

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. releases 2 more detainees from Guantanamo Bay

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USPA News - Two Sudanese detainees were released Wednesday from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba, raising the number of inmates released so far this month to six, the Pentagon confirmed on Thursday after the men arrived home in their African country. The two men, identified as Noor Uthman Muhammed and Ibrahim Othman Ibrahim Idris, arrived in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum aboard a U.S. military plane on Thursday morning.

They thanked their government for efforts to secure their release, according to comments published by Sudan's state-run news agency. Muhammed pleaded guilty in a military commission court in February 2011 to providing material support to terrorism and conspiring to provide material support to terrorism. He was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment, but the court suspended all but 34 months of his sentence in exchange for his guilty plea and promise to cooperate with prosecutors. Prosecutors accused Muhammed of having been a principal trainer and key figure at the notable Khalden training camp in Afghanistan. Among the individuals who are believed to have attended the camp are participants of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, a participant in the bombing of U.S. embassies in Africa, and individuals who participated in the attacks of September 11, 2001. But Muhammed's defense lawyer, Maj. Amy Fitzgibbons, previously condemned the connection made by prosecutors between Muhammed and those involved in the attacks of September 11, 2001. She said hundreds of people had gone through the training camp and added that Muhammed was there to "deepen his faith and get small arms training." In a news report published in the Miami Herald in September 2010, Fitzgibbons was cited as saying that Muhammed's time at the Khalden training camp was "similar" to Americans going with a group of friends "to a rifle range." Muhammed completed the unsuspended portion of his sentence on December 3. Idris, who is mentally ill and spent much of his 11 years at Guantanamo Bay in psychiatric treatment, was ordered released by a federal judge in October. The man had already been approved for release by six departments and agencies after the interagency Guantanamo Review Task Force conducted a review of his case, as ordered by Obama in January 2009 with the aim of eventually closing the facility. The review examined a number of factors, including security issues. "The United States coordinated with the Government of Sudan regarding appropriate security measures and to ensure that these transfers are consistent with our humane treatment policy," the Pentagon said in a press statement on Thursday. It follows four other transfers earlier this month, compared to eight releases from Guantanamo Bay for the entire year. The detention facility was opened in 2002 in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks and remains open despite Obama ordering its closure within 12 months on January 22, 2009. And while 158 people remain imprisoned nearly five years later, only a handful of them are facing charges. Obama pledged earlier this year to renew his efforts to close to detention facility, saying Guantanamo Bay is not necessary to keep Americans safe. "The idea that we would still maintain forever a group of individuals who have not been tried, that is contrary to who we are, it is contrary to our interests, and it needs to stop," he said on April 30. "Congress determined that they would not let us close it," he added at the time, pointing to congressional restrictions on the transfer of prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay as an obstacle to close the prison. Observers, however, note that Obama himself has repeatedly signed such restrictions into law. At least 15 detainees also remain on a hunger strike, down from 106 inmates earlier this year, resulting in the military force-feeding all of them, which is contrary to international standards. The Pentagon stopped providing daily updates on the hunger strike earlier this month, saying the figures serve no operational purpose and "detract from the more important issues."

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