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Mental exam for detainee denied

Sam Hananel
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WASHINGTON - A federal judge says he will not allow an 18-year-old Canadian held with other terror suspects at a U.S. naval station in Cuba to be examined to determine if he is mentally fit to help his defense.

U.S. District Judge John D. Bates ruled Tuesday that there is no legal basis to order a mental competence exam before Omar Khadr's status is reviewed by a military tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Khadr, who was 15 when U.S. forces captured him in Afghanistan, was wounded in a battle that killed a U.S. soldier and injured four others, the military says.

The son of a suspected al-Qaida financier, Khadr is among about 550 men from more than 40 countries being held on suspicion of links to the terror network or the fallen Taliban militia that ruled Afghanistan and sheltered al-Qaida fighters.

The request for a medical exam was made by Khadr's grandmother, who has challenged the legality of her grandson's detention and conditions of his confinement. Similar challenges have been filed by other detainees in the first wave of court filings since the Supreme Court ruled in June that the prisoners may use American courts to contest their detentions.

His grandmother claims Khadr is in poor and deteriorating physical and mental health and asked the court to order examinations and release his medical records.

She said Khadr suffered severe psychological trauma during the battle that gave him shrapnel wounds and cost him his vision in his left eye.

Bates reviewed medical records provided by prison officials and said he found no evidence to raise doubts about Khadr's competence.

Khadr's father, Ahem Said Khadr, is an Egyptian-born Canadian citizen arrested in Pakistan in 1995 after a bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad. He was later released, and his whereabouts are unknown.

More lawsuits are expected on behalf of other Guantanamo prisoners, some of whom have been at the prison for more than 2 1/2 years, with little or no contact with the outside world.