

The Cost of the Guantánamo Bay Prison

The prison at Guantánamo Bay, which now holds 40 detainees, is vastly more expensive to operate than the equivalent federal prisons. Indeed, it's come to be called "the most expensive prison on earth."¹ Meanwhile, operating the Guantánamo military commissions, which have proven highly inefficient, is also much more expensive than conducting terrorism cases in federal courts. Keeping the prison open and trying military commission cases at the U.S. naval base in Cuba is a waste of valuable resources. This is fiscally irresponsible at a time when important programs for soldiers and veterans, and support for military functions, are being reduced due to lack of funding.

Overall Costs

The documented cost of running the Guantánamo prison facility in 2015 was **\$445 million**.² The actual amount is far more, since this amount does not include the cost of Camp 7, where "high-value detainees" are held. That cost has been deemed classified. The \$445 million sum also fails to include the cost of Justice Department, FBI, and CIA involvement in detention operations.

At the beginning of 2015, the prison held 122 detainees; at the end of 2015 it held 107.³ So over the course of 2015, the absolute minimum cost ranged **between \$3.7 million and \$4.2 million per year for each detainee**. The yearly cost of holding prisoners in federal prisons, by contrast, is much smaller. Keeping a prisoner at a maximum-security federal prison costs just over \$34,000 per year.⁴ At a federal Supermax prison, the highest-security and strictest federal prisons, the cost is \$78,000 per year.⁵

The average cost of a death penalty case in the state of Maryland is \$1.7 million in cases where the death penalty is applied (\$850,000 when it is not), according to a 2008 study.⁶ Thus even if Guantánamo detainees slated for trial were transferred to the United States to face capital charges and their cases were decided in a single year, they were sentenced to the death penalty, and they were imprisoned in Supermax prisons in the United States during their trials, the cost would be still be only \$1.78 million per year per detainee. Even in the costliest possible circumstances in the United States, therefore, the costs of Guantánamo still far exceed those of the U.S. federal system.

In fact, most detainees slated for trial would not be eligible for capital punishment and would not need to be housed in Supermax facilities, so the real cost for trials and prison in the United States for the Guantánamo detainees would be much lower than these estimates.

The administration has proposed a plan to bring any remaining detainees to the United States and house them in an already existing prison or newly constructed prison. This plan would save between \$65 million and \$85 million per year.⁷

¹ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/guantanamo/article1938974.html>

² http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/GTMO_Closure_Plan_0216.pdf

³ <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/timeline>

⁴ <http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/7-24-13SmithTestimony.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/article1953705.html>

⁶ http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411625_md_death_penalty.pdf

⁷ http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/GTMO_Closure_Plan_0216.pdf

Included Costs for Guantanamo:

Flights for trial attorneys, witnesses, observers, victims' family members, and others – which are required for all pre-trial and trial hearings – reportedly cost around **\$90,000 each way** due to the difficult logistics of traveling to Guantanamo and the need for special security.⁸ With the Office of Military Commissions attempting to pick up the pace of these hearings, these costs can be expected to grow significantly.

Also included in the total cost for detention operations and the military commissions is **\$78.6 million** for the U.S. Army, including contract intelligence analysts, librarians and linguists; and **\$148.8 million** in U.S. Navy expenditures, including detention operations security, translation, and courtroom support services.⁹

Other Military Obligations:

General John Kelly, Commander of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) (which includes Guantanamo Bay) told Congress in 2013, “[O]ur ability to fully execute [SOUTHCOM’s] mission is at extreme risk as we face present-day budget uncertainty and the potentially devastating long-term impacts of sequestration and its associated out-year budget reductions.”¹⁰

Currently planned cuts in the 2015 Department of Defense budget included:

- ☑ Reducing readiness, capacity, and modernization for all branches of the military. In January 2015, the Joint Chiefs for the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force all testified that sequestration cuts have forced them to make cuts that significantly reduce the abilities of U.S. armed forces.¹¹
- ☑ Reducing annual pay raises for military personnel, capping them at one percent instead of the usual 1.8 percent.¹²
- ☑ Defense Commissary Agency budgets dropping from \$1.4 billion per year to \$400 million, resulting in higher commissary prices for soldiers by an average of 20 percent.¹³
- ☑ Lowering the basic allowances for housing for the first time in over a decade,¹⁴ raising the cost of housing for military personnel. Further cuts to these allowances are planned for the future as well.¹⁵
- ☑ Increasing copayments for prescription drugs for military personnel. These are also expected to continue to increase over the next decade.¹⁶

Planned Future Costs for Guantanamo:

- ☑ **Underwater fiber-optic cable to update the base’s IT infrastructure:** The military commissions and prison’s technological needs are often hampered by technical difficulties stemming from the lack of adequate IT infrastructure needed for commission hearings and intelligence gathering.¹⁷ These difficulties create problems for the commission proceedings and extend the amount of time needed for hearings. The proposed budget to build the fiber-optic cable is currently \$31 million.¹⁸ These issues would not need to be addressed if the detainees were held in U.S. federal prisons and if the hearings occurred in federal courts, which are already well-equipped with the necessary technology.

⁸ <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/navy-order-ends-florida-to-gitmo-commercial-flights>

⁹ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/uploads/pdfs/Costs-DOD-GTMO-Data-Response-to-Congressional-Ltr-61713.pdf>

¹⁰ http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/posture_usmc_20mar2013.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/15-01-28-mpact-of-the-budget-control-act-of-2011-and-sequestration-on-national-security>

¹² <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2014/12/02/congress-agrees-to-troop-pay-bah-cuts-in-budget-compromise.html>

¹³ <http://www.militarytimes.com/article/20140225/BENEFITS07/302250014/Industry-group-slams-DoD-plan-cut-commissary-budget>

¹⁴ http://www.moaa.org/main_menu/take_action/top_issues/serving_in_uniform/compensation/white_house__raise_fees,_cut_pay,_housing,_and__commissary.html

¹⁵ <http://www.stripes.com/news/us/congress-passes-defense-budget-with-troop-benefit-cuts-1.319021>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/guantanamo/article1941012.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/guantanamo/article1964511.html>

- ☑ **New medical facilities:** The military has requested an updated medical facility for the prison.¹⁹ With the aging detainee population, medical costs are expected to skyrocket if the facility is not closed.²⁰ Medical needs of detainees will have to be addressed, either at Guantanamo Bay (by importing specialists and medical equipment), or by bringing detainees to the United States for treatment and then returning them to the base at Guantanamo. Such detainee transfers are currently prohibited by law. Both of these options would be extremely costly. Existing U.S. federal prisons are much better equipped to address the health concerns of an aging population and can do so at a much lower cost.
- ☑ **Infrastructure updates:** Built to be a temporary detention facility, the infrastructure of the Guantanamo Bay prison is beginning to crumble.²¹ If it remains open, more repairs will be needed to maintain the prison for the dwindling population, raising the cost per detainee as time goes on. The military has already requested \$200 million to repair the Camp 7 section of the facility, which holds high-value detainees.²² Because of its location and the United States' inability to hire local laborers, repairs at Guantanamo cost far more than repairs to facilities in the United States. According to General John Kelly, SOUTHCOM Commander: "So a 10-penny nail costs 20 cents. Everything's more expensive."²³ Transferring the detainees to already-established federal prisons would prevent the U.S. government from incurring these unnecessary costs.
- ☑ **New courtroom facilities:** Brigadier General Mark Martins, lead prosecutor of the Guantanamo Military Commissions, has said he wants the cases slated for trial to move along more quickly. With three cases in pre-trial hearings, this would most likely mean that trials would have to run consecutively. And with only two courtrooms at the prison, this would be difficult without the construction of at least one additional courtroom. BG Martins also stated that as many as 20 detainees could be tried,²⁴ which could mean more construction and exorbitant travel costs for trials.

All the available data show clearly that maintaining the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay is not only costly but a waste of millions of dollars in precious U.S. military resources. The necessary facilities to try and imprison detainees already exist and are already funded in the civilian federal prison and justice systems on U.S. soil. National security leaders agree the Guantanamo detention center should be closed in the interests of U.S. national security;²⁵ the unnecessary costs of keeping it open should compel fiscal conservatives to demand the prison's closure as well.

¹⁹ <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119503/guantanamo-bay-costs-mindboggling-expenses-running-prison>

²⁰ <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/13/medical-issues-confrontingguantanamoinmates.html>

²¹ <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119503/guantanamo-bay-costs-mindboggling-expenses-running-prison>

²² http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/01/us/politics/decaying-guantanamo-defies-closing-plans.html?_r=0

²³ <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/general-says-guantanamo-buildings-are-disrepair>

²⁴ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324069104578527012686080732>

²⁵ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/quote-sheet-national-security-leaders-support-closing-guantanamo>