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Transnational: Guantanamo Bay Detainees Returning to Terrorism Update

This paper responds to a DoD GC request for an update on the status and activity of former Guantanamo Bay (GTMO) detainees known/suspected of returning to terrorism after release.

Key Points

- Most detainee transfers/releases from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (GTMO), during 2002–2003 were sent back to Afghanistan or Pakistan. Since 2004, a higher percentage of detainees from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East have been released. Available reporting indicates a corresponding increase in terrorist activity attributed to released GTMO detainees in those areas.
- As more GTMO detainees are released to even more diverse locations, there will likely be a corresponding geographic growth of post-release terrorist activity. Former detainees who return to terrorism will continue to gravitate to their roots, with those from Afghanistan/Pakistan returning to local anti-coalition activity, and those from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa plugging back into the transnational terrorist networks they affiliated with prior to capture. Those returning to transnational networks are more likely to be involved in future major acts of terrorism.
- There is generally about a year between release and subsequent indications of post-transfer/release terrorist activity. Upon return, many detainees are held for varying lengths of time ranging from less than 24 hours up to several years. It is likely additional former detainees have been involved in terrorist activities undiscovered to date.
- Within the past year, former GTMO detainees have participated in terrorist activities ranging from small-scale attacks to transnational facilitation and attack planning. However, the former GTMO detainees known or suspected to have returned to terrorism represent a small proportion of the total transferred/released.

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- Of particular note are the following seven released detainees; each returned to terrorism focused on harming U.S. or allied interests.
 - Mohammed Ismail: Ismail was one of the “juveniles” released from GTMO in 2004. During a press interview after his release, he described the Americans saying, “They gave me a good time in Cuba. They were very nice to me, giving me English lessons.” He concluded his interview saying he would have to find work once he finished visiting all his relatives. He was recaptured four months later in May 2004, participating in an attack on U.S. forces near Kandahar. At the time of his recapture, Ismail carried a letter confirming his status as a Taliban member in good standing.
 - Said Mohammed Alim Shah AKA Abdullah Mahsud: Following his March 2004 transfer, this former detainee sought interviews with Pakistani media. In October 2004 he kidnapped two Chinese engineers and claimed responsibility for an Islamabad hotel bombing. As recently as May 2006, press reporting referred to Mahsud as the Taliban leader in Waziristan, but Pakistani officials have claimed he died during 2005 raids in South Waziristan.
 - Mohamed Yusif Yaqub AKA Mullah Shazada: After his release from GTMO on 8 May 03, Shazada assumed control of Taliban operations in southern Afghanistan. In this role, his activities reportedly included the organization and execution of a jailbreak in Kandahar, and a nearly successful capture of the border town of Spin Boldak. Shazada was killed on 7 May 2004 during fighting with U.S. forces. His memorial in Quetta, Pakistan drew many Taliban leaders wanted by U.S. forces. At the time of his release there was no indication he was a member of any terrorist organization or posed a risk to US or allied interests.
 - Maulavi Abdul Ghaffar: After being captured in early 2002 and held at GTMO for eight months, Ghaffar reportedly became the Taliban’s regional commander in Uruzgan and Helmand provinces, carrying out attacks on U.S. and Afghan forces. On 25 September 2004, while planning an attack against Afghan police, Ghaffar and two of his men were killed in a raid by Afghan security forces
 - Mohammed Nayim Farouq: After his release from US custody in July 2003, Farouq quickly renewed his association with Taliban and al-Qaida members and has since become re-involved in anti-Coalition militant activity.
 - Ravil Shafeyavich Gumarov: Following his March 2004 transfer and subsequent release, this former detainee was arrested for involvement in a gas

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line bombing in Russia in January 2005. In May 2006, a Russian court found him guilty and sentenced him to 13 years in prison.

- Timur Ravilich Ishmurat: Following his March 2004 transfer and subsequent release, this former detainee was arrested with Ravil Gumarov for involvement in a gas line bombing in Russia in January 2005. In May 2006, a Russian court found him guilty and sentenced him to 11 years in prison.

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