

Young Guantánamo detainee details abuse

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In an affidavit released last week, a Canadian-born detainee held in the US military-run prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, has detailed coercion, torture and other crimes committed by his American captors over the past six years.

The detainee, Omar Khadr, now 21 years old, has been held by the US for more than a quarter of his life, on inconsistent allegations and forced confessions, and in the most heinous conditions. He was only charged in 2007—with murder, attempted murder, conspiracy, spying, and providing material support for terrorism—after being held for five years.

In his statement, Khadr said US interrogators threatened him with rape, tortured him, and forced him to swear to false statements. The affidavit was drawn up in February and released March 18—albeit in heavily redacted form—after Canada’s Supreme Court ruled that Khadr’s lawyers could present evidence before the court that his detention violated international law.

Beginning with his nearly fatal wounding and capture after a July 27, 2002 firefight, when he was only 15 years old, Khadr has been subjected to extreme physical and psychological abuse. The boy was flown to a tent hospital at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, along with US Sergeant Chris Speer, whom Khadr is charged with killing with a grenade.

Interrogations began there almost immediately: “I was unconscious for about one week after being captured.... During the day I was guarded by a young blond soldier who ... had paper and took notes.” Two interrogations took place within three days’ time after he regained consciousness.

This section of the affidavit is heavily blacked out; nevertheless, the substance of the statement is clear. “Due to my injuries, this caused me great pain.... I was unable to even stand at this time, so I was not a threat,” he stated. “I could tell that this treatment was for punishment and to make me answer questions and give

them the answers they wanted.”

Another soldier involved in the interrogations “would often [redacted]. He would tell nurses not to [redacted] since he said that I had killed an American soldier. He would also [redacted] me quite often. There were no doctors or nurses present when I was interrogated. During the interrogations, the pain was taking my thoughts away.”

Affidavits issued by other detainees have stated that Khadr had been denied types of surgery and pain medication.

After two weeks at the hospital, Khadr was transferred to the horrid Bagram prison, where he was “immediately taken to an interrogation room.” One of his interrogators “would often [redacted] if I did not give him the answers he wanted.” “Interrogators threatened to have me raped, or sent to other countries like Egypt, Syria, Jordan or Israel to be raped,” he said.

During one particularly abusive interrogation, Khadr stated, “the more I answered his questions and the more I gave him the answers he wanted, the less [redacted] on me. I figured out right away that I would simply tell them whatever I thought they wanted to hear in order to keep them from causing me [redacted].”

Absurdly, US officials have justified the censorship by citing security and strategic secrets. A March 18 report by Canwest News Service said censors were concerned that “terrorists could discover—and presumably prepare to resist—specific interrogation techniques.”

There is little doubt that Khadr, like other inmates, was tortured at length in the makeshift prison camp at Bagram and at Guantánamo. The redactions are merely crude attempts to obscure further evidence of torture and war crimes that are committed routinely by soldiers, with the encouragement and approval of military brass and the Bush administration.

During his three-month imprisonment at Bagram,

Khadr estimated he was interrogated 42 times. For weeks he was brought in on a stretcher. He said soldiers routinely videotaped dressing changes for his wounds. Some statements refer to his being hooded, sexually humiliated, being threatened with attack dogs, and the painful handling of his still open bullet and shrapnel wounds. All of these abuses were well established at Bagram, Abu Ghraib, and elsewhere.

One of Khadr's interrogators, Sergeant Joshua Claus, was one of 15 US military personnel charged in connection with the murder of two men at Bagram five months after Khadr's arrival. Claus, brought before military court on the most minor charges—assault and “maltreatment of a detainee”—pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a mere five months in jail.

Before being transferred to Guantánamo, Khadr said detainees were denied any food or water for two nights and a day “so that we would not have to use the bathroom on the plane.” Upon their arrival, a military official announced, “Welcome to Israel.” Then, “They half-dragged, half-carried us so quickly off the plane that everyone had cuts on their ankles from the shackles,” Khadr stated. “They would smack you with a stick if you made any wrong moves.”

At Guantánamo, Khadr said, “I was not provided with any educational opportunities, no psychological or psychiatric attention, and was routinely interrogated.” He was also subjected to prolonged periods of isolation, sensory deprivation, stress positions, temperature exposure, and humiliation.

The affidavit also highlights the cowardice and complicity of the Canadian ruling establishment in the “war on terror.” In 2003, Khadr stated that a Canadian delegation paid a visit to Guantánamo, and that he tried to explain to them that he had been threatened and abused into false statements. “I showed them my injuries and told them that what I had told the Americans was not right and not true,” he said. “I said that I told the Americans whatever they wanted me to say because they would torture me. The Canadians called me a liar and I began to sob. They screamed at me and told me that they could not do anything for me.”

Out of the hundreds of detainees that have been held at the military prison, Khadr is one of only four Guantánamo detainees that have been prosecuted under the 2006 Military Commission Act. Details in a

separate affidavit of his military lawyer, also released last week, suggest that the decision to charge Khadr at that time was motivated by political requirements of the Bush administration.

Khadr's lawyer, Lieutenant Commander Bill Kuebler, described a January 2007 discussion between former Guantánamo chief prosecutor Colonel Morris Davis and James Haynes, the general counsel at the Defense Department, in which Haynes told Davis that it was “necessary” to charge Australian detainee David Hicks.

According to the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, Davis objected because the military tribunal system was not yet functioning. The paper quoted a portion of Kuebler's statement: “Mr. Haynes also said that it would look strange if just Hicks were charged and therefore asked Colonel Davis if there were any other cases that could be brought at the same time.... Colonel Davis indicated that Mr. Khadr's case was one of two cases for which charges were sworn so that Hicks would not be the only detainee facing charges.”

Omar Khadr's affidavit is available in redacted form here.



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