- 1 IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
- $2 \quad - - - - - X$
- 3 SHAFIQ RASUL, ET AL., :
- 4 Petitioners :
- 5 v. : No. 03-334
- 6 GEORGE W. BUSH, PRESIDENT OF :
- 7 THE UNITED STATES, ET AL. :
- 8 and :
- 9 FAWZI KHALID ABDULLAH FAHAD :
- 10 AL ODAH, ET AL., :
- 11 Petitioners :
- 12 v. : No. 03-343
- 13 UNITED STATES, ET AL. :
- 14 ------
- Washington, D.C.
- 16 Tuesday, April 20, 2004
- 17 The above-entitled matter came on for oral
- 18 argument before the Supreme Court of the United
- 19 States at 10:02 a.m.
- 20 APPEARANCES:
- 21 JOHN J. GIBBONS, ESQ., Newark, N.J., on behalf of the
- 22 Petitioner.
- 23 THEODORE B. OLSON, Solicitor General, Department of
- Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of the
- United States, supporting the Respondents.

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- 1 PROCEEDINGS
- 2 (10:02 a.m.)
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE REHNQUIST: We'll hear
- 4 argument now on 03-334, Shafiq Rasul vs. George W.
- 5 Bush and a companion case. Mr. Gibbons.
- 6 ORAL ARGUMENT OF JOHN J. GIBBONS
- 7 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONERS
- 8 MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
- 9 it please the Court:
- 10 What is at stake in this case is the
- 11 authority of the Federal courts to uphold the rule of
- 12 law. Respondents assert that their actions are
- 13 absolutely immune from judicial examination whenever
- 14 they elect to detain foreign nationals outside our
- 15 borders. Under this theory, neither the length of
- 16 the detention, the conditions of their confinement,
- 17 nor the fact that they have been wrongfully detained
- 18 makes the slightest difference.
- 19 Respondents would create a lawless enclave
- 20 insulating the executive branch from any judicial
- 21 scrutiny now or in the future.
- QUESTION: Mr. Gibbons, I understand that
- 23 your clients have been detained approximately two
- 24 years?
- 25 MR. GIBBONS: That's correct, Your Honor.

- 1 QUESTION: Supposing they had only been
- 2 detained six months, how much would that weaken your
- 3 case?
- 4 MR. GIBBONS: It wouldn't weaken it at all
- 5 because as I'll get into in the argument, the case
- 6 depends on compliance with provisions of a binding
- 7 treaty, which requires a prompt determination of
- 8 their status.
- 9 QUESTION: So they would have had a habeas
- 10 corpus entitlement, in your view, within weeks after
- 11 their, after their detention?
- MR. GIBBONS: They would have had
- 13 entitlement to the process specified in the Geneva
- 14 Convention, and if they had that process --
- 15 QUESTION: Did they have that right when
- 16 they were in Afghanistan?
- 17 MR. GIBBONS: They allege not, and on this
- 18 record, you have to assume that, as did the Court of
- 19 Appeals.
- 20 OUESTION: But now in Johnson vs.
- 21 Eisentrager, we said that the Geneva Convention did
- 22 not confer a private right of action.
- MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, the question of
- 24 the private right of action really is not presented
- 25 in this case. We are not asking to imply a private

- 1 right of action from the Geneva Convention or any
- 2 other treaty. What we are saying is that the cause
- 3 of action is created by the Habeas Corpus Statute and
- 4 by the Administrative Procedure Act. The treaty
- 5 provides a rule of decision, not a cause of action.
- 6 QUESTION: Well, I guess, at least the
- 7 question presented is just whether the Federal court
- 8 has jurisdiction under the Habeas Statute, Section
- 9 2241, is that right?
- 10 MR. GIBBONS: That's correct.
- 11 QUESTION: And you don't raise the issue
- 12 of any potential jurisdiction on the basis of the
- 13 Constitution alone. We are here debating the
- 14 jurisdiction under the Habeas Statute, is that right?
- 15 MR. GIBBONS: That's correct, Justice
- 16 O'Connor. As a matter of fact --
- 17 QUESTION: 1331. I thought --
- MR. GIBBONS: It doesn't depend on Section
- 19 1331, although the Administrative Procedure Act claim
- 20 does depend on Section 1331.
- 21 QUESTION: That's what I'm asking. Is
- 22 that here or not? You mentioned the APA claim.
- MR. GIBBONS: Yes.
- 24 QUESTION: I thought you were still
- 25 asserting that, are you not?

- 1 MR. GIBBONS: Yes. I'm asserting that.
- 2 QUESTION: So it isn't just habeas then,
- 3 it's also --
- 4 MR. GIBBONS: That does --
- 5 QUESTION: It's also 13 --
- 6 MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, Justice Scalia,
- 7 it does depend on Section 1331.
- 8 QUESTION: So we have two things, the
- 9 Habeas Statute and 1331?
- MR. GIBBONS: Yes.
- 11 QUESTION: But you still win.
- MR. GIBBONS: Now --
- 13 QUESTION: If you win under the Habeas
- 14 Statute?
- MR. GIBBONS: Oh, absolutely.
- 16 QUESTION: Yes. You don't need both.
- MR. GIBBONS: No. We don't. Now, if you
- 18 look at the Court of Appeals ruling in this case, the
- 19 Court of Appeals assumed that these people were
- 20 friendly aliens, assumed that they had never been
- 21 members of any armed forces, and had never carried
- 22 out any belligerent activity against the United
- 23 States. Assumed that they had never had the hearing
- 24 required by the Geneva Convention to determine
- 25 whether or not in fact they were civilians who should

- 1 have been repatriated.
- What the Court of Appeals held was, and
- 3 it's on page 1141 of the court's opinion, if the
- 4 Constitution does not entitle detainees to due
- 5 process, and it does not, they cannot invoke the
- 6 jurisdiction of our courts to test the
- 7 constitutionality or legality of restraints on their
- 8 liberty.
- 9 Thus the Court of Appeals assumed that
- 10 the -- that the result turned on the absence of a
- 11 constitutional right, and that simply misreads the
- 12 Habeas Corpus Statute. Section 2241(c)(1), which is
- 13 carried forward in virtually identical language from
- 14 Section 14 of the Judiciary Act of 1789, antedated
- 15 the Bill of Rights. All it required, all it has ever
- 16 required is Federal custody simpliciter, and that
- 17 gives habeas corpus jurisdiction.
- 18 QUESTION: Well, but other than producing
- 19 the person before the court so that the system is
- 20 satisfied that we know where the person is, surely
- 21 you have to go beyond that and assert some sort of
- 22 right. And you -- you say that --
- MR. GIBBONS: Of course.
- 24 QUESTION: -- the Geneva Convention is
- 25 really not the basis for the cause of action, which I

- 1 agree, so where do we go after that? So he is here
- 2 in front of the court. Now what?
- MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, the Geneva
- 4 Convention is the supreme law of the land. That's
- 5 what the Constitution says about habeas.
- 6 QUESTION: But it may not be
- 7 self-executing. That's the problem, I guess. The
- 8 indications are it's not.
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, Your Honor --
- 10 QUESTION: Forgetting the Geneva
- 11 Convention, what happens when the person comes before
- 12 the court? You prevail and there is a writ of habeas
- 13 corpus, it comes here, and the judge says, now what
- 14 am I supposed to do.
- MR. GIBBONS: What the judge is supposed
- 16 to do is determine first whether or not the
- 17 government's response that the detention is legal is
- in fact an adequate response. Now, the government in
- 19 this case probably will respond, we don't have to
- 20 give the hearings required by the Geneva Convention.
- 21 But if you're going to treat a binding United States
- 22 treaty as the supreme law of the land, that is not an
- 23 adequate answer.
- Now, this question of, is the treaty
- 25 self-executing or not self-executing, I suggest is a

- 1 straw man. Since 1813, if a treaty provides a rule
- 2 of decision and something else provides a cause of
- 3 action, the treaty nevertheless provides the rule of
- 4 decision. That was several --
- 5 QUESTION: But Johnson said quite
- 6 specifically that the Geneva Convention was not
- 7 available to the Petitioners in that case because it
- 8 did not confer any right of action.
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: Well, Your Honor, I think
- 10 the latter part of your sentence is probably an
- 11 overreading of Johnson. In Johnson, which I suggest
- 12 is clearly distinguishable from this case, there were
- 13 three critical facts. One was that they were
- 14 admitted enemy aliens. Our Petitioners plead that
- 15 they are not.
- The other was that they had a hearing
- 17 before a military tribunal which comported with
- 18 Federal legislation and with the extant rules of
- 19 international law, and our Petitioners have had no
- 20 such hearing.
- 21 QUESTION: Well --
- 22 QUESTION: But I take it you are --
- 23 QUESTION: -- if you, if you, if your
- 24 clients here had been given the review that has been
- 25 described to us in the government's brief, by

- 1 military authorities to determine whether these
- 2 people are indeed being held as enemy combatants,
- 3 would you be here if you knew that that review had
- 4 been provided?
- 5 MR. GIBBONS: We would not be. What we
- 6 are seeking is the review provided --
- 7 QUESTION: Well, I don't see how that --
- 8 QUESTION: Wouldn't that depend on what
- 9 the review showed? And I thought you have alleged that
- 10 your
- 11 clients were not enemy aliens. If it showed they
- 12 were tourists, they were just picked up by mistake,
- 13 would you be here or would you not be here?
- MR. GIBBONS: If they were detained after
- 15 a hearing determined that they were civilian
- 16 detainees who under Article IV of the Geneva
- 17 Convention should be repatriated, we would be here.
- 18 QUESTION: I don't see how those merits
- 19 question go to the issue of jurisdiction of the
- 20 Court. It may well be that if those factors you
- 21 mentioned were changed, you'd be entitled to judgment
- 22 here, even though the plaintiffs in Eisentrager were
- 23 not entitled to judgment, but we are not talking
- 24 about the merits right now. We are talking about
- 25 jurisdiction. Certainly jurisdiction doesn't turn on

- 1 the merits whether you were an enemy alien or not.
- 2 MR. GIBBONS: Well, I suggest that a fair
- 3 reading of Eisentrager is that that did turn on the
- 4 merits.
- 5 QUESTION: No, but I thought your -- may
- 6 I, may I ask you this, because I'm having the trouble
- 7 Justice Scalia is having. I thought your principal
- 8 argument on the basis of Eisentrager was that it
- 9 cannot stand for the proposition that there is no
- 10 jurisdiction because in fact, in Eisentrager, there
- 11 was enough mention of matters on the merits so that
- 12 it was clear that's what was driving the ultimate
- 13 resolution in Eisentrager.
- And it cannot stand for the proposition
- 15 that a court cannot even inquire, and the only issue
- 16 we have got is whether under the Habeas Statute the
- 17 court can even inquire. Do I misunderstand your
- 18 position?
- 19 MR. GIBBONS: No, you do not, Justice
- 20 Souter.
- 21 QUESTION: Okay.
- MR. GIBBONS: It's our position that
- 23 Eisentrager was a decision on the merits as a matter
- 24 of fact. The Court says that they -- Petitioners
- 25 were extended the same preliminary hearing as the

- 1 sufficiency application that was extended in Quirin,
- 2 Yamashita and Hirota versus McArthur, all of which
- 3 were decisions on the merits.
- 4 QUESTION: But in several different
- 5 places, Mr. Gibbons, in Eisentrager, the Court says
- 6 that we are talking about the Habeas Statute, and we
- 7 are saying these Petitioners are not entitled to
- 8 habeas.
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: Well, they are not as a
- 10 matter -- let me be clear about that. The result on
- 11 the merits in Eisentrager is perfectly correct. What
- 12 the Court did in Eisentrager was apply the scope of
- 13 review on habeas corpus, which was standard at that
- 14 time. If the military tribunal had lawful
- 15 jurisdiction, that ended the habeas inquiry.
- 16 QUESTION: Well, there is another problem.
- 17 At that time, that case was decided when Ahrens
- 18 against Clark was the statement of the law, so there
- 19 is no statutory basis for jurisdiction there, and the
- 20 issue is whether the Constitution by itself provided
- 21 jurisdiction. And of course, all that's changed now.
- MR. GIBBONS: Well, Your Honor, in
- 23 Eisentrager, both the Court of Appeals and the
- 24 Supreme Court made it clear that they disapproved,
- 25 they were not adopting the ruling of the District

- 1 Court based on Ahrens v. Clark. Of course, in any
- 2 event, that does not go to subject matter
- 3 jurisdiction. That's a Rule 12(b)(2) issue of in
- 4 personam jurisdiction, whether a proper Respondent is
- 5 before the Court. In Eisentrager, the Court assumed
- 6 --
- 7 QUESTION: Well, you didn't raise the question

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- 9 of whether the territorial jurisdiction provision
- 10 covered it. There was no territorial jurisdiction if
- 11 they were outside the district under the ruling in
- 12 Ahrens against Clark, which means they had to rely on
- 13 the Constitution to support jurisdiction, which in
- 14 turn means that once they have overruled Ahrens
- 15 against Clark, which they did, there is now a
- 16 statutory basis for jurisdiction that did not then
- 17 exist.
- MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, respectfully, I
- 19 don't think you can fairly read Justice Jackson's
- 20 opinion as adopting the Ahrens v. Clark position.
- 21 QUESTION: No. But Ahrens v. Clark was
- 22 the law at the time of that decision, and it was
- 23 subsequently overruled. So that -- that case was
- 24 decided when the legal climate was different than it
- 25 has been since Ahrens against Clark was overruled.

- 1 MR. GIBBONS: Well -- in any event --
- 2 QUESTION: Let me help you.
- MR. GIBBONS: In any event, there is no
- 4 question that the Ahrens v. Clark rule does not apply
- 5 today. These Respondents are the proper Respondents.
- 6 QUESTION: Of course, it's a question of
- 7 how much it doesn't apply, whether it doesn't apply
- 8 only when there is at least clear statutory
- 9 jurisdiction in one, in one Federal court so it's
- 10 almost a venue call. It isn't clear that it's been
- 11 overruled when there is no statutory jurisdiction in
- 12 any Federal court. That's certainly an open question.
- MR. GIBBONS: Well, Your Honor, as to the
- 14 absence of jurisdiction, 2241(c)(1) could not be
- 15 plainer. It's been plain for 215 years. If there is
- 16 Federal detention and there is a proper Respondent
- 17 before the Court as there is, there is habeas corpus
- 18 jurisdiction. I don't see any, even ambiguity in
- 19 that statute.
- 20 QUESTION: What do you do if you have a
- 21 lawful combatant in a declared war, and the
- 22 combatant, an enemy of the United States is captured
- 23 and detained, habeas?
- MR. GIBBONS: Habeas, you mean on the
- 25 battlefield? Absolutely not.

- 1 QUESTION: We'll take it from the
- 2 battlefield, and a week later, 10 miles away, then
- 3 six months later, a thousand miles away.
- 4 MR. GIBBONS: In the zone of active
- 5 military operations or in an occupied area under
- 6 martial law, habeas corpus jurisdiction has never
- 7 extended. It is the common law.
- 8 QUESTION: Suppose it's Guantanamo.

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- MR. GIBBONS: Well, the --
- 11 QUESTION: A declared war and a lawful
- 12 combatant.
- 13 MR. GIBBONS: A declared war and someone
- 14 who has been determined to be a combatant in
- 15 accordance with Article V of the Geneva Convention,
- 16 an application for a writ of habeas corpus in those
- 17 circumstances would, under Rule 12(b)(6), be
- 18 summarily dismissed.
- 19 QUESTION: You are close to the merits.
- 20 OUESTION: You are back to the Geneva
- 21 Convention again, so I just have to assume your case
- 22 depends on the Geneva Convention.
- MR. GIBBONS: Well, it --
- 24 QUESTION: It's not self-executing.
- 25 MR. GIBBONS: It depends on the Geneva

- 1 Convention and on the military regulations duly
- 2 adopted and binding on the military forces of the
- 3 United States.
- 4 QUESTION: But isn't that the merits case
- 5 that you are talking about? I mean, your
- 6 jurisdictional argument doesn't depend, as I
- 7 understand it, on military regulations or the Geneva
- 8 Convention. It depends on this statute.
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: No. It does not.
- 10 QUESTION: If you get into court, your
- 11 clients may raise Geneva Convention and all sorts of
- 12 things, but that's not what your case here depends
- 13 on.
- MR. GIBBONS: No. Our position is that
- 15 the Habeas Corpus Statute has meant what it said
- 16 since 1789.
- 17 QUESTION: I mean, you have to think down
- 18 the road, is there an alternative to the Geneva
- 19 Convention that is on the substantive claim. I was
- 20 also thinking, and here I want your view on it, that
- 21 if you have, if they get in the door, and now they
- 22 have a claim that they are being held without a
- 23 competent tribunal assessing it, you get to your
- 24 route as well by saying that the part about the Fifth
- 25 Amendment in Eisentrager is, in effect, overruled by

- 1 Reid v. Covert. And in fact, if you follow Harlan
- 2 and by following Harlan, you apply some kind of due
- 3 process, and the Geneva Convention comes in to inform
- 4 the content of that due process.
- Now, is there an argument there or not?
- 6 MR. GIBBONS: There certainly is, Your
- 7 Honor, but since --
- 8 QUESTION: You're not simply being polite?
- 9 I want to --
- 10 (Laughter.)
- 11 MR. GIBBONS: I have more to say about it.
- 12 QUESTION: But you do have the impediment,
- 13 Mr. Gibbons, that the D.C. Circuit said it decided
- 14 the merits as well as jurisdiction, so I think
- 15 Justice O'Connor and Justice Kennedy were asking you
- 16 before, well, if you prevail on jurisdiction under
- 17 that opinion, don't you go out the door immediately
- 18 because the D.C. Circuit said, at least as far as the
- 19 Constitution is concerned, nonresident aliens have no
- 20 due process rights.
- 21 MR. GIBBONS: As far as the Constitution
- 22 is concerned, that's what the District of Columbia
- 23 Circuit said. Now, as to whether or not that's right
- 24 --
- 25 QUESTION: But that's not before us.

- 1 MR. GIBBONS: First of all --
- 2 QUESTION: Whether -- as I take it we ask
- 3 you to address only the bare jurisdictional question.
- 4 MR. GIBBONS: The bare jurisdictional
- 5 question depends on Federal custody simpliciter, and
- 6 then the Court goes on to decide, is there any legal
- 7 basis for the government's response to the writ.
- 8 QUESTION: Can I ask this, Mr. Gibbons.
- 9 If the jurisdictional question rests on Habeas
- 10 Statute simpliciter, without reference to the Geneva
- 11 Convention or any of the other merits points that
- 12 you've been raising, how then do you answer Justice
- 13 Kennedy's question if the merits are out and it
- 14 doesn't matter whether you are a combatant or
- 15 noncombatant, is there jurisdiction when somebody is
- 16 captured on the field of battle and held immediately
- on the field of battle, why wouldn't there be
- 18 jurisdiction there? The only answers you give are
- 19 merits answers, not jurisdictional answers.
- 20 MR. GIBBONS: Your Honor, what I'm
- 21 suggesting is that whether you call it jurisdiction
- 22 or whether you call it the merits, in the battlefield
- 23 situation, it's going to go out under Rule 12, in any
- 24 event.
- 25 QUESTION: But that's, that's quite

- 1 different. I mean, all we are theoretically talking
- 2 about here is jurisdiction. And the idea that, you
- 3 know, you have Justice Kennedy's example, a lawful
- 4 combatant, a declared war, detained at Guantanamo
- 5 maybe two months after he is captured, and an
- 6 action's brought here in the District of Columbia for
- 7 habeas corpus and what does a -- what does a judge
- 8 say when he considers that sort of petition?
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: When he sees that petition,
- 10 he should dismiss it summarily, whether he dismisses
- 11 it under 12(b)(1) or 12(b)(6), it won't take him any
- 12 more time. Habeas corpus, as the historians' brief,
- 13 and others among the amici point out, has never run
- 14 to the battlefield, as a matter of habeas corpus
- 15 common law. And it is, after all, a common law writ.
- 16 It has never run to any place except where the
- 17 sovereign issuing the writ has some undisputed
- 18 control.
- 19 QUESTION: Well, suppose at Guantanamo,
- 20 you still have to summarily dismiss under the
- 21 hypothetical, right?
- MR. GIBBONS: Yes, Justice Kennedy --
- 23 Kennedy, and the Court of Appeals did rely on some
- 24 mystical ultimate sovereignty of Cuba over, as we
- 25 Navy types call it, Gitmo, treating the Navy base

- 1 there as a no law zone. Now, Guantanamo Navy base,
- 2 as I can attest from a year of personal experience,
- 3 is under complete United States control and has been
- 4 for a century.
- 5 QUESTION: We don't need your personal
- 6 experience. That's what it says in the treaty. It
- 7 says complete jurisdiction.
- 8 MR. GIBBONS: That's exactly what it says.
- 9 QUESTION: Complete jurisdictional control.
- 10
- MR. GIBBONS: That's exactly what it says
- 12 -- yes.
- 13 QUESTION: Now, it also says Cuba retains
- 14 sovereighty.
- 15 MR. GIBBONS: It does not say that. It
- 16 says that if the United States decides to surrender
- 17 the perpetual lease, Cuba has ultimate sovereignty,
- 18 whatever that means. Now, for lawyers and judges
- 19 dealing with the word sovereignty, it doesn't
- 20 self-define.
- 21 QUESTION: Excuse me. Does it say that,
- 22 Cuba has ultimate sovereignty only if the United
- 23 States decides to surrender?
- MR. GIBBONS: Yes.
- 25 QUESTION: Where would that text be? I

- 1 did not realize that was there.
- 2 MR. GIBBONS: Perhaps one of my colleagues
- 3 can find the language in the appendix.
- 4 QUESTION: Why don't you go ahead.
- 5 MR. GIBBONS: But, for example, if one of
- 6 the detainees here assaulted another detainee in
- 7 Guantanamo, there is no question they would be
- 8 prosecuted under American law because no other law
- 9 applies there. Cuban law doesn't apply there.
- Now, if the test is sovereignty, that term
- 11 must be given some rational meaning by judges.
- 12 Respondents concede that habeas corpus would extend
- 13 to citizens detained in Guantanamo. That would be no
- 14 interference with Cuban sovereignty, and extending
- 15 habeas corpus to noncitizens there is no more an
- 16 interference with Cuban sovereignty.
- 17 If there isn't -- if there isn't
- 18 sovereignty over that base where no law applies,
- 19 legislative, judicial or otherwise, the term has no
- 20 meaning. Sovereignty for legal purposes must at
- 21 least mean that some political organization has a
- 22 monopoly on sanction in that defined geographic area.
- 23 QUESTION: Mr. Gibbons, I'm quoting from
- 24 page 8 of the government's brief, which I assume is
- 25 an accurate quote of the treaty. It doesn't just say

- 1 that Cuba has sovereignty if we give up the lease.
- 2 It says the United States -- this is the treaty,
- 3 recognizes the continuance of the ultimate
- 4 sovereignty of the Republic of Cuba over the leased
- 5 area. Now I take that to mean that they are
- 6 sovereign even during the term of the lease. You may
- 7 say it's artificial, but there it is.
- 8 MR. GIBBONS: I --
- 9 QUESTION: It's the law of the land, as
- 10 you say.
- 11 MR. GIBBONS: I misspoke, Justice Scalia,
- 12 by omitting the reference to continuing. But it
- 13 doesn't make any difference. That continuing
- 14 sovereignty -- Queen Elizabeth is the nominal
- 15 sovereign of Canada. That doesn't determine whether
- 16 or not Canadian courts can grant a writ of habeas
- 17 corpus. She's also the nominal sovereign of
- 18 Australia.
- 19 QUESTION: I don't think sovereignty is
- 20 being used in the same sense. I mean, it would be a
- 21 good point if you --
- MR. GIBBONS: Well, that's the point.
- 23 QUESTION: If you said that England was
- 24 sovereign over Canada, and I don't think anybody
- 25 would say that.

- 1 MR. GIBBONS: But if the reference in the
- 2 lease meant that Cuban law somehow applied in the
- 3 United States Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, that would
- 4 be one thing. But Cuban law has never had any
- 5 application inside that base. A stamp with Fidel
- 6 Castro's picture on it wouldn't get a letter off the
- 7 base.
- 8 QUESTION: But you couldn't sublease --
- 9 QUESTION: Mr. Gibbons --
- 10 QUESTION: -- could we -- we couldn't
- 11 sublease Gitmo and we couldn't sell any of Gitmo to a
- 12 foreign country, could we? Why not? Because Cuba is
- 13 sovereign.
- MR. GIBBONS: Well, there are all sorts of
- 15 treaties in which the United States, or perhaps
- 16 leases in other respects, in which the United States
- 17 knew its own authority, but that doesn't mean that
- 18 the United States has surrendered its sovereignty.
- 19 OUESTION: Is it like a Federal enclave
- 20 within a State? I was trying to think of anything
- 21 that might be -- resemble this relationship of the
- 22 United States to a territory inside another
- 23 territory?
- 24 MR. GIBBONS: Well, Guantanamo is to some
- 25 extent unique. One of the amicus briefs that surveyed

- 1 a United States Navy base elsewhere points out that
- 2 this is the only base, for example, where the United
- 3 States has not entered into a status of forces --
- 4 forces agreement.
- 5 It's not at all clear that we have
- 6 exclusive jurisdiction, civil jurisdiction in any of
- 7 our other enclaves in foreign countries. But we have
- 8 exclusive jurisdiction and control over civil law in
- 9 Guantanamo, and have had for a century. So it's --
- 10 so it's so totally artificial to say that because of
- 11 this provision in the lease, the executive branch can
- 12 create a no law zone where it is not accountable to
- 13 any judiciary, anywhere.
- Now, in some other places where the United
- 15 States has a base, there may be other civil authority
- 16 that can demand an accounting. But what the
- 17 executive branch is saying here is we don't have to
- 18 account to anyone, anywhere.
- 19 Justice Breyer, you asked me a question
- 20 before, and someone else, that's not unusual,
- 21 interrupted before I answered you. And to tell you
- 22 the truth, I don't remember your question at this
- 23 point.
- 24 QUESTION: I can explore it with the
- 25 Solicitor General possibly.

- 1 MR. GIBBONS: Well, Your Honor, I was also
- 2 asked a question about whether or not aliens had any
- 3 constitutional rights. In Verdugo, speaking for four
- 4 members of the Court at least, Mr. Chief Justice, you
- 5 said that Eisentrager stood for the proposition that
- 6 --
- 7 QUESTION: I think I was speaking for
- 8 five. I think Justice Kennedy joined the opinion.
- 9 MR. GIBBONS: Well, he did. But he wrote
- 10 separately, I think, and at least cast some doubt on
- 11 whether or not he agreed with your position that
- 12 there is no Fifth Amendment right for an alien
- 13 outside the United States.
- Now, of course, that reading of
- 15 Eisentrager assumes that it was a decision on the
- 16 merits and not a jurisdictional decision. But be
- 17 that as it may, our position, and again, it's not
- 18 necessary for reversal in this case, and perhaps
- 19 should not even be addressed because you could avoid
- 20 a constitutional decision by making a statutory
- 21 decision, but our position is that that statement in
- 22 Verdugo is overbroad.
- 23 QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Gibbons.
- 24 General Olson, we'll hear from you.
- 25 ORAL ARGUMENT OF SOLICITOR GENERAL THEODORE B. OLSON

- 1 ON BEHALF OF RESPONDENTS
- 2 GENERAL OLSON: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
- 3 it please the Court:
- The United States is at war. Over 10,000
- 5 American troops are in Afghanistan today in response
- 6 to a virtually unanimous Congressional declaration of
- 7 an unusual and extraordinarily -- extraordinary
- 8 threat to our national security, and an authorization
- 9 to the President to use all necessary and appropriate
- 10 force to deter and prevent acts of terrorism against
- 11 the United States.
- 12 It's in that context that Petitioners ask
- 13 this Court to assert jurisdiction that is not
- 14 authorized by Congress, does not arise from the
- 15 Constitution, has never been exercised by this Court
- 16 --
- 17 QUESTION: Mr. Olson, supposing the war
- 18 had ended, could you continue to detain these people
- 19 on Guantanamo? Would there then be jurisdiction?
- 20 GENERAL OLSON: We believe that there
- 21 would not be jurisdiction, just --
- 22 QUESTION: So the existence of the war is
- 23 really irrelevant to the legal issue?
- 24 GENERAL OLSON: It is not irrelevant,
- 25 because it is in this context that that question is

- 1 raised, and I would -- the question, the case of
- 2 Johnson vs. Eisentrager, which we have discussed
- 3 here, even the dissent in that case said that it
- 4 would be fantastic to assume that habeas corpus
- 5 jurisdiction would exist in the time of war. So that
- 6 that case is not --
- 7 QUESTION: No, but your position does not
- 8 depend on the existence of a war?
- 9 GENERAL OLSON: It doesn't depend upon
- 10 that, Justice Stevens, but it's even more forceful.
- 11 And more compelling. Because all of the Justices in
- 12 the Eisentrager case would have held that there was
- 13 no jurisdiction under these circumstances.
- 14 OUESTION: What if one of the Plaintiffs
- 15 were an American citizen here, but being held in
- 16
- 17 Guantanamo.
- 18 GENERAL OLSON: We have not --
- 19 QUESTION: Jurisdiction under Habeas
- 20 Statute?
- 21 GENERAL OLSON: We would acknowledge
- 22 jurisdiction. The Court has never --
- 23 QUESTION: Excuse me.
- 24 GENERAL OLSON: We would acknowledge that
- 25 there would be jurisdiction --

- 1 QUESTION: Why?
- 2 GENERAL OLSON: -- under the Habeas Corpus
- 3 Statute for the reasons that are explained in
- 4 Eisentrager itself, that citizenship is a foundation
- 5 for a relationship between the nation and the
- 6 individual and a foundation for --
- 7 QUESTION: Is that sufficient to give us
- 8 jurisdiction over Guantanamo, which is another
- 9 sovereign?
- 10 GENERAL OLSON: With respect to the
- 11 individual. We would, we would still argue --
- 12 QUESTION: What if the American citizen
- 13 was in the middle of the battlefield in Iraq?
- 14 GENERAL OLSON: We would still argue that
- 15 the jurisdiction under the Habeas Statute would not
- 16 extend under these circumstances to a wartime
- 17 situation, Justice Stevens, but that the -- what the
- 18 Eisentrager Court said, that there is enhanced
- 19 respect with respect to the power of the Court under
- 20 the habeas corpus jurisdiction with respect to
- 21 questions involving citizenship.
- But what was unquestionable with respect
- 23 to that case is that an alien who had never had any
- 24 relationship to the United States and who was being
- 25 held as a result of a combat situation or a war

- 1 situation in a foreign jurisdiction, there was no
- 2 jurisdiction under the Habeas Statute.
- 3 QUESTION: Well, it's clear that there was
- 4 no relief. What do you say to Mr. Gibbons' position
- 5 that because in fact they did discuss the merits,
- 6 that case cannot really be taken as authority for
- 7 the -- leaving Ahrens and Braden aside, that the case
- 8 cannot be taken as authority for the proposition that
- 9 there is no jurisdiction in the sense of allowing the
- 10 person through the door to make whatever claim the
- 11 person wants to make. What is your response to that?
- 12 GENERAL OLSON: Our response to that is
- 13 throughout the decision in Eisentrager, the Court
- 14 referred to the question of jurisdiction.
- 15 QUESTION: Oh, it did.
- 16 GENERAL OLSON: It starts --
- 17 QUESTION: I'm really not asking a
- 18 question about, frankly, about the Court's
- 19 terminology. I'm asking about the holding in the
- 20 case.
- 21 GENERAL OLSON: The holding --
- 22 QUESTION: The mere argument is you can't
- 23 say it held anything more than that there was no
- 24 relief at the end of the road.
- 25 GENERAL OLSON: It held that there was no

- 1 relief at the end of the road, because the ultimate
- 2 question, to use the words of the Court, the ultimate
- 3 question is jurisdiction. The Court over and over
- 4 again said that we are deciding how far the Habeas
- 5 Statute reaches.
- 6 OUESTION: General Olson, would you look
- 7 at page 777 of the Johnson v. Eisentrager opinion,
- 8 and it says -- this is a hard opinion to fathom, but
- 9 it does say we are here confronted with, and there is
- 10 a whole list of things. And one of them is, is an
- 11 enemy alien, and another is, was tried and convicted
- 12 by a military commission sitting outside the United
- 13 States.
- 14 Why would the Court think it necessary to
- 15 say this is what we confronted in this case which
- 16 makes it worlds different from our case, where there
- 17 has been no trial and conviction, where these people
- 18 are saying, and we must accept for the moment that
- 19 it's true, that they are innocents. That they are
- 20 not combatants of any kind.
- 21 GENERAL OLSON: Well, those were
- 22 unquestionably facts that related to the case, that
- 23 related to the facts that came to the Court, but in
- 24 the very next paragraph, the Court goes on to say
- 25 that we have pointed out that the privilege of

- 1 litigation has been extended to aliens whether
- 2 friendly or enemy, that specifically addresses one of
- 3 the points you mentioned, only because permitting
- 4 their presence in the country implied protection.
- 5 And the Court went on to say, no such
- 6 basis can be invoked here for these prisoners at no
- 7 relevant time were within any territory over which
- 8 the United States is sovereign, and the scenes of
- 9 their offense, their capture, their trial and their
- 10 punishment were all beyond the territorial
- 11 jurisdiction of the United States.
- 12 And earlier in that --
- 13 QUESTION: Their trial and their
- 14 punishment. This is a completed episode. This is a
- 15 very difficult decision to understand. I would say
- 16 it's at least ambiguous.
- 17 GENERAL OLSON: It seems to me -- it seems
- 18 to me that those statements all have to be read in
- 19 the context -- context of the Court saying the
- 20 ultimate question is jurisdiction.
- 21 QUESTION: But it was so unnecessary to
- 22 say, to give that list that appears on page 777.
- 23 GENERAL OLSON: Well, I suspect that there
- 24 are many decisions of this Court where, when the
- 25 Court is dealing with the facts of a specific case,

- 1 especially in the context of a Court of Appeals
- 2 decision, if the Court were to turn to the briefs
- 3 that were written before to present the issue in this
- 4 Court, the only -- the question presented, submitted
- 5 in this case, in this Court, in Eisentrager was the
- 6 jurisdiction under the Habeas Statute. But the case
- 7 arose in the context where the Court of --
- 8 QUESTION: Was it really -- was it really
- 9 under the Habeas Statute or under the Constitution?
- 10 GENERAL OLSON: It was --
- 11 QUESTION: Because if the, if the views of
- 12 the dissenters in Ahrens against Clark were the law
- 13 at that time as they perhaps are now, then there
- 14 would have been statutory jurisdiction, which was not
- 15 present at that time.
- 16 GENERAL OLSON: But the Court was
- 17 specifically focusing on the jurisdictional incidents
- 18 attached to the condition of the individual --
- 19 QUESTION: But the Eisentrager Court never
- 20 once mentioned the statute, the Habeas Statute in its
- 21 opinion. What it seemed to do was to reach the
- 22 merits and say at the end of the day, these people
- 23 have no rights. They have had a trial under the
- 24 military tribunal and they have no rights that could
- 25 be granted at the end of the day, and no mention of

- 1 the Habeas Statute.
- 2 GENERAL OLSON: The Court specifically did
- 3 say, but did not mention the statute, Justice
- 4 O'Connor, but the statute is mentioned throughout the
- 5 briefs, in the government's brief when it says what
- 6 -- the statute at issue, the Habeas Corpus Statute
- 7 and within its territory, the language of Part A.
- 8 The statute that exists today is the same statute
- 9 that the Eisentrager Court was considering.
- 10 QUESTION: Well, the briefs may have
- 11 mentioned it, but wasn't the problem that Eisentrager
- 12 had to confront, the problem created by Ahrens,
- 13 construing respective jurisdiction, and therefore,
- 14 the only way there could be habeas jurisdiction in
- 15 Eisentrager was if due process demanded it.
- And the Court went on to say, well, there
- 17 are various reasons why there is no ultimate due
- 18 process entitlement, and therefore, due process does
- 19 not demand entertainment of jurisdiction.
- 20 After Braden, that argument is gone. Why,
- 21 therefore, is Eisentrager not undercut to the point
- 22 where it's no further authority on the jurisdictional
- 23 point?
- 24 GENERAL OLSON: Well, it seems to me again
- 25 the entire opinion has to be taken in context. The

- 1 Court did specifically say that there is no statutory
- 2 authority. It didn't say, it didn't identify by
- 3 number a provision of the code, but it specifically
- 4 said no statutory authority.
- 5 QUESTION: The reason it said that was
- 6 because Ahrens was then the law.
- 7 QUESTION: Yeah.
- 8 QUESTION: And that was very clear in the
- 9 Court of Appeals opinion. They rested their decision
- 10 solely on the Constitution.
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: Well, Justice Stevens, I
- 12 submit that in the context of the case, in the
- 13 context of the way the dissent understood it, as well
- 14 as the majority understood it --
- 15 OUESTION: Yes, but the fact case was --
- 16 the case was decided when the majority view in Ahrens
- 17 was the law, and that is no longer the law.
- 18 GENERAL OLSON: Well, we would submit that
- 19 Ahrens, the over -- partial overruling, I think, has
- 20 been pointed out before. Ahrens has no effect on the
- 21 vitality of the Eisentrager case. The Court made
- 22 clear that it was deciding -- and everyone -- the
- 23 reason I mentioned the briefs is the context in which
- 24 the case was presented to the Court, and argued to
- 25 the Court and the decision that was made by the

- 1 majority in the Court, focusing on the identity of
- 2 the Petitioner, whether alien or friendly.
- 3 Justice Black in his dissenting opinion
- 4 says this decision would apply to whether someone was
- 5 hostile or not, and the entire context of the case,
- 6 Justice Stevens, it seems to me, and does not --
- 7 QUESTION: The context of the case was it
- 8 was decided at a time when Ahrens against Clark was
- 9 the law. And if the dissenting opinion in Ahrens
- 10 against Clark had been the law, it would have been
- 11 decided differently.
- 12 GENERAL OLSON: Well, it seems to me that
- 13 a fair reading of the case goes much further than
- 14 that, because the Court was not focusing on that. It
- 15 didn't specify that it was making its decision on
- 16 that basis. It did specify over and over again, and
- 17 the dissent referred to this as well, that it was
- 18 focusing on the fact that the individuals bringing
- 19 the petition had no sufficient contacts with the
- 20 United States. That's in part why the Court
- 21 distinguished --
- 22 QUESTION: And that's a complete response
- 23 to an argument resting entirely on the Constitution.
- 24 QUESTION: Did it cite Ahrens?
- 25 GENERAL OLSON: It did not, as I'm --

- 1 QUESTION: I don't recall.
- 2 GENERAL OLSON: I don't recall that it
- 3 did. The District Court --
- 4 QUESTION: Kind of extraordinary if it was
- 5 relying entirely on that --
- 6 GENERAL OLSON: The District Court relied
- 7 upon that decision. The Court of Appeals went much
- 8 further with respect to -- in fact, the Court, and
- 9 this Court, Justice Jackson's opinion for the Court
- 10 in this case specifically points out that the Court
- 11 of Appeals went back to something it called
- 12 fundamentals, because it couldn't find any authority
- in either the statute or the Constitution.
- 14 QUESTION: Well, didn't the Johnson
- 15 opinion also say, we don't have to concern ourselves
- 16 here with the proper custodian. We kind of finesse
- 17 that point?
- 18 GENERAL OLSON: I believe that's a correct
- 19 characterization. What -- the other portion of the
- 20 decision that it seems to me important to recognize
- 21 is that this is a decision that was widely perceived,
- 22 and has been consistently perceived, as a definition
- 23 of the scope of the Habeas Statute. Going back to
- 24 the early 1800s, this Court decided that the extent
- 25 of habeas jurisdiction arose from the statute, not

- 1 from the common law.
- 2 QUESTION: That gets me back to your
- 3 statement that if this had been a citizen held in
- 4 Guantanamo, that habeas would be available. But the
- 5 statute doesn't talk about citizens. It says
- 6 prisoners held under the authority of the United
- 7 States. Now, if the citizen can say that he is a
- 8 prisoner held under the authority of the United
- 9 States in Guantanamo, why couldn't a noncitizen under
- 10 the statute say the same thing?
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: I think, Justice Kennedy,
- 12 the answer to that is, in the first place, we are
- 13 not, we are not saying that there necessarily would
- 14 be jurisdiction there, but we are saying that the
- 15 Court -- that the Court would go further with respect
- 16 to that because, and this is also in Eisentrager and
- 17 a number of other Court's -- of this Court's
- 18 decisions, that the Court will find more protection
- 19 for citizens as a result of the relationship going
- 20 back --
- 21 QUESTION: Well, but the only way we can
- 22 do it --
- 23 QUESTION: I don't, I don't mean to
- 24 misconstrue it or to misstate it, I had thought you
- 25 said at the outset that if this had been a citizen of

- 1 the United States held in Guantanamo, there would be
- 2 habeas corpus.
- 3 GENERAL OLSON: We are not -- we are
- 4 saying that we would not be contesting it, Justice
- 5 Kennedy, and the Court will be dealing with other
- 6 issues involving citizens.
- 7 QUESTION: You don't have to contest the
- 8 jurisdictional objection. If there is no
- 9 jurisdiction, there is no jurisdiction, whether you
- 10 contest it or not.
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: Well, I quess the only way
- 12 I can answer this, Justice Stevens, is to say that
- 13 what the Court seemed to say, not only in the
- 14 majority opinion, but in the dissenting opinion, that
- 15 more rights would be given to citizens --
- 16 QUESTION: No, but there are no rights
- 17 that can be recognized unless there is jurisdiction
- 18 in the first place. And if the Court is going to
- 19 make good on what you have just said it said, it has
- 20 got to do so presupposing jurisdiction. So if you
- 21 are going to rely upon those statements, don't you
- 22 necessarily have to concede jurisdiction?
- 23 GENERAL OLSON: I don't --
- 24 QUESTION: With respect to the citizen?
- 25 Doesn't make any difference if they have got lots of

- 1 rights if there is no jurisdiction to get into a
- 2 court to enforce them.
- 3 GENERAL OLSON: I think that the answer is
- 4 that that does not necessarily follow. The Court has
- 5 not reached that decision yet, and that's something
- 6 that is not before the Court.
- 7 QUESTION: Certainly the argument is
- 8 available that in that situation, the Constitution
- 9 requires jurisdiction. The Constitution requires
- 10 that an American citizen who has the protection of
- 11 the Constitution have some manner of vindicating his
- 12 rights under the Constitution. That would be the
- 13 argument.
- 14 GENERAL OLSON: I agree with that, justice
- 15 Scalia, and this Court has said again and again that
- 16 --
- 17 QUESTION: And that was part of his
- 18 argument in Eisentrager.
- 19 GENERAL OLSON: And it was -- and in that
- 20 case, the Court specifically said the Fifth Amendment
- 21 did not extend to the Petitioners in that case. The
- 22 Court has said that again in the Verdugo case in
- 23 terms of the Fourth Amendment.
- 24 QUESTION: Is that your answer to Justice
- 25 Kennedy, that there would be jurisdiction because due

- 1 process would require it for citizens, but there
- 2 would not be statutory jurisdiction in the case of
- 3 the citizen at Guantanamo?
- 4 GENERAL OLSON: I think it would be an
- 5 interpretation. And what this Court is doing is
- 6 interpreting the statute because the Habeas Corpus
- 7 Statute defines the extent of rights --
- 8 QUESTION: Well, but what is the
- 9 position -- I mean, I want to know what the position
- 10 of the United States is for the same reason Justice
- 11 Kennedy does.
- 12 GENERAL OLSON: Our answer to that
- 13 question, Justice Souter, is that citizens of the
- 14 United States, because of their constitutional
- 15 circumstances, may have greater rights with respect
- 16 to the scope and reach of the Habeas Statute as the
- 17 Court has or would interpret it. That case has never
- 18 come before this Court, and it's important to
- 19 emphasize that --
- 20 QUESTION: You go outside of the statutory
- 21 language for your case that's in front of us.
- 22 GENERAL OLSON: Excuse me, Justice --
- 23 QUESTION: You are going outside of the
- 24 statutory language to resolve both the hypothetical
- 25 case and the case in front of us. This is a

- 1 prisoner, and he is detained under the authority of
- 2 the United States.
- 3 GENERAL OLSON: And this Court construed
- 4 those provisions in the Eisentrager case and
- 5 determined that the statute did not reach aliens that
- 6 did have no contact with the United States and were
- 7 held in a foreign jurisdiction outside the
- 8 sovereignty of the United States.
- 9 QUESTION: It did not construe the
- 10 statute. It assumed the statute was inapplicable and
- 11 concluded that the Constitution was not a substitute
- 12 for the statute.
- GENERAL OLSON: Well, Justice Stevens, I
- 14 respectfully disagree. I think the Court was
- 15 construing the statute not to be applicable, then it
- 16 went on because the Court of Appeals had addressed
- 17 the constitutional question.
- 18 OUESTION: Not a word, not a word in the
- 19 opinion that supports it.
- 20 GENERAL OLSON: Well, I respectfully
- 21 disagree. The Court does say, we don't find any
- 22 authority in the statute. We don't find any
- 23 authority in the Constitution. We will not go to
- 24 so-called fundamentals to find it someplace else.
- 25 That is consistent with what this Court decided in

- 1 the --
- 2 QUESTION: Well, it's obvious that there
- 3 is language in Eisentrager that supports you, obvious
- 4 to me, but you have just heard that judges don't
- 5 always distinguish between 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6), not
- 6 even in this Court, at least we don't always get it
- 7 right. And there is also language, as you have
- 8 heard, that's against you. I think there is some in
- 9 there.
- 10 So what I'm thinking now, assuming that
- 11 it's very hard to interpret Eisentrager, is that if
- 12 we go with you, it has a virtue of clarity. There is
- 13 a clear rule. Not a citizen, outside the United
- 14 States, you don't get your foot in the door. But
- 15 against you is that same fact.
- 16 It seems rather contrary to an idea of a
- 17 Constitution with three branches that the executive
- 18 would be free to do whatever they want, whatever they
- 19 want without a check. That's problem one.
- 20 Problem two is that we have several
- 21 hundred years of British history where the cases
- 22 interpreting habeas corpus said to the contrary
- 23 anyway. And then we have the possibility of really
- 24 helping you with what you're really worried about,
- 25 which is undue court interference by shaping the

- 1 substantive right to deal with all those problems of
- 2 the military that led you to begin your talk by
- 3 reminding us of those problems.
- 4 So if it's that choice, why not say, sure,
- 5 you get your foot in the door, prisoners in
- 6 Guantanamo, and we'll use the substantive rights to
- 7 work out something that's protective but practical.
- 8 GENERAL OLSON: Well, Justice Breyer,
- 9 there are several answers to that. You started with
- 10 the proposition that there was no check and that the
- 11 executive is asserting no check. This is the
- 12 interpretation of the scope of a Habeas Statute.
- 13 Congress had -- has had 54 years with full awareness
- 14 of the decision to change it.
- Indeed, as we point out in our brief,
- 16 eight months after the Eisentrager decision, a bill
- 17 was introduced that would have changed that statute,
- 18 H.R. 2812, which would specifically have changed the
- 19 statute to deal with the Eisentrager situation, so
- 20 there is a check.
- 21 QUESTION: It could have been just a
- 22 clarifying, General Olson. As you well know, the
- 23 fact that a bill was introduced and not passed
- 24 carries very little weight on what law that exists
- 25 means.

- 1 GENERAL OLSON: Well, I understand that,
- 2 but the bill was -- came eight months after
- 3 Eisentrager.
- 4 QUESTION: You're not using it to say what
- 5 the law was. You're using it to show that there was
- 6 available, and is available, a perfectly good check
- 7 upon the executive branch. If the people think that
- 8 this is unfair, if Congress thinks it's unfair, with
- 9 a stroke of the pen, they can change the Habeas
- 10 Statute.
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: That's precisely correct.
- 12 And they had a bill before them eight months after
- 13 the Eisentrager decision which had -- that Congress
- 14 proceeded on it. Congress has also dealt with the
- 15 Habeas Statute in a variety of other ways. It has
- 16 seen fit in no way to change the decision required by
- 17 this Court with respect to the statute.
- 18 You mentioned several hundred years of
- 19 British history was your second point. All of those
- 20 cases, or virtually all of those same cases that have
- 21 been brought up in the briefs, and the amicus briefs
- 22 today, were in the briefs that were before the
- 23 Eisentrager --
- 24 QUESTION: I grant you this. My question
- 25 has to assume that Eisentrager is ambiguous and not

- 1 clearly determinative. But then on that assumption,
- 2 I'm still honestly most worried about the fact that
- 3 there would be a large category of unchecked and
- 4 uncheckable actions dealing with the detention of
- 5 individuals that are being held in a place where
- 6 America has power to do everything.
- 7 Now, that's what's worrying me because of
- 8 Article III, and the other thing on the opposite
- 9 side, as I said, is it's possible to tailor the
- 10 substance to take care of the problems that are
- 11 worrying you. Those are my two basic points.
- 12 GENERAL OLSON: Well, let me get back to
- 13 it again. Those earlier cases were decided and
- 14 rejected in Eisen -- in the Eisentrager case.
- 15 Whether there is a check on the executive, there is a
- 16 Congressional check through the power of legislation,
- 17 through the power of oversight, through the power of
- 18 appropriations. There is --
- 19 QUESTION: Can we hold hearings to
- 20 determine the problems that are bothering you? I
- 21 mean, we have to take your word for what the problems
- 22 are. We can't call witnesses and see what the real
- 23 problems are, can we, in creating this new
- 24 substantive rule that we are going to let the courts
- 25 create. Congress could do all that, though, couldn't

- 1 it?
- 2 GENERAL OLSON: Congress could do all that
- 3 --
- 4 QUESTION: If it wanted to change the
- 5 Habeas Statute, it could make all sorts of refined
- 6 modifications.
- 7 GENERAL OLSON: Yes, it could --
- 8 QUESTION: About issues that we know
- 9 nothing whatever about, because we have only lawyers
- 10 before us. We have no witnesses. We have no
- 11 cross-examination, we have no investigative staff.
- 12 And we should be the ones, Justice Breyer suggests,
- 13 to draw up this reticulated system to preserve our
- 14 military from intervention by the courts.
- 15 GENERAL OLSON: Well, we would agree with
- 16 that and we would emphasize the point that stepping
- 17 across that line would be impossible to go back from
- 18 with respect to prisoners in the battlefield. In
- 19 fact, the reply brief refers to the front lines in
- 20 Iraq, in a battle station in Iraq. We are talking
- 21 here about battlefield decisions and --
- 22 QUESTION: The battlefield, I might, since
- 23 -- all I mean by working out the substantive rights
- 24 is what Justice Harlan meant and what Justice Kennedy
- 25 meant in adopting Justice Harlan's view in Verdugo.

- 1 And that really derives from the insular cases, and I
- 2 don't think it's something that requires witnesses
- 3 and reticulated whatever they are, tax cuts.
- 4 (Laughter.)
- 5 GENERAL OLSON: Well, to the extent that
- 6 the Court would say, the executive, you must give a
- 7 military process because the Petitioners in this
- 8 case, first of all, demanded in their petition and
- 9 they would have a right to raise these issues to the
- 10 extent they have not backed off in this case, but
- 11 they demanded in their petition, their release,
- 12 unmonitored communications with counsel, cessation of
- 13 interrogations, evidentiary hearings.
- 14 QUESTION: Wasn't it --
- 15 QUESTION: Our, our doctrine would have to
- 16 be applied in the first instance by 800 different
- 17 district judges, I take it.
- GENERAL OLSON: Well, there is no question
- 19 that that is exactly right. And to the extent that
- 20 what the Petitioners are seeking is to oversee the
- 21 circumstances -- this is the language in their brief,
- 22 to oversee the circumstances of detention. That is
- 23 going to vary from case to case.
- 24 QUESTION: General Olson, I have looked at
- 25 the reply brief, which is the last chance to say what

- 1 they mean. And they say we are not asking for any of
- 2 those things, and certainly not asking to have a
- 3 lawyer there while these people are being
- 4 interrogated.
- 5 They are saying, look, we are claiming
- 6 that our people are innocents. And for purposes of
- 7 this proceeding, we must assume that. And all we
- 8 want is some process to determine whether they are
- 9 indeed innocent, and it doesn't have to be a court
- 10 process.
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: But Justice Ginsburg, the
- 12 relief that I was articulating is what they asked for
- 13 in the first instance. If they have jurisdiction in
- 14 this Court, the next Petitioner doesn't have to say
- 15 well, I only want a process. And if they only
- 16 want -- now they are saying they only want an
- 17 executive branch process to review. As we
- 18 explained --
- 19 QUESTION: But to go back to the
- 20 jurisdiction, so I understand really what your
- 21 argument is. Would this be entirely different, as
- 22 far as their jurisdiction is concerned, if we were
- 23 talking about -- if the people were prisoners on
- 24 Ellis Island or in Puerto Rico?
- 25 GENERAL OLSON: Yes, we would. Because we

- 1 are talking about territorial sovereign jurisdiction
- 2 of the United States. What -- what exists in
- 3 Guantanamo is no different than existed in Lansberg
- 4 Prison and --
- 5 QUESTION: Why is that, why is that
- 6 crucial? I mean, it's not crucial, I take it, under
- 7 the respective jurisdiction clause of 2241. Is it
- 8 crucial under the Due Process Clause?
- 9 GENERAL OLSON: It is, it is the line that
- 10 this Court drew and repeatedly articulated --
- 11 QUESTION: But why is it a good line? I
- 12 mean, what is -- what is the justification?
- 13 GENERAL OLSON: Because it is a line that
- 14 is, is -- has the virtue of what Justice Breyer was
- 15 talking about, of having relative certainty. It is a
- line that's defined by State to State relationships.
- 17 QUESTION: Why does it have complete
- 18 jurisdiction? No one else has jurisdiction.
- 19 Complete jurisdiction of satisfactory lines.
- 20 GENERAL OLSON: Well, the complete
- 21 jurisdiction is a phrase in that lease, the lease
- 22 specifically says that ultimate sovereignty is
- 23 Cuba's. It specifically says that the United States
- 24 --
- 25 OUESTION: How many years have we been

- 1 operating in Guantanamo with Cuban law never
- 2 applying?
- 3 GENERAL OLSON: With respect -- the lease
- 4 restricts the ability of the United States to use
- 5 that property for only Naval or coaling purposes. It
- 6 specifically says it may not be used for any other
- 7 purpose.
- 8 QUESTION: General Olson, there is a whole
- 9 other issue in this case which you have not addressed
- 10 and I don't think your brief much addressed it.
- 11 There is also a claim of jurisdiction under Section
- 12 1331 in the Administrative Procedure Act. Will you
- 13 say at least a few words about what your response to
- 14 that is? I don't even see the APA cited in your
- 15 brief.
- 16 GENERAL OLSON: What is cited in the
- 17 brief, and we explain that the President is not an
- 18 agency under the APA, that the United States military
- 19 with respect to operations and military operations
- are specifically exempted by the APA.
- 21 QUESTION: That goes to the merits.
- GENERAL OLSON: And that the fundamental
- 23 nature of what the Petitioners are seeking here is
- 24 the review of the nature and status of their
- 25 detention, which sounds in -- and is examined by this

- 1 Court repeatedly under the doctrine of habeas corpus.
- 2 And that there is no foundation. In fact, I submit
- 3 that the way the briefs have been written, the
- 4 Petitioners don't even feel strongly about the APA
- 5 position.
- 6 What they are talking about, and why most
- 7 of their briefs explain, they are focusing on
- 8 fundamental habeas corpus as it existed throughout
- 9 the centuries. What is important to emphasize here
- 10 with respect to all of these questions, with respect
- 11 to, well, how much control would there be, how much
- 12 control would there be in Guantanamo versus a place
- in Afghanistan or another place --
- 14 QUESTION: No, I think Guantanamo, everyone
- 15
- 16 agrees, is an animal, there is no other like it. The
- 17 closest would be the Canal Zone, I suppose.
- 18 GENERAL OLSON: The Canal Zone was treated
- 19 differently by Congress. Congress created, applied,
- 20 under its responsibility with respect to territorial
- 21 and insular or unincorporated territory, applied laws
- 22 there, put a court there. So it's very different
- 23 than the Canal Zone.
- QUESTION: Why isn't this like, as I asked
- 25 Mr. Gibbons, a Federal enclave within a State?

- 1 GENERAL OLSON: Because it is -- because
- 2 it is a -- in the first place, the question of
- 3 sovereignty is a political decision. It would be
- 4 remarkable for the judiciary to start deciding where
- 5 the United States is sovereign and where the United
- 6 States has control --
- 7 QUESTION: The word is physical control,
- 8 power.
- 9 GENERAL OLSON: We have that, Justice
- 10 Ginsburg, in every place where we would put military
- 11 detainees, in a field of combat where there are
- 12 prisons in Afghanistan where we have complete control
- 13 with respect to the circumstances.
- 14 QUESTION: But those -- Afghanistan is not
- 15 a place where American law is, and for a century, has
- 16 customarily been applied to all aspects of life. We
- 17 even protect the Cuban iguana. We bring -- in
- 18 bringing people from Afghanistan or wherever they
- 19 were brought to Guantanamo, we are doing in
- 20 functional terms exactly what we would do if we
- 21 brought them to the District of Columbia, in a
- 22 functional sense, leaving aside the metaphysics of
- 23 ultimate sovereignty.
- 24 If the metaphysics of ultimate sovereignty
- 25 do not preclude us from doing what we have been doing

- 1 for the last 100 years, why is it a bar to the
- 2 exercise of judicial jurisdiction under the Habeas
- 3 Statute?
- 4 GENERAL OLSON: The Court actually heard a
- 5 case, Neely vs. Henkel, in 1901, which specifically
- 6 addressed that, and held that the United States did
- 7 not have sovereignty for the enforcement of its laws
- 8 in Guantanamo. And at that point --
- 9 QUESTION: We've been doing a pretty good
- 10 job of it since then, am I right?
- 11 GENERAL OLSON: With respect to a certain
- 12 area, a military base in Germany, a military base in
- 13 Afghanistan, the United States must have and does
- 14 exercise relatively complete control. Every argument
- 15 that's being made here today could be made by the two
- 16 million persons that were in custody at the end of
- 17 World War II, and judges would have to decide the
- 18 circumstances of their detention, whether there had
- 19 been adequate military process, what control existed
- 20 over the territory in which they were being kept.
- 21 What this is --
- 22 QUESTION: Are you saying that there is no
- 23 statutory regime that applies to Guantanamo which is
- 24 different from the statutory or legal regime that
- 25 applied to occupied territories after World War II or

- 1 indeed that applies to territory under the control of
- 2 the American military in Afghanistan or Iraq?
- GENERAL OLSON: There is a great deal of
- 4 differences in connection with every area over which
- 5 the United States has some degree of control. The
- 6 degree of control that it has here is limited to
- 7 specific purposes in -- with respect to the
- 8 sovereignty of Cuba.
- 9 QUESTION: Thank you, General Olson. The
- 10 case is submitted.
- 11 (Whereupon, at 11:02 a.m., the case in the
- 12 above-entitled matter was submitted.)
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