

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COURT URGED TO UPHOLD DETENTION OF TALIBAN FIGHTERS AT GUANTANAMO BAY

(Rasul v. Bush and Al Odah v. United States)

The Washington Legal Foundation (WLF) today urged the U.S. Supreme Court to reject a challenge to the U.S. military's decision to detain captured Taliban and al Qaeda fighters at the Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The detained fighters have filed petitions for writs of habeas corpus, alleging that their detention without trial violates their rights under the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause as well as their rights under international law. In a brief filed in the two consolidated cases, *Rasul v. Bush* and *Al Odah v. United States*, WLF argued that the federal courts lack jurisdiction to hear habeas corpus claims raised by nonresident aliens who are not being held on U.S. territory. WLF noted that while Guantanamo Bay is under the control of U.S. military forces, it has always been understood by all parties that the naval base is part of Cuba.

"The overseas conduct of U.S. military forces in their dealings with aliens are simply not subject to second-guessing by the federal courts," said WLF Chief Counsel Richard Samp after filing WLF's brief. "Those who believe they are being unjustly detained are free to raise their claims through appropriate Executive Branch and diplomatic channels; but allowing courts to become a part of the process, thereby allowing our enemies to use our courts to challenge military decisions, is one of the surest ways to hamper our military effectiveness," Samp said.

The habeas corpus petitions were filed by 12 Kuwaitis, two Australians, and two British citizens being held at Guantanamo Bay after their capture in Afghanistan. In July 2002, a federal district court dismissed the petitions, finding that the federal courts lack jurisdiction to hear these cases. The petitioners appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, which affirmed the dismissal in an opinion issued in 2003. The Supreme Court last fall agreed to review the case. WLF also filed a brief when the case was in the appeals court.

WLF argued that dismissal is required by *Johnson v. Eisentrager*, a 1950 case in which the Supreme Court refused to allow federal courts to exercise jurisdiction over habeas corpus petitions filed by German soldiers convicted of war crimes and being held in a military prison controlled by American forces in Germany. The petitioners deny that they were Taliban or al Qaeda fighters; they insist that they were captured in Afghanistan while on humanitarian missions. WLF argued that *Eisentrager* applies here regardless that the petitioners deny their guilt; WLF argued that the key principle underlying *Eisentrager* is that the federal courts are not open to the claims of nonresident aliens being held overseas by the U.S. military, regardless whether the petitioners admit that they are enemy soldiers.

WLF also urged the court to reject the petitioners' claim that evolving principles of international law have rendered *Eisentrager* obsolete. WLF labeled as "particularly pernicious" the efforts of activists lawyers to enforce international law in federal courts. WLF argued that federal courts are supposed to apply federal/ American law, not international law. WLF said that Congress is free to make international law part of our federal law by passing laws to that effect, but insisted that Congress has never done so. WLF argued that while the Senate has ratified several human rights treaties in recent years, the petitioners are not permitted to sue to enforce those rights because Congress at the time of ratification made absolutely clear that the treaties did not give rise to any rights enforceable in court.

The Washington Legal Foundation is a law and public policy center with supporters in all 50 states. It devotes a considerable portion of its resources to promoting America's national security. WLF filed its brief on behalf of itself, the Allied Educational Foundation, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

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For further information, contact WLF Chief Counsel Richard Samp, (202) 588-0302. A copy of WLF's brief is posted on its website, www.wlf.org.