

US-Canada “Terror Justice”: I Will Never Forget Omar Khadr

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I’ve known about Omar Khadr since he was a boy. He’s 26, like me. At age 15, U.S. military found Khadr face-down, unconscious, under a pile of rubble in Afghanistan. When Khadr regained consciousness a week later, he was at Bagram air force base, “[one of the worst places on Earth](#)”:

Damien Corsetti, who was known as “Monster” at Bagram, based on a tattoo on his chest, and also as “The King of Torture,” described himself as “a disabled veteran suffering post traumatic stress disorder as a result of his interrogation work in both Afghanistan and Iraq,” and explained how, on seeing Khadr on July 29, 2002, just two days after his capture, he was struck by how he was an injured “child” detained in “one of the worst places on Earth.” He added, “More than anything, he looked beat up. He was a 15 year-old kid with three holes in his body, a bunch of shrapnel in his face. That was what I remember. How horrible this 15 year-old child looked.”

The well-circulated photo of Khadr at age 14, only a little younger than he was at his capture, still haunts me, not unlike the photo of the bombing victim Ali Ismael Abbas which I used to wave at Iraq Occupation protests. It has been alleged that Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen, was a child soldier, used as a pawn first by terrorists and then punished by the U.S as if he were an adult with agency. Khadr is being released to Canada after a decade long battle by civil rights groups. He will [serve out his sentence in Canadian prison](#), with eligibility for parole in 2013.

The U.S. defence department issued a statement Saturday referring to the five war crimes to which Khadr pleaded guilty before a military commission: murder in violation of the law of war attempted murder in violation of the law of war conspiracy providing material support for terrorism spying

There are too many ironies and outrages to catalogue in this diary entry. Khadr was still injured when the torture began. The interrogators pried open his mind and used fear to transform him:

There is much more in the affidavit – casual cruelty, whereby guards made Khadr do hard manual labor when his wounds were not healed, and, significantly, threats “to have me raped, or sent to other countries like Egypt, Syria, Jordan or Israel to be raped.” He also noted, “I would always hear people screaming, both day and night,” and explained that other prisoners were

scared of his interrogator. "Most people would not talk about what had been done to them," he declared. "This made me afraid." Khadr also described what happened to him in Guantánamo, where, as I explained last week, he "arrived around the time that a regime of humiliation, isolation and abuse, including extreme temperature manipulation, forced nudity and sexual humiliation, had just been introduced, by reverse-engineering torture techniques, used in a military program designed to train US personnel to resist interrogation if captured, in an attempt to increase the meager flow of 'actionable intelligence' from the prison."

At various points in 2003, while the use of these techniques was still widespread, Khadr stated that he was short-shackled in painful positions and left for up to ten hours in a freezing cold cell, threatened with rape and with being transferred to another country where he could be raped, and, on one particular occasion, when he had been left short-shackled in a painful position until he urinated on himself:

Military police poured pine oil on the floor and on me, and then, with me lying on my stomach and my hands and feet cuffed together behind me, the military police dragged me back and forth through the mixture of urine and pine oil on the floor. Later, I was put back in my cell, without being allowed a shower or a change of clothes. I was not given a change of clothes for two days. They did this to me again a few weeks later.

Khadr was subjected to a 'Palestinian hanging':

The first to reveal a glimpse of the regime at Bagram was, ironically, a medic called as a witness by the prosecution. "Mr. M," as he was identified, who testified by video link from Boston, countered Khadr's claims that, while he was at Bagram, "five people in civilian clothes would come and change my bandages," and that they "treated me very roughly and videotaped me while they did it," stating that he alone changed his bandages twice a day, and that no rough treatment was involved. He did, however, note that, on one occasion, he found Khadr hooded and chained to a cage by his wrists with his arms "just above eye level," and that when he lifted the hood, Khadr was visibly upset. The medic added, as Carol Rosenberg described it in the Miami Herald, that "he didn't object to Khadr's treatment, because chaining was an approved form of punishment" at Bagram, "adding that he didn't know the reason for the punishment nor how long Khadr had been chained."

This rather nonchalant description of "chaining" may not have shocked the medic, especially as the chains were apparently "slack enough to allow Khadr's feet to touch the floor," but the only reason for this was because of the severity of his wounds, as Khadr explained in his affidavit, in which he also stated that he was chained up "several times." Otherwise, like numerous other prisoners, including Dilawar (the subject of "Taxi to the Dark Side") and Mullah Habibullah, the two prisoners who were killed at Bagram in December 2002, he would have been fully suspended by his wrists, in a torture technique more commonly known as the "strappado" technique or "Palestinian hanging."

Nevertheless, as Barry Coburn, Khadr's lead lawyer, explained, the medic's testimony provided "critically important validation" of statements in his client's affidavit, and another of his lawyers, Kobie Flowers, added, "Had this been an American soldier in North Korea, people would be outraged. Here we have a 15-year-old individual who was nearly killed with bullets in his back who was left up there to hang as punishment."

There's more in the long, sad, tale of Omar Khadr. But that gives you some idea. This is a

critical story and its embers have to remain hot. These are the stakes. The U.S. can choose to forget that it captured and tortured a boy for years, physically and psychologically. That it tortured many people, some Middle Eastern, some Western. I guarantee you that the price of forgetting will revisit us in the future. [Or we can remember the stain on our nation, like many other countries have to each day.](#)

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