

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? \$10.5 million awarded to Omar Khadr

The government of Canada Friday issued a formal apology along with a reported \$10.5 million settlement payment to convicted terrorist Omar Khadr for abuses he suffered while being imprisoned at the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Canadians from all across the country are rightfully appalled at this reported settlement. It is one thing to acknowledge alleged mistreatments; however, it is an entirely different thing to award a convicted terrorist who murdered an allied soldier and wounded another. Moreover, it calls into question about the true motivations of the Prime Minister and the current Liberal government in making such a settlement and not allowing the legal processes in place to finish.

Canadians across the country know this reported \$10.5 million settlement to Khadr is wrong. He admitted that he killed a U.S. Army Medic (Sergeant Christopher Speer) and was convicted by the American government for this and other terrorist-related charges. He later appealed his conviction in the U.S. and also re-launched a civil suit against the Canadian government, claiming several of his Charter rights were violated. Both of these legal proceedings were in progress, but now Canadians are learning through the media that several weeks ago, the current Liberal government negotiated a reported settlement of \$10.5 million with Khadr instead of waiting for the legal processes to run their course.

Valid arguments can be made as to why it would've been appropriate to have waited for the legal processes to finish, including an opportunity for the courts to examine the alleged offenses of the parties involved. Khadr's brother is on record as saying their father was 'old friends' with al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and that he and Omar 'attended terrorist training camps.' It has also been reported that the Khadr family lived in the Osama bin Laden compound for a period of time. Following the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001 in the U.S., it has also been reported the Khadr family left the bin Laden compound and took up arms against the Americans and their allies (including Canadians) who were fighting al-Qaida under the first-ever NATO-invoked (and approved) Article 5 action that the Liberal government of that time supported. It was during this time Khadr threw a grenade from the compound which killed Sergeant Speer and maimed another U.S. soldier.

Khadr's lawyer has argued Khadr suffered torture at the hands of the U.S. military that violated his human rights while he was detained at Guantanamo Bay and that the Canadian government was complicit. These allegations should be heard and addressed in the courts, where this was taking place until the current Liberal government made the reported \$10.5 million settlement.

Arguments have been made that by settling with Khadr now, it would've saved the taxpayer more money in the long run because his lawsuit ultimately would've succeeded and he would've been awarded more than \$10.5 million. There is no way of knowing that with any degree of certainty, as my colleague Michelle Rempel has raised along with other valid points. I agree with her that it is difficult to believe the Prime Minister's motivations were to save the Canadian taxpayer money in the long run. This is a Prime Minister who doesn't blink at uncontrolled spending and running up deficits. He could've allowed the suit to go through the legal process. If the court had decided in Khadr's favour, the Prime Minister and his government could've explored appeal options. If those efforts failed, his government would at least have a compelling reason for making a payment to Khadr at that point.

One of the more likely motivations behind Prime Minister Trudeau's decision to settle the lawsuit with Khadr is to avoid being forced to take a decisive stand on this controversial issue that would require him to explain and revisit that stance with Canadians over the long run, as Rempel has suggested. We've all come to learn that the Prime Minister prefers selfies and photo ops over tackling tough issues, which opens him up to scrutiny that he wishes to avoid. Another possible motivation raised by Rempel is that he's attempting to gain favour with a segment of voters; albeit, at a huge cost to the taxpayer. Regardless, if the Prime Minister thought the \$10.5 million settlement was necessary, he should've, at the very least, stood by his convictions and provided an explanation to the Canadian taxpayer instead of completely skirting the issue while visiting Ireland.

Our thoughts continue to be with Speer's widow and family who must relive their ordeal every time this issue comes up in the media. Given Khadr's admission of guilt, the Conservative Official Opposition is calling on him to give any settlement money to Speer's widow and two children.

When a Canadian soldier is killed or injured in battle, the government provides a lump sum payment up to a maximum of \$360,000. Despite this, the current Liberal government is willing to provide \$10.5 million to a convicted terrorist who actively sought to kill Canadian and allied soldiers, murdered one U.S. soldier, and permanently maimed another. Such a settlement making a convicted terrorist one of the wealthiest men in Canada isn't acceptable to the Canadian taxpayer, nor to our Canadian values. Canadians deserve better from their government.

