

THEY USED THREAT OF PRISON RAPE TO SCARE OMAR KHADR

As Spencer reports from Gitmo, the first interrogator to question Omar Khadr at Bagram told him a story suggesting that if he lied, he'd be sent to an American prison where he'd be likely to get raped.

"I told him a fictitious story we had invented when we were there," Interrogator #1 said. It was something "three or four" interrogators at Bagram came up with after learning that Afghans were "terrified of getting raped and general homosexuality, things of that nature." The story went like this:

Interrogator #1 would tell the detainee, "I know you're lying about something." And so, for an instruction about the consequences of lying, Khadr learned that lying "not so seriously" wouldn't land him in a place like "Cuba" – meaning, presumably, Guantanamo Bay – but in an American prison instead. And this one time, a "poor little 20-year-old kid" sent from Afghanistan ended up in an American prison for lying to an American. "A bunch of big black guys and big Nazis noticed the little Afghan didn't speak their language, and prayed five times a day – he's Muslim," Interrogator #1 said. Although the fictitious inmates were criminals, "they're still patriotic," and the guards "can't be everywhere at once."

"So this one unfortunate time, he's in the shower by himself, and these four big black guys show up – and it's terrible something would happen – but they caught him in the shower and raped him. And it's terrible that these things

happen, the kid got hurt and ended up dying,” Interrogator #1 said. “It’s all a fictitious story.”

It may have been a fictitious story, but it was an implicit threat, and a very plausible one when you consider it was told to a Canadian likely to be aware of America’s atrocious record of prison rape of both men and women.

The fate of Khadr—whose further interrogations all followed this implicit threat—is one issue. But the fate of American prisoners exposed to rape is equally timely. There are just four days left to a comment period on new standards that would mitigate many of the underlying problems that allow prison rape to happen.

The U.S. Attorney General is currently reviewing national standards aimed at preventing and addressing this type of abuse. Until May 10, these measures are open for public comments. If fully implemented, the national standards will spare countless Americans the horror of sexual abuse. But the standards are under threat. The reason: Prison officials claim that it will be too expensive to implement them – too *expensive* to prevent staff from raping detainees.

[snip]

In 2003, Congress recognized that the victimization of inmates constitutes a national crisis and so it unanimously passed the U.S. Prison Rape Elimination Act.

The national standards currently under review by Attorney General Eric Holder were developed by a bipartisan federal commission through extensive consultation with corrections officials, criminal justice experts, advocates and prisoner rape survivors. They are basic, common-sense measures, highlighting the

need to train staff, identify likely rape victims and likely predators and ensure that prisons are subjected to independent audits.

By law, Attorney General Eric Holder has until June to review the standards and codify them as federal regulations, making them binding on detention facilities nationwide.

Sadly, it now looks like Holder will not meet his deadline. The delay is due, in large part, to a problematic cost projection study commissioned by the Justice Department in response to pressure from corrections leaders.

In addition, there's a petition calling on Holder to implement the new measures quickly.

It's really appalling they used such a threat to scare Khadr. But it's equally appalling that the threat is so plausible because rape is so common in our prisons.

And we may be a lot closer to doing something about the latter than we seem to be able to do about the former.