

Key witness in Khadr case based testimony on work of anti-Muslim bigot

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A forensic psychiatrist serving as a key witness in the case against Omar Khadr, the former child soldier currently on trial for war crimes in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, has based his analysis of the young prisoner on the work of a psychologist who is openly bigoted toward Muslims.

Dr. Michael Welner is a well-known forensic psychiatrist who has participated in a number of high-profile criminal cases and has been a frequent commentator on the major news networks in the United States. He was hired by the prosecution in the Khadr case to interview Khadr and assess the potential dangers he may present to society in the future. Welner recently spent eight hours interviewing Khadr over a period of two days at the Guantánamo Bay prison camp.

In testimony before the military commission trying Khadr on Tuesday, Welner said the former child soldier, who was only 15 when he was captured by US Special Forces in Afghanistan in 2002, had been “marinated in the radical jihad” and described him as “Al Qaeda royalty” who had become a “rock star” at the Guantánamo Bay camp. Welner told the tribunal, “In my professional opinion, Omar Khadr is at a high risk of dangerousness as a radical jihadist.”

On Wednesday, Khadr’s defense attorneys had the opportunity to cross examine the psychiatrist. The attorneys were able to expose the fact that Welner had based his assessment of Khadr and radical Islam largely on the work of Danish psychologist Nicolai Sennels, an outspoken anti-Muslim bigot and the author of *Among Criminal Muslims*. During questioning, Welner admitted speaking with Sennels by phone before making his final assessment of Khadr. The psychiatrist also confessed to sharing some—but not all—of Sennels’ political views.

Sennels has spent several years studying Muslim inmates at Sønderbro youth prison in Copenhagen. The psychologist is notorious for his anti-Muslim bigotry, which most recently found expression in an open letter written to British Prime Minister David Cameron in which Sennels urged Cameron not to allow Turkey to join the European Union. In this letter, a filthy slander against Muslims and Turkish immigrants, Sennels described the Koran as “a criminal book that forces people to do criminal things” and says Turkish immigrants are “incapable” of integrating into “high tech” societies because widespread inbreeding in Turkey has made them unintelligent.

Sennels declares in the letter, “We Europeans are sick and tired of criminal foreigners being invited to our countries by the politicians that we—with our votes—trusted to take good care

of our countries!”

In another recent article, Sennels called for “a popular movement composed of average citizens standing up against the immature and psychologically unhealthy culture of Islam.”

That the star witness against Omar Khadr has based his work on the racist and chauvinistic foundations laid out by Sennels only underscores the thoroughly reactionary character of the proceedings. The most backward sentiments have found expression in the trial, which is itself a component of the illegal colonial-style wars being carried out in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Khadr, born in Canada and raised in Pakistan, was a child soldier, just 15 years old when he was wounded and captured by US Special Forces in Afghanistan in 2002. He was held for five years before he was charged with any crime. During that time, the teenager suffered torture at the hands of his captors at the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and the Guantánamo Bay prison camp. In a 2008 affidavit, Khadr testified to being threatened with rape by his interrogators.

Khadr has been detained in direct violation of international law, which forbids belligerent countries from detaining minors and stipulates that child soldiers be treated as victims rather than combatants. Khadr is the first person to face a military war crimes tribunal for acts committed as a juvenile since the Second World War. His acceptance of a plea bargain in the present drumhead trial is undoubtedly the outcome of his attorneys’ recognition that he can not receive a fair trial in the military court.

As the US prosecution of this former child soldier is under way in Cuba, it has also been revealed this week that the Obama administration has granted a waiver to four countries—Yemen, Sudan, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo—that will allow these countries to continue receiving military aid from the US even though their militaries employ child soldiers. In a memo to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, President Obama declared it to be “in the national interest,” i.e., in the strategic interests of US imperialism, to grant waivers to these countries despite their criminal abuse of children.

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