

At about 155 pounds (70 kilograms), the Syrian prisoner is gaunt for a man over 6 feet (180 centimeters) tall. He is pale and weak, so lethargic at times that one of his lawyers said he had to lie on the floor when he met with her one day this summer at the prison on the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The hunger strike that 43-year-old Abu Wa'el Dhiab started 18 months ago to protest his indefinite confinement without charge was supposed to be over by now. He was told in the spring he would be resettled in Uruguay, along with five other Guantanamo prisoners. But as the months have dragged on and the transfer put on hold, his standoff with military officials has only deteriorated, at times turning violent.

"Everyone who has seen him recently is alarmed," said Alka Pradhan, one of his attorneys. The prisoner has been engaged in a tense struggle with guards in recent months, according to documents filed in federal court in Washington, where Dhiab, who has been fed through a nasal tube to prevent starvation, is challenging some of the tactics used by the military to deal with prisoners on hunger strike.

In July, the Pentagon gave Congress a legally required 30-day notice that it intended to transfer Dhiab and five other Guantanamo prisoners - three other Syrians, a Tunisian and a Palestinian - to Uruguay, where President Jose Mujica, a leftist former political prisoner, offered to accept them as a humanitarian gesture. The other prisoners have kept a much lower profile at Guantanamo than Dhiab so little is known about them. But they are among the several dozen prisoners who cannot return to their homelands because they would face persecution or because their own countries are considered unstable.

The transfer to Uruguay, where one poll shows it is opposed by a majority, however, is not imminent. Presidential spokesman Diego Canepa announced last week that aspects of the transfer were still being finalized and that it would be unlikely within the next two to three months. That would put it past Uruguay's Oct. 26 presidential and legislative elections, and perhaps even a possible Nov. 30 runoff.

The U.S. government says the transfer of Dhiab and others is still going to happen. "We are very appreciative of Uruguay's decision to resettle these individuals," said Ian Moss, adviser to the Special Envoy for Guantanamo Closure. "It truly is a significant humanitarian gesture." Dhiab was captured in Pakistan in April 2002 and turned over to U.S. authorities, who detained him at Guantanamo along with other men suspected of ties to al-Qaida or the Taliban. His lawyers say Dhiab was a honey salesman in his native Syria and that he was in Pakistan to get medical treatment. In any case, he was never charged with a crime and in 2009 deemed to pose no threat and cleared for release. The U.S. cannot send him back to war-torn Syria so officials have been trying to find a third country to accept him.

He has a wife and two children who fled their country and now live in Turkey.

His circumstances are shared by other men at Guantanamo. Out of the remaining 149 prisoners, more than 70 have been cleared for release.

In 2013, Dhiab joined a mass hunger strike to protest the stalled transfers and conditions inside the prison. Pradhan, an attorney with human rights group Reprieve, says he has only eaten parts of a meal or a nutritional supplement to avoid the "forcible cell extraction," to which he has been subjected 48 times so far this year.

Since April, he has physically assaulted troops three times and twice used vomit and feces to attack them, according to an affidavit from the commander of the guard force, Army Col. David

Heath. He also has threatened to kill guards and is considered to pose such a danger that officials opposed allowing him to be unshackled last week when he was examined by medical experts hired by his legal team.

"Given his recent behavior, the risk is unacceptable that Mr. Dhiab would take advantage of the opportunity presented by being completely unrestrained ... to further commit harmful acts that endanger the guards, the medical consultants or himself," Heath said in the Aug. 26 affidavit. Pradhan expects his hunger strike will continue. "He is so desperate to see his family and see his kids. He really doesn't want to die," she said. "But you can understand him not wanting to end his hunger strike until he's actually on a plane."--AP