

## Plan to close Gitmo now on indefinite hold

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As one of his very first acts in the White House, President Obama signed an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay prison for terror suspects within a year.

The one-year mark arrived Friday -- and it will likely be a year or more before Obama makes good on his promise.

He has not offered a new deadline.

Unless Obama decides to change course, to close Gitmo the president must still find support in Congress to pay for what's being dubbed "Gitmo North" -- Illinois' Thomson Correctional Center -- a super-secure prison near Downstate Sterling for some of the detainees he wants to continue holding. Gov. Quinn says that Illinois should receive "at least" \$145 million from the federal government for the Thomson prison.

Obama must also get additional money, likely hundreds of millions of dollars, to provide extra security to put some suspects on trial in federal courts.

Len Goodman, a Chicago lawyer who last week returned from a visit to Guantanamo, said the delays have only embittered his client Shawali Khan, an Afghan detainee who was captured in 2002 and has long claimed he is innocent.

"His level of frustration is greater than I've ever seen it," said Goodman. "Everyone had high hopes for Obama, but sadly I think nothing has changed from Bush to Obama, except the conditions are better inside for the detainees. But all in all, it's just promises made and promises not kept."

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs says he doesn't know when the facility will close. But he said the president "pledged to close Guantanamo Bay and he'll do that."

The high-security military prison, the administration argues, actually weakens national security because it serves as a recruiting tool for terrorists and undermines the United States' moral authority in combating such killers. Critics of the closure plan, principally Republicans, say bringing detainees to the U.S. to face trial or shipping them overseas only increases the risk of attacks.

Since Obama took office a year ago, more than 40 detainees have been removed from the

naval base in Cuba -- sent off to their homelands or to other countries. If the administration cannot quicken that pace, it would take until a hypothetical second Obama term to actually empty the site.

Last week, a protest over the delay led to 42 arrests. Members of the group Witness Against Torture gathered at the steps of the Capitol, where protesters dressed in jumpsuits held banners with such phrasing as "Broken Promises" or "Broken Laws" or "Broken Lives."

But the recent Christmas bombing attempt of a Detroit-bound airliner only gave further fuel to those urging the president to apply the brakes to the prison closure.

The young Nigerian accused in that attempt allegedly told investigators he was trained by al-Qaida operatives in Yemen.

That detail has huge implications for closing Guantanamo, where about 90 -- or nearly half -- of the remaining detainees are Yemenis, many with no clear place to go even if senior administration officials decide they can be released.

U.S. officials are increasingly worried that the group that claimed responsibility for the bombing attempt, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, is so firmly entrenched in parts of that country that sending detainees back to Yemen could provide fresh troops to the terrorists.

The Obama administration, which sent a group of Yemenis home from Guantanamo just days before the failed airliner bombing, has halted any further transfers to Yemen for the near future.