

US youth returns home after torture in Kuwait

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Gulet Mohamed, a 19-year-old American citizen, returned to the US Friday after being tortured—apparently on Washington’s orders—at the hands of the regime in Kuwait.

Arriving at Washington’s Dulles Airport after a month of incarceration in Kuwait, Mohamed was detained for another two hours at customs as FBI agents attempted to interrogate him without a lawyer present. He was then released into the arms of his family and returned to his home in Northern Virginia. He has been charged with no offense.

The youth’s ordeal began on December 20, when he went to the international airport in Kuwait City to renew his visa. He had been out of the US since March 2009, traveling first to Yemen for three weeks to study Arabic, going on to Somalia, where he had stayed with family members, and finally to Kuwait, where he lived with his uncle and continued his studies. Mohamed, a naturalized American citizen, had lived in the US since he was three years old and intended to return to the US later this year to attend college.

After being held at the office in the Kuwait airport for five hours, he was handcuffed and blindfolded by men in civilian clothes, bundled into a vehicle and transported to a detention and interrogation center.

There, Mohamed was severely beaten, whipped, beaten on the soles of his feet with sticks, forced to stand for hours and subjected to other forms of torture. He was repeatedly threatened with electric shock torture and was told that unless he gave his interrogators the information they were looking for his mother would be detained and killed.

The youth’s family and attorneys representing him from the Council on American-Islamic Relations charged that the interrogations and torture were carried out with the support and participation of the US government.

“The manner of his detention and the questions asked of

Mr. Mohamed indicate to him that he was taken into custody at the behest of the United States,” the youth’s lawyer, Gadeir Abbas, wrote in a letter to the US Justice Department earlier this month.

In particular, the Kuwaiti interrogators demanded that Mohamed admit to having known and met with Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen and Muslim cleric who is believed to be in Yemen. The Obama administration has declared Awlaki, a prominent advocate of Islamic fundamentalism, a “terrorist” and targeted him for assassination.

The interrogators also questioned Mohamed about a casual conversation he had had at a local mosque in Virginia, something that the Kuwaiti secret police could have known about only through contact with American agents, based on surveillance carried out in the US.

When Mohamed insisted that he had nothing to do with terrorism and did not know Awlaki, he was subjected to further beatings and torture.

After more than two weeks of this ordeal, Mohamed was visited at the detention center by three FBI agents, who told him that he would be released only if he cooperated. The youth told the agents that he had a lawyer and would not submit to interrogation without legal representation.

He was visited by an official from the US Embassy in Kuwait only after being transferred to a deportation center. The official claimed that the embassy had not known of his whereabouts previously, while telling Mohamed that his travel the previous year had raised “red flags.”

The claim that the embassy knew nothing about Mohamed’s fate is a patent lie. It is inconceivable that the Kuwaiti sheikdom, a client state of Washington which hosts multiple American bases and serves as the staging area for the US occupation of Iraq, would detain, interrogate and torture a US citizen for weeks on end without explicit approval from the American government.

While in the deportation detention center, Mohamed was able to borrow a cell phone smuggled in by another inmate and telephone his family—who learned of his fate for the first time—and reporters in the US. “I cannot sleep. I cannot eat. I’m scared to walk to the bathroom because I’m afraid they will hunt me down,” Mohamed said in a telephone interview with the *New York Times*. Choking back tears, he added, “I’ve been beaten and tortured, physically and mentally. I’m not the same.”

When his family complied with the Kuwaiti regime’s demand that they purchase a one-way ticket for Mohamed to return to the US, the authorities there had him transferred to the airport. However, he was barred from boarding a United Airlines flight because he had secretly been placed on a no-fly list by the US government. As a result, he was thrown back into detention.

It was only after lawyers for the Virginia youth went to federal court in the US seeking a restraining order and preliminary injunction overturning the US government’s preventing him from returning that the government relented and allowed him to fly.

The suit charged that the government had violated Mohamed’s 14th Amendment right as a US citizen to live in the US and subjected to him to “effective banishment.”

“The United States is depriving Mr. Mohamed of perhaps the most basic prerogative of American citizenship: the right to be in the United States,” the lawsuit stated. “This is patently unconstitutional, and it is up to this court to bring Gulet Mohamed—an American citizen—back to his country.”

The American Civil Liberties Union has brought a separate lawsuit on behalf of 14 individuals who have been placed on no-fly lists and, in some cases, similarly prevented from returning to the US.

One, a former US Marine, 32-year-old Ayman Latif, was denied the right to return home to Miami after visiting Egypt with his wife and children. Despite repeated visits to the US Embassy and interviews with FBI agents, he has been unable to get the travel ban lifted. “I didn’t do anything wrong. I’m not a terrorist,” he told the *Washington Post*. “If I did something, fine, give me due process.”

In another case, Nagib Ali Ghaleb, a naturalized US citizen from San Francisco, was barred from returning home from Yemen last February. According to the ACLU suit, he was told by the FBI that he would be taken off the no-fly list only if he agreed to become a confidential informant, spying on the Yemeni community in California. He refused.

Mohamed’s lawyer, Gadeir Abbas, drew a direct parallel between the treatment of his client and the crimes carried out under the Bush administration by means of the “extraordinary rendition” program, in which people abducted and detained without charges were flown to countries with the express purpose of subjecting them to interrogation under torture.

The government, he said, was “trying to accomplish the same goal: the unlawful torture and detention abroad of an American citizen by a country that is known to engage in human rights abuses.”

Exactly two years ago, Obama signed executive orders that he claimed would end torture and shut down the infamous US detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. At the time, these orders were hailed in the media as a “clean break” with the policies of the Bush administration.

Now, two years later, Guantánamo remains open, and the White House is preparing to expand the operations of the extra-legal military tribunals there. And, as the ordeal of Gulet Mohamed demonstrates, torture remains a chosen instrument of US policy, in this case, utilizing the secret police of an overseas client regime to organize the interrogation under torture of a young US citizen, while attempting to employ a no-fly list to prevent him from coming home.

Not only have the crimes carried out under the Bush administration gone unpunished, they are being continued and deepened under the Obama White House, which has arrogated to itself the right not only to torture, but to assassinate American citizens.



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