

By Charlie Savage

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WASHINGTON – The United States Southern Command has requested \$49 million to build a new prison building at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for “special” detainees on top of other renovations it says are necessary since Congress has decided to keep it open indefinitely. That brings the potential taxpayer bill for upgrading the deteriorating facilities to an estimated \$195.7 million, the military said on Thursday.

That overall price tag is significantly higher than the estimate of \$150 million to \$170 million that General John F. Kelly, the Southcom commander, gave in Congressional testimony on Wednesday. The special detainee facility was not included on the list of requested construction projects released by Southcom on Wednesday when reporters asked for details.

The project appears to be a proposed replacement for Camp 7, where so-called high-value detainees who were formerly held by the Central Intelligence Agency – like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-described architect of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 – are housed. While the existence of Camp 7 is widely known, the military generally refuses to discuss it.

General Kelly had referred to the special facility in passing in his testimony. After describing projects he said were necessary, he added: “There’s other projects that I couldn’t talk about here in the open but do have to do with replacing one of the camp facilities where some of the detainees are — special detainees are housed. We could get into that offline if you want.”

Lt. Cmdr. Ron Flanders of the Navy, a Southcom spokesman, said the first version of the list for reporters did not include the special detainee facility because it was not clear whether that proposal was public information. But after the general mentioned it, he decided to put out the

complete list. The total estimated cost of the projects has also fluctuated, Commander Flanders said.

Other items on the list include \$99 million for two barracks facilities; \$12 million for a new mess hall; and replacing legal, medical and communications facilities that are scattered around the base with new ones at the main detention camps, reducing the need for guards to transport prisoners.

The request comes amid sensitive budget cutbacks. In his testimony, General Kelly acknowledged that the projects added up to a “considerable bill,” in part because “everything that’s built down there is at least twice as expensive.” But he said the renovations were necessary if the prison was to remain open for the indefinite future.