

British government accused in parliament of “outsourcing” torture

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The British government has been accused by Conservative MP David Davis of outsourcing the torture of Rangzieb Ahmed, from Rochdale, to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI) in 2006. The case is the latest, and one of the most damaging, of up to 29 cases in which British security services have been accused of colluding directly in the torture of British citizens and residents.

Using parliamentary privilege, on July 8, Davis, a right-wing Tory who has refashioned himself as a defender of civil liberties, outlined the circumstances in which the British government, the security agency MI5 and the Greater Manchester police conspired to hand over Ahmed to the ISI with the clear knowledge that he would be tortured.

According to the *Guardian*'s Ian Cobain, who has written extensively on the matter, the information revealed by Davis has “previously been suppressed through the process of secret court hearings and, had the *Guardian* or other organisations reported it, they would have exposed themselves to this risk of prosecution for contempt of court.”

Davis himself stated, “I cannot properly give my sources, given the vindictive attitude of this government, particularly the Foreign Office, to whistleblowers. Indeed, in this case of Rangzieb Ahmed, the authorities were so paranoid that they threatened to arrest a journalist for reporting facts stated in open court.”

Davis noted that Ahmed's case followed on from those of Moazzam Begg, Tariq Mahmoud, Salahuddin Amin, Rashid Rauf, Jamil Rahman, Alam Ghafoor and Azhar Khan, among others. These all claim, or have been reported, to have been tortured in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates or

Egypt, with the complicity and, in some cases, the presence of British intelligence personnel.

In the case of Rashid Rauf, from Birmingham, he was, according to his lawyer, so badly scarred and his torture had been so severe that plans to prosecute him in the UK were abandoned. Rauf, arrested in Pakistan in 2006, was allegedly central to a plot to bomb transatlantic flights leaving from London's Heathrow airport. He was inexplicably allowed to escape from custody in 2007, before later being reported killed by a US missile. His family rejects both claims.

The claims by Ethiopian caretaker Binyam Mohammed of collusion by the CIA and MI5 in his torture by intelligence services in Pakistan, Morocco and Afghanistan will form the basis of investigations by the Metropolitan Police. Court cases may emerge following a High Court ruling last year, which stated that MI5's role in his torture went “far beyond that of a bystander or witness.”

According to Davis, Rangzieb Ahmed, in the aftermath of July 7, 2005, bombings in London, was kept under surveillance for a year. Over this period, evidence was collected on his activities, on the basis of which he was subsequently convicted, following his expulsion from Pakistan in 2007.

Davis stressed, “Despite the authorities having that evidence, he was—astonishingly—not arrested but instead allowed to leave the country.” He went on, “Since they knew he was leaving, since they knew where he was going and since they had more than enough evidence to arrest him, allowing him to leave was clearly deliberate.”

Ahmed was kept under surveillance in Dubai. When he went to Pakistan, British intelligence wrote to the ISI to “suggest” that Ahmed be arrested. Davis noted that the officer making the “suggestion” would be

perfectly aware that this amounted to a request that Ahmed be tortured.

Ahmed was arrested in Pakistan August 20, 2006, whereupon the Greater Manchester Police and MI5 put together a list of questions to be put to him. These were passed on to the ISI. While beating the now 33-year-old man with wooden staves and strips of car tyre, the ISI proceeded to question him about his activities in the UK.

Ahmed claims he saw a file entitled “UK/Pakistan Secret” while he was being tortured, which presumably contained the questions.

During the course of his ordeal, three of Ahmed’s fingernails were pulled out with pliers. The *Guardian* July 8 printed photographs showing Ahmed’s fingers in 2007, with three fingernails only partially restored, along with details of exactly how the fingernails were removed.

Davis noted that the Crown Prosecution Service has confirmed that Ahmed’s fingernails were removed while he was in Pakistani custody. After 13 days, Ahmed was visited by MI5 and MI6 officers and questioned. He was then questioned by American intelligence officers. Davis asked, “It is also an extraordinary, if sinister, coincidence that the Manchester police accessed Rangzieb Ahmed’s medical records within days of the MI5/MI6 interview. Why would they do that if he was in perfect health?”

Davis continued, “The authorities know full well that this story is an evidential showcase for the policy of complicity in torture, should that evidence ever come out.”

Davis suggested that a civil case against the government would allow an exposure of previous court rulings. Ahmed’s legal advisers are suggesting such a case.

On July 6, the *Guardian* ran a story by Ian Cobain in which he reported a discussion in April between Ahmed and MI5. Following his conviction, Ahmed has been held in Manchester prison. Last April, he was visited by two officers, one from MI5, one from the police, who tried to both recruit him as an agent and bribe him to keep quiet.

Ahmed told the *Guardian* that after requesting advice about “tackling extremism” and offering protection, the officers said to him, “If you withdraw what you are saying about torture, we can make a deal to reduce your

sentence, or if you want money we can give you money.”

Ahmed’s solicitor, Tayab Ali, warned, “Any attempt to conceal evidence of torture would amount, in this case, to an attempt to pervert the course of justice, and I would expect the courts to take a very serious view of the matter.”

Referring to this meeting, Davis suggested that it was most likely videotaped, and demanded that the Crown Prosecution Service investigate further. Davis called for a review of the court records to confirm the pre-trial handling of Ahmed and for the current UK guidelines on torture to be published. The MP also asked if disciplinary action within the intelligence services had been initiated and finally demanded a full judicial inquiry into “allegations of UK complicity in torture.”

Responding to Davis’s allegations, the new Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, wrote to the *Guardian*. According to Johnson’s perfunctory letter, “These allegations are unsubstantiated and baseless. As a matter of principle the security service and police seek to uphold the law.” Johnson is considered a likely candidate to replace Gordon Brown as Labour leader.

The government is seeking to suppress 42 classified US documents, which may bear direct relevance to the extent to which British torture policy was formulated to comply and assist with demands from the US administration.

According to Binyam Mohamed’s lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith, who has seen the documents, “There are things I can’t talk about because they’re classified. I can’t say why I believe that this probably went all the way to No 10. I would be astounded if No 10 didn’t know what was going on.”



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