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# Trump Orders Use of Guantanamo Bay to House Migrants

President says facility would accommodate up to 30,000 people

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PRESIDENT TRUMP ORDERED THE PENTAGON AND DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY TO PREPARE A MIGRANT FACILITY AT GUANTANAMO BAY. PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

WASHINGTON—President Trump on Wednesday ordered the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security to construct a facility for holding as many as 30,000 migrants at Guantanamo Bay.

The U.S. Navy base in Cuba, the site of a prison for more than two decades for terror suspects, would be used to “contain the worst criminal illegal aliens threatening the American people,” Trump said. He didn’t offer further details.

“Some of them are so bad we don’t even trust the countries to hold them, because we don’t want them coming back,” Trump said of the migrants while signing a bill passed in response to a murder by a migrant who was in the U.S. illegally. “So we’re going to send them out to Guantanamo.”

The move underscored the White House’s increasing reliance on military facilities and personnel in carrying out its immigration crackdown. Trump has also ordered active-duty troops to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist civilian authorities and is using Air Force transport planes to quickly scale up deportation flights to other countries.

Opening 30,000 additional detention beds would almost double U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s capacity to hold migrants ahead of their deportations. Congress has allotted funding for detaining as many as 41,000 immigrants at a time, a historically high number that Trump’s team considers inadequate as it tries to carry out the largest

mass deportation in U.S. history.

Guantanamo Bay has been used in the past as a migrant detention center, including in the 1980s and 1990s when thousands of Haitians were sent there, sometimes even after winning asylum cases. The Biden administration also used the facility to house a small number of migrants so they could be resettled to third countries.

Pentagon officials said they were unaware of the plan, which White House officials said was completed on Wednesday.

The administration will expand an existing migrant detention center at the base, building out the temporary housing and other facilities for thousands more people, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and White House border czar Tom Homan told reporters after Trump's announcement. The administration will ask Congress to fund the expansion as part of the tax and spending bill Republicans are trying to assemble.

Homan said the facility would be run by ICE. "Every facility, including Gitmo, will have the highest detention standards," he said.

Holding migrants on Guantanamo Bay would mean detainees wouldn't have ready access to lawyers, said Leon Fresco, an immigration attorney who served as a top immigration official in the Obama administration.

"The Trump administration may find the symbolism of sending migrants to Guantanamo darkly appealing; its practical result would be more injustice, waste, and self-inflicted loss of credibility," said Sue Hendrickson, president of the advocacy group Human Rights First.

The Cuban base is better known for its prison built to hold suspected terrorists. There are currently 15 prisoners, ranging in age from 45 to 63, being held at Guantanamo Bay. Opened just after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the prison at its peak held nearly 800 individuals.

Hundreds of U.S. troops are currently guarding the detainees at the base. No Americans are held at Guantanamo Bay and none of the prisoners now held there can be transferred to the U.S., under laws passed by Congress.

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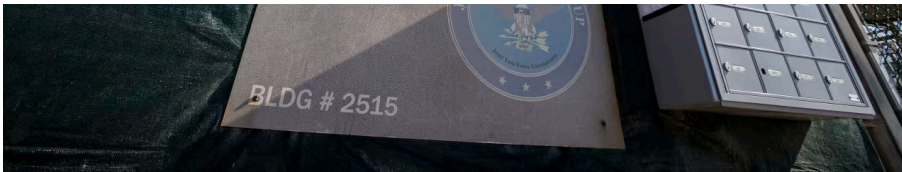
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It wasn't clear how long Trump plans to hold migrants at Guantanamo. Under existing law, the government isn't allowed to detain migrants indefinitely on immigration offenses if it has no hope of deporting them. Venezuelans have fast become one of the largest populations of immigrants in the country illegally, but Caracas has refused to take back deportees.

The Trump administration said Tuesday that it would detain migrants at Buckley Space Force Base in Aurora, Colo., but paused that plan Wednesday. A DHS spokeswoman, whose agency is responsible for running detention centers on military bases, wouldn't give a reason.

The past two Democratic presidents, Barack Obama and Joe Biden, promised to close the detention facility but failed to do so. Trump in his first term closed an office that worked to release Guantanamo detainees.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday that Guantanamo would be "a temporary transit" point to move tens of thousands "illegals out of our country where they do not belong, back to the country where they came."

Hegseth, who deployed to Guantanamo as part of a guard unit, suggested in a Fox News interview that the base golf course could be converted to hold another 6,000 migrants.

Alexander Ward and Alex Leary contributed to this article.

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