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Guantanamo Lawyers Prepare for Hearings

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GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba (AP) - Military prosecutors at this U.S. naval base geared up Tuesday for hearings for a Canadian teenager accused of killing a U.S. soldier in Afghanistan, while his defense attorney called the process a "sham."

Toronto-born Omar Ahmed Khadr was 15 and a Taliban fighter when he was captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan after he allegedly tossed a grenade, killing a U.S. Special Forces medic in a battle, and planted mines targeting U.S. convoys.

Now 19, Khadr is charged with murder, attempted murder, aiding the enemy and conspiracy. His pretrial hearing is scheduled for Wednesday along with a hearing for Ali Hamza Ahmad Sulayman al Bahlul, a Yemeni charged with conspiracy.

The administrative hearings could include setting schedules for their trials. If convicted, both face up to life in prison.

Muneer Ahmad, Khadr's civilian attorney, claimed the hearings don't conform to generally accepted legal principles and said the defense team has challenged the commission's legality in federal court.

"The hearing room ... is designed to look like a court. The presiding officer will be wearing a black robe," Ahmad said Tuesday. "But understand that the room is not a court and the presiding officer is not a judge and this is not a full and fair trial. No matter how they dress it up, the military commission is still a sham."

Air Force Col. Morris Davis, the chief prosecutor, denied that was the case.

"We've got nothing to be ashamed of in what we're doing here," Davis said. "We're extending a full, fair and open trial to the terrorists that have attacked us."

Al Bahlul has challenged the military's appointment of defense council, saying he would like to defend himself. That issue could be decided Wednesday, said Maj. Jane Boomer, a spokeswoman for the Office of Military Commissions.

It will be al Bahlul's second time before the commission.

Guantanamo, located along Cuba's eastern edge, holds about 500 prisoners.