

Documents expose intimate ties between Libyan torturers and CIA, MI6

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A hoard of secret documents uncovered in the Tripoli offices of Libya's External Security Organisation on Friday has exposed the lie that NATO began bombing Libya for humanitarian reasons or has moved to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi because of concerns over his regime's abuse of democratic rights.

British and American intelligence agencies maintained the closest ties with the Gaddafi regime and collaborated in the interrogation and torture of Islamist suspects that they had detained in other countries and "rendered" to Libya. Having relied on Gaddafi's police state for their own purposes, Washington and London only turned on their former ally as a means of containing and countering revolutionary upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa and to obtain tighter control of Libyan oil by installing a client regime.

The documents were found by the US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) and journalists in the office of Moussa Koussa, who was head of the External Security Organisation until 2009, when he became Libya's foreign minister. Koussa defected from the Gaddafi regime in March and flew to London where he was welcomed with open arms. He later left Britain after demands were raised that he face police questioning over his role in the murder of Libyan dissidents in exile, and is believed to be living in one of the Gulf states.

The files from Koussa's office include at least three large binders of English-language documents—one marked CIA and two other two marked MI6—covering the period from 2002 to 2007. Most are concentrated in the period from late 2003 and 2004 when relations with Britain and the US became much closer following Gaddafi's decision in 2003 to give up Libya's nuclear program. Many more documents in Arabic were found.

Only a few of the documents along with excerpts from others have been published. But even those have shed light on the close relations with Libyan intelligence that Washington and London would now prefer to forget. Both countries have refused to comment on the files. The opposition National Transitional Council (NTC)—no doubt on orders from the US or

Britain—quickly blocked further access by instructing the building to be locked on Saturday morning.

Describing the extent of the documents, *Time* magazine wrote: "Among the documents found were rendition proposals, rendition schedules, a speech drafted for Gaddafi by MI6 about making the Middle East 'a WMD-free zone', lists of terrorist suspect interrogation questions requested by the CIA, wiretaps of foreign embassies, Libyan telephone numbers intercepted by and provided by the CIA to Libyan authorities, as well as transcripts of terrorism suspect interrogations."

HRW emergencies director Peter Bouckaert, who was involved in unearthing the documents, told the media: "The rendition program was all about handing over these significant figures related to Al Qaeda so they could torture them and get the information they wanted." He added: "The CIA also sent the questions they wanted Libyan intelligence to ask, and, from the files, it's very clear they were present in some of the interrogations themselves."

Contact with Libyan intelligence took place at the highest levels. In a letter to Koussa in early 2004, Stephen Kappes, then CIA deputy director of operations, proposed the establishment of "a permanent CIA presence" in Libya. "We have talked about this move for quite some time, and Libya's cooperation on WMD and other issues, as well as our nascent intelligence cooperation means that now it the right moment to move ahead," he wrote.

As well as sending two CIA operatives to "staff our station in Libya," Kappes added that the CIA was "eager to work with you" in interrogating "a terrorist" recently rendered to Libya. "I would like to send to Libya an additional two officers, and I would appreciate if they could have direct access to question this individual," he went on.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Kappes was a key figure in the secret talks that led to Gaddafi's decision in 2003 to give up Libya's nuclear program. The British-based *Independent* reported that two CIA directors were present at a

key meeting in December 2003 at the Travellers Club in London when top British and American officials thrashed out with Koussa final details of the arrangements that would transform the Gaddafi regime from pariah status to an ally.

Over the weekend, unnamed US and British officials attempted to limit the political damage by insisting that the intelligence agencies had ensured that rendered individuals would be treated humanely. It is clear from the case of Abu Abudullah al-Sadiq, the nom de guerre for Abdel Hakim Belhaj, that references in the documents to “protecting human rights” were purely cosmetic.

Belhaj, who is now head of the opposition militias currently controlling Tripoli, was being hunted in 2004 as a leading figure in the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). Libyan intelligence asked for the assistance of the CIA in locating him and received a reply from a CIA case officer in March 2004, promising to do its best, and adding: “We are committed to developing this relationship for the benefit of both our services” and promised to do their best to locate him. Two days later, another CIA fax to the Libyans announced that Belhaj and his pregnant wife had been found. “We are planning to take control of the pair in Bangkok and place them on our aircraft for your country.”

Interviewed by the *Washington Post*, Belhaj explained that he had been detained in Bangkok and tortured for two days by men he believed to be CIA agents. “I was injected, and strung up by hands, and cold water and ice was put all over my body,” he said. After being flown to Libya with his wife, he was held in jail for six years in Tripoli, three of them in solitary confinement. His wife was detained for two months. Among the documents discovered last Friday was a 400-page file of his interrogations. Now operating as part of the NATO-backed NTC, Belhaj declared that he did not want revenge, but might pursue legal action against the CIA. He flew to Qatar last week with NTC chairman Mustafa Abdel Jalil for high-level talks with NATO and Western officials on continuing military operations.

The twists and turns of Belhaj’s career demonstrate the utter cynicism of the bogus US-led “war on terrorism” in which yesterday’s “terrorists” become today’s “freedom fighters”, and vice versa. Belhaj joined the CIA-sponsored jihad against the Soviet-backed regime in the late 1980s when Al Qaeda was formed and links between thousands of foreign fighters were forged. Returning to Libya, he became the emir of LIFG, that was fighting to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in the 1990s, and was branded by the US State Department as a “terrorist organization.” Now, along with other ex-LIFG members, Belhaj is playing a prominent role as commander of the Tripoli Military Council in the US-backed puppet regime in Libya.

Of the other rendition cases uncovered, one is acutely embarrassing for British intelligence, as it demonstrates the direct involvement of MI6 in handing over senior LIFG deputy emir Abu Munthir and his family to Libyan authorities. MI5 and MI6 have repeatedly denied any involvement in the CIA’s renditions. However, a CIA document noted that the British had organised the rendition of Abu Munthir from Hong Kong but ran into difficulties as Hong Kong authorities were reluctant to allow a Libyan aircraft to land. The CIA helpfully suggested that a chartered foreign aircraft would provide the necessary diplomatic camouflage and offered to help pay for it.

The *Independent* made clear that relations between MI6 and Libyan intelligence were particularly cozy. “So close had the relationship become that several Western European intelligence agencies were using the services of MI6 for help with their own terrorist suspects. The Swedish, Italian and Dutch services sought the help of the UK agency in liaising with Tripoli,” the newspaper wrote. Other governments involved in rendition to Libya, according to *Time*, included those of Malaysia, South Africa, Thailand, Hong Kong and Pakistan.

HRW official Bouckaert described the documents discovered as revealing “a very dark chapter in American intelligence history.” But the suggestion that this is all in the past is absurd. The CIA and MI6, along with special forces units, have been intimately involved in the military operations to drive out Gaddafi and to set up a new regime headed by the NTC in Tripoli. As such, the US and European governments are directly responsible for the extra-judicial killings and other atrocities being meted out to suspected Gaddafi loyalists.

For the time being at least, Washington and London are more than willing to work with the man they sent for torture, Belhaj, who will ruthlessly stamp out any opposition in Tripoli to the NTC. The names might have changed, but the brutal methods used to prosecute imperialist interests remain the same.



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