

Opinion & Analysis

Cowen wrong to offer haven for jihadists

TONY ALLWRIGHT

OPINION

REMEMBER THOSE second World War stories and movies where Germans ran prisoner-of-war camps, usually called something like Stalag, where American and British servicemen were interned? The lads were always trying to escape, but usually failed.

You remember the bit where the Germans' allies, the Italians and Japanese, would denounce the Nazis for keeping these men illegally locked up, their human rights violated, with no mention of a trial? Especially the bit where the Germans relented a bit, held a few tribunals and let out some of the less vociferous POWs? These fellows would of course re-enlist and return to fight the Germans.

They were such inspiring stories. What's that? You don't remember this kind of plotline?

Well, how about the more recent version, involving the redoubtable 007, sorry 008.

Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul was an armed Taliban fighter captured during George Bush's 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. He was designated an unlawful combatant, and eventually found himself in Guantánamo Bay prison as Detainee 008.

Over the following years, America's "allies" (eg France) and "friends" (eg Ireland) urged it to close Guantánamo, to put prisoners such as 008 on trial, and in effect to free the vast majority because juries were never likely to find many guilty "beyond reasonable doubt".

The occasional prisoner, judged no longer a threat, did leak out. One was 008, after he promised to go pursue a peaceful life. In 2007, he was released and flown to Kabul where he was reinterned. A year ago he was set free and, to no one's great surprise, rejoined the Taliban. He rapidly rose to become operations chief in Helmand province and the architect of a new offensive against British troops, exemplified by a spike in roadside bombings that have killed more than 40 brave Tommies.

008 is just one of 60 Guantánamo alumni to have resurfaced on the battlefield.

Now, Barack Obama is in the Oval Office. He announced that Guantánamo would close in a

year (yeah, right!), and asked whether his friends in Europe and elsewhere would take the tribal wild men off his hands. Very few volunteered, though there's lots of talk of "considering" it.

Jacques Barrot, vice-president of the European Commission, has declared that without "total transparency" of information about the inmates, the EU "can't assume that responsibility".

Not to be put off by tales of freed inmates returning to terrorism, the moment arrived for our Taoiseach to step forward in the exuberance of Saint Patrick's Day in Washington. Brian Cowen, having first granted an audience to Big O, headed off to CNN for a big announcement.

Doubtless thinking it would curry Big O's favour, he chose America and journalist Wolf Blitzer as the medium to tell the world, and all at home, that Ireland would be delighted to take Guantánamo inmates (as *The Irish Times* reported last Friday). After all, since the Belfast Agreement, the Irish have had a lack of terrorist outrages. This needs to be rectified, despite the efforts of IRA dissidents to do exactly that by murdering the two soldiers and policeman.

As far as I can ascertain, neither the Cabinet nor Dáil have publicly decided Guantánamo detainees will be accepted – or even been so informed. Thus Biffo's choice of foreign shores to announce such a controversial fait accompli, without any public debate, constitutes a massive contempt.

And no, the Nazis did not free their prisoners to go back to battle. They kept them locked up until the war was over (if they didn't kill them). The Americans should do likewise until the war against Islamic jihad is over and the jihadists have been crushed.

Brian Cowen has no business volunteering that the Irish public should provide a safe haven for Guantánamo prisoners freed by Big O for the latter's own political reasons. If the president does not want them in America, he should not try to inflict them on others.

Erik Eblana's letter yesterday makes a similar point. The jihad is not over, and won't be for many more years.

Tony Allwright is an engineering and industrial safety consultant, and blogs on international and national issues.
www.tallwrite.com/blog.htm