

Fresh evidence of British collusion in torture

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Further evidence of British collusion in the torture of UK citizens has come to light. Alam Ghafoor, a British businessman, was seized in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in July 2005 while on a business trip. He was subjected to days of mistreatment and torture.

According to a report in the July 26 edition of the *Guardian* by Helen Carter, “Ghafoor and his business partner, Mohammed Rafiq Siddique, flew to the UAE on 4 July. They were dragged out of a restaurant as they dined on 21 July. The two British Muslims say they were threatened with torture, deprived of sleep, subjected to stress positions and told they would be killed and fed to dogs.”

The seizure of Ghafoor and his colleague took place within weeks of the July 7 London terrorist bombings. The bombings were followed by an unprecedented attack on democratic rights and legal norms. It was under these conditions that the British authorities apparently authorised the kidnapping of Ghafoor and his friend.

On July 22, just one day after Ghafoor was seized in the UAE, armed British police officers executed 27-year-old Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes in London. Officers fired seven bullets into his head while he was sat on a London Underground tube carriage, without warning or cause.

The *Guardian* article states that heavily redacted papers it has seen relating to Ghafoor’s case “appear to indicate that the request to visit Alam Ghafoor was made to an unidentified British intelligence officer and not to officials in the UAE.”

The *Guardian* comments that the papers show that officials “were asking someone other than the UAE authorities for permission to see him.” It continues: “Who that person is, and who they represented, is unclear, as their name was censored before the copies were handed over. Some of the reports were so heavily redacted by the time Ghafoor received them that the only words not blanked are his name.”

One of the papers cited is dated July 25, 2005 and is

written by a consular official in the UAE. It states, “Today I phoned [name withheld] trying to get permission to see them. First [...] told me that there was no need because they would be deported soon. I asked if we could see them today or tomorrow. [...] told me that [...] would check with the UAE authorities ... and would let me know. I didn’t hear from [...] since then. Tomorrow I’ll speak to [...] again.”

Ghafoor was subjected to humiliation and torture in the UAE until he was eventually released without charge on July 30, 2005. According to the *Guardian*, “At the time of his interrogation, Ghafoor was told that British security services had requested his questioning.”

The *Guardian* details the harrowing ordeal endured by Ghafoor: He “was shown a photograph and told he resembled one of the 7/7 suicide bombers and must be related to him. His business partner, Siddique, who was also detained and tortured, says he was told he must have been involved in the bombings—not only did he share a name with the bombers, but he lived in Dewsbury, the same Yorkshire town.

“Ghafoor said his interrogators questioned his sexuality, as he is not married, and insulted him because he was unable to wash, saying he smelled. He was also punched in the groin.

“One interrogator said to him: ‘In the morning you will be thrown into a pit and the dogs will tear you to bits and I will watch it and enjoy it.’”

Under such duress, Ghafoor signed a false confession in which he said, “he was a friend of the bombers and had organised the London attacks.”

He told the *Guardian*, “I wrote a false confession and put crazy things in it like ‘I have constant contact with Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.’”

Following his “confession,” the newspaper reports, “He was told he would be shot by a firing squad the following morning.”

To this day, Ghafoor has not received an explanation for his treatment in the UAE, or an official apology. He told the newspaper, “I would like to know why I was put

through this hell and I would like someone to be accountable.”

The cases of Alam Ghafoor and Mohammed Rafiq Siddique are not isolated incidents. They are the latest in a growing body of evidence revealing collusion between the UK and foreign governments in criminal practises including rendition, abuse and torture.

Binyam Mohamed was finally released without charge in March this year, after being held captive by the United States for almost seven years. He was originally detained in Pakistan in 2002 and was then sent by means of “extraordinary rendition” to Morocco, Afghanistan and finally to Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, where he spent the past four years. For the duration of his detention at the hands of the US government, he was subjected to the most brutal torture. Mohamed alleges that the British government were complicit in his detention and torture.

Lawyers for Mohamed are currently contesting a High Court case in London in an attempt to force the disclosure of CIA documents pertaining to his torture. Lawyers representing the Guardian and other media groups are supporting his lawyers.

The British government is determined to ensure that the documents remain secret. Foreign Secretary David Miliband has told the court that publication of the CIA documents would result in the United States stopping the sharing of intelligence with the UK.

Earlier this month, the British government was accused by Conservative MP David Davis of outsourcing the torture of British citizen Rangzieb Ahmed to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI) in 2006.

Mohammed Saad Iqbal Madni is presently suing the British government. On July 28, Reprieve, a human rights organization organisation that defends the legal rights of prisoners, launched a legal action against the British Government for its role in the illegal rendition and subsequent torture of Madni.

Madni, a Pakistani national, was abducted on January 11, 2002 by Indonesian intelligence agents while visiting a friend in Jakarta. Two days later, without a court hearing or lawyer, Iqbal was put on an unmarked US-registered Gulfstream jet parked at a military airport in Jakarta and flown to Egypt.

According to an article published in the *Guardian* on July 28 by Reprieve Director Clive Stafford Smith, “The Americans put him in a coffin and flew him to Egypt, apparently stopping off in the British colony of Diego Garcia en route.

“When Madni arrived in Cairo, he was still bleeding

through his nose and mouth from his earlier abuse, yet this was soon relegated to a minor complaint. At the behest of the Americans, he spent 92 days being tortured with electric cattle prods before being rendered to Afghanistan and ultimately to Guantánamo Bay.”

The legal case against the British government is centred on the following facts:

“Reprieve has discovered that Mr. Madni was almost certainly rendered to torture via the British Overseas Territory of Diego Garcia; Diego Garcia is a British Overseas Territory subject to UK sovereignty, but has been made available to the US for certain defence purposes since 1967; the UK government denied Diego Garcia’s involvement in rendition 54 times; in answer to the 55th demand in January 2008, Foreign Secretary David Miliband admitted to two cases of illegal rendition via Diego Garcia and was forced to apologise for misleading both Parliament and Reprieve; Mr. Miliband has previously blocked Reprieve’s attempts to restore the victims’ legal rights, refusing to admit their identities.”

Reprieve’s executive director, Clare Algar, said, “For too long, Diego Garcia has been used as a secret safe haven for the US and UK. It is about time this territory was subjected to the scrutiny of the law. Mr. Madni’s case is the first step towards restoring the rule of law to Diego Garcia.”

Clive Stafford Smith commented on the implications of the legal action, saying, “Rendition is kidnap, pure and simple, and there is a very serious principle at stake here. The British government refuses to admit its involvement in a crime, then refuses to identify the victims and affirmatively blocks others from trying to reunite them with their legal rights.

“Mr. Madni suffers serious physical and psychological injuries as a result of his rendition to torture, yet has never had so much as an apology from his abusers. He is happy finally to be free, but wants to launch this action to ensure that no one is forced to suffer in this way in future.”



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