

British police trained Bangladeshi death squads

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Cables released by WikiLeaks reveal how the British government provides training to a Bangladeshi government paramilitary force specialising in executing political opponents.

The Rapid Action Battalion's most recent killing was Anisur Rahman, a member of the Bangladeshi Communist Party in the western region of the country.

The Bangladesh government had promised to end the extra-judicial executions. In a radio discussion organised by the BBC, however, its fishing minister recently stated, "There are incidents of trials that are not possible under the laws of the land. The government will continue with extra-judicial killings commonly called 'crossfire', until terrorist activities and extortion are uprooted."

"Crossfire" killings are a euphemism for an execution. Acting as judge, jury and executioner, a government-appointed Star Chamber decides who should die for their so-called crimes against the interests of the ruling clique and then the order goes out to the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

The WikiLeaks cables show that the British government facilitates this execution squad—providing it with training, the exact nature of which, in light of the ongoing brutal behaviour of British forces and inhumane conduct in Iraq and Afghanistan, remains somewhat cloudy.

The training of the Bangladeshi RAB members in the UK has been carried out by the West Mercia and Humberside police forces. The courses are approved by the British Association of Chief Police Officers.

Washington reportedly refused to offer training to the RAB, citing its history of gross human rights violations. However, in one leaked cable, James Moriarty, the American ambassador in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, states, "The RAB enjoys a great deal of

respect and admiration from a population scared by decreasing law and order over the last decade."

Moriarty expresses his opinion that the RAB "enforcement organisation is best positioned to one day become a Bangladeshi version of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation".

In another cable, Moriarty quotes British officials as stating they have been "training RAB for 18 months in areas such as investigative interviewing techniques and rules of engagement."

When asked by the *Guardian* newspaper, which published the WikiLeaks cables in the UK, a spokesperson for the British government claimed that the British state "provides a range of human rights assistance" to the RAB.

When questioned by the *Guardian* about the nature of the training provided to the squad, Mejbah Uddin, head of training at the RAB, said that he was not aware of any human rights training since he was appointed in summer.

In addition to the hundreds of executions committed by the RAB, the organisation also stands accused of the routine use of torture, kidnapping, extortion and accepting bribes in return for "crossfire" deaths. The RAB openly acknowledges that it is responsible for hundreds of deaths since its formation in 2004. The director general of the RAB admitted to 577 deaths at the hand of his operatives in "crossfire" incidents since the formation of the paramilitary organisation. This figure was updated in March of last year to 622. But human rights groups estimate that the RAB is responsible for at least 1,000 extra-judicial killings.

One of the major issues revealed by WikiLeaks is the ongoing relationship between the former colonial masters in London and Bangladesh. The leaked cables reveal that the British training of RAB began under the

Blair Labour government in 1997, when it was promoting its so-called “ethical” foreign policy, and continues under the current Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition. The RAB confirmed that as recently as last October, RAB members took part in training in the UK.

For their part, the present administration in Dhaka campaigned during the last elections to end the rule of terror waged by the RAB against the Bangladeshi population. However, once elected into office, they have decided that mass murder has its uses after all.

A year ago, the high court in Dhaka ruled that the extra-judicial killings committed by the RAB be brought to a halt, but they have continued unabated, averaging a slaying every week. Most often young men—frequently leftists, but not always—are executed in the dead of night.

No one has been charged for a single death carried out by the RAB.

Ominously, the WikiLeaks cables also reveal that the US government surveys and analyses the statistics and contours of Muslim immigrant communities in the UK. The cables revealed information about the size and projected growth of the British Bangladeshi community, which is predominately Muslim.



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