## **Windsurfing to Guantánamo. Who knew that protesting American oppression could be such fun?**

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Five years ago this month, an American facility was opened in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba to house the most dangerous combatants captured in the global war against Militant Islamism. To commemorate the anniversary, anti-Guantánamo demonstrations have been staged in more than 20 countries. In Washington last week, more than 80 protesters were arrested after they refused to leave a federal court house.

But it is Amnesty International that has come up with the most original way to display outrage, enthusiastically (if not quite grammatically) urging its supporters to “Sail, fly, windsurf with the Close Guantánamo flotilla! This extraordinary journey is a unique opportunity to express your opposition to Guantánamo, will help to pressure the US government to close the camp once and for all. Join us and

invite your friends to travel with you to confront injustice!”

For those with limited vacation time, Amnesty suggests: “Say Close Guantánamo on Camera! Vote for your favourite video!...Whether you think the funniest or the most artistic should win, we need an all categories winner! Cast your votes and get a chance to win a Make Some Noise goodie bag. Voting closes 31 January, and the winning video (its prize being wrapped in secrecy, like Guantánamo;) will be announced shortly after.”

Who knew that protesting American oppression could be such fun? Evidently, opposing suicide bombings and ritual beheadings is less amusing. I could find no denunciation of such practices on Amnesty’s home page ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)). Nor was there any apparent concern for pris-

oners being held by such Militant Islamist organizations as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Also conspicuous by its absence: A serious discussion of what would happen if Guantánamo were to be closed. Would detainees be released on the battlefields where they had been captured? Or would they be returned to their home countries? What if their home countries were likely to torture or execute them?

In wars, combatants are killed; luckier ones are taken prisoner and held -- not as punishment but to prevent their return to battle. If the combatants are honorable soldiers they are entitled to be regarded as Prisoners of War, with all the rights and privileges that status implies. But the combatants sent to Guantánamo are those who have violated the most basic laws of war, in particular by targeting civilians and by hiding among civilians.

Nevertheless -- and despite relentless allegations to the contrary -- the evidence indicates they are treated humanely, even leniently. "Not a single case of torture or inhumane treatment has ever been substantiated," Rear Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., the commander at Guantánamo, told me and other visiting journalists recently. "We are the most transparent detention facility in the world."

Representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross visit detainees freely and regularly, as do attorneys -- more than 900 of them. Thousands of letters are sent

and received. This is what Amnesty defines as being "wrapped in secrecy"?

Detainees can refuse interrogation. Those willing to answer questions sit in easy chairs, drink tea and may watch television during the sessions. Not only is torture prohibited: At Guantánamo there can be no coercion of any kind and there is no solitary confinement.

Every detainee's case is reviewed and those deemed unlikely to return to combat operations are released. To date, 315 of 770 detainees have been sent on their way. Several dozen are known to have returned to the fight against Americans in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Included in those ranks is a detainee who had been provided with an artificial leg and extensive physical therapy to help him use it.

Detainees get three square meals a day -- religiously appropriate food blessed by an imam. They receive the same medical and dental care as American military officers.

Admiral Harris said his mission is to provide "safe and humane care and custody" to the detainees. He is under no illusion about the detainees' mission: They have organized themselves into a "fully tricked-out" al-Qaeda cell. Threats against Guantánamo guards are frequent. So are attacks with human waste and weapons made from such objects as plumbing fixtures and the blades of fans.

No one likes Guantánamo -- not those who run the facility and certainly not the American taxpayers who shell out millions of dollars a year to keep it functioning. But among the most recent arrivals are top al-Qaeda operatives Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi Binalshibh.

Such mass murderers should not be let loose on the world – not even in response to Amnesty International’s windsurfer flotillas, video contests and “Make Some Noise goodie bags.”

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