

# Woes of Camp X-ray detainees

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BRIGHT orange suits, large black goggles, turquoise surgical masks, bizarre hand gloves, knit caps and earmuffs — these are all part of the attire the Americans have selected for their Al Qaeda and Taliban detainees at Camp X-ray in Guantanamo Bay.

All these accessories are meant to mask the inmates' senses of sight, touch, smell and hearing. The photographs depicting their plight were released by the US authorities and got extensive coverage in the world media. With shaved heads, manacled arms, and shackled ankles, they were seen kneeling down in open-air cells behind three fences and coils of razor wire.

The hastily built 8x8 cells with chain-link fence walls on a concrete slab topped by a corrugated roof could be called cages. These cages are no different from the ones that are used to keep wild animals. As per other details, although it is winter in the Caribbean, the prisoners have been provided with rubber mats and thin blankets. They use open-air latrines and say their prayers on one of the two towels, which have been provided to each of them.

In order to accommodate more and more prisoners in the base, the American authorities had planned to house two prisoners in a cell. This would have been disastrous for the prisoners since the individual capacity of these cells is hardly sufficient to accommodate even one person. All this is happening in the name of a war of the civilized against the uncivilized.

Transporting prisoners in chains and keeping them in cages have struck people from all parts of the world as a denial of civilized values. It is interesting to note that the criticism of such a behaviour has not come from the Muslim states, but from citizens and politicians in the western countries, including the United States.

prisoners of war, preferring the term 'Unlawful combatants' for them. One, however, fails to understand that when the whole episode was called 'The American War', 'War on Terrorism', and 'War on Afghanistan', why those apprehended during the same may not be called 'Prisoners of War?'

Moreover, it is not up to the Americans to determine whether the detainees are entitled to POW status or not. The Geneva Conventions clearly spell out that the status, if disputed, has to be determined by a 'competent tribunal'.

There seems to be a lot of thinking involved on the part of the Americans in the selection of a detention site outside the American borders. By keeping the detainees beyond the reach of a legal regime, they have been denied access to the US judicial system. Likewise by keeping them out of sight, the Americans intend to hide them from watchful eyes of the world media.

Now the Americans are free to treat the prisoners in a way they deem most appropriate. They themselves have released the pictures but then there is a point in that too. A clear cut message has been put across the whole world that anyone who acts or intends to act against American interests may have to face the worst possible mental and physical punishment?

The Americans fail to appreciate a subtle point that the extremist groups of al-Qaeda type are born from and thrive on a sense of injustice. The US has not released the names of the detainees, nor has given their nationalities but they are believed to include mainly the nationals of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and other Arab countries. By meting out inhuman treatment to them, are the Americans not creating a sense of extreme hatred among the fanatics in the Arab world?

If this is a war about values why should we not apply to al-Qaeda and the Taliban the principles of fairness and justice applicable in the civilized

Criticism had grown to such an extent that the US authorities have lately suspended transferring of the prisoners to Camp X-ray. The European Union, Amnesty International and International Conference of Red Cross have all demanded that the detainees be given prisoner of war status and then be treated according to the Geneva Conventions.

The Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1864 and updated four times since, provide for humane treatment of war prisoners.

The conventions spell out guidelines for what constitutes a prisoner of war and the rights to which he or she is entitled. The Pentagon has, however, declined to call the detainees

apprehended in the civilized world? We must realize that the treatment, which is being meted out to the Camp X-ray prisoners is undermining any claim that our so-called civilized world has to moral superiority. It is true that the Americans have suspended further transportation of the prisoners but attention should also be given to those unfortunates, which have already been transferred to Guantanamo Bay.

The prisoners' issue should be seen in a wider context. It is doing more harm than good to the original cause of defeating terrorism. The war on terrorism is going to be a protracted one and has many facets. In such a war, winning minds is as important as securing victories on the battlefield.