

Prisoners shipped to Saudi halfway-houses

by UPI

GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba -- More than 100 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, were sent to Saudi Arabia under a program that requires counseling, vocational training and religious classes. "Our goal is to transfer out as many individuals from Guantanamo Bay as we can," Sandra Hodgkinson, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for detainee affairs, told The Washington Post. "... We believe this is a very, very good program." The United States once held 138 Saudis at Guantanamo and about 20 remain. Ten are scheduled for repatriation and another 10 for trial by military commissions, the Post said. The Saudi prisoner transfer has reduced the Guantanamo prison population to its lowest point since April 2002. There are about 300 detainees at the facility, down from 680, the Post said. About half the prisoners are either Yemenis or Afghans. Saudi officials told the Post that no one who's completed their halfway-house-like program has posed a threat. The program focuses on connecting former prisoners with family, community and stability to break the terrorist mindset, the Post said. Critics, however, said they are concerned extremists may hit the streets again under such arrangements. "If they are allowed to re-engage in jihad, then I think it's criminal," terrorism analyst Steven Emerson told the Post. "I don't always believe the Saudis are doing what they say they are doing. Could it work? Technically, it could work. Would I trust them to become babysitters? Not on my life."

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