

'Osama will never face US trial, be caught alive'

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Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden will never face trial in the United States because he will not be captured alive, Attorney General Eric Holder told lawmakers on Tuesday.

During a heated exchange with Republican congressmen, Holder predicted that "we will be reading Miranda rights to the corpse of Osama bin Laden" rather than to the US public enemy number one in captivity.

"Let's deal with reality," the attorney general added. Bin Laden "will never appear in an American courtroom."

Holder reacted angrily to Republican critics who say the attorney general's proposal to try terror suspects in US federal civilian courts would put Americans at risk.

"They have the same rights that a Charles Manson would have, any other kind of mass murderer," he told a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing.

"The notion that a defendant in an Article III (civilian) court is somehow being treated in an inappropriate, special way - that he's being coddled, is anything but the truth... These defendants charged with murder are treated just like any other murder defendant would be."

'Profound' Republic-Democrat differences

Republican Representative John Culberson said Holder's analogy to Manson, a convicted killer, showed President Barack Obama's administration has a profound disconnect with an American public that wants the terror suspects to be tried as war criminals and not as criminal defendants.

"My constituents and I just have a deep-seeded and profound philosophical difference with the Obama administration, the Department of Justice, the leadership of this Congress," the Texas Republican said.

"This is war, and in time of war, we as a nation have never given constitutional rights to foreign nationals, enemy soldiers, certainly captured overseas."

The hearing came as the Obama administration's plans to try the self-proclaimed mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and his alleged co-conspirators on trial in New York have been put on hold.

Mounting opposition from local politicians, including New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, has led the White House to reconsider, and it is now looking at trying the men in a military tribunal.

Holder said a decision was weeks and not months away.

Democratic Representative Chaka Fattah, meanwhile, complained that politicians were too "cowardly" to hold a civilian trial in New York, just steps away from where the World Trade Center once stood.

"It doesn't befit a great nation to hesitate or equivocate on the question of following our own laws and the impulse to justice," he said.

- AFP

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