

Documents reveal how UK backed Gaddafi's repression

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Documents found in the abandoned residence of the British Ambassador in Tripoli reveal the extent of the British government's intimate relationships with the former Gaddafi government in Libya.

They provide further evidence of Britain's lead role in the seizure, "rendition" and torture of opponents of Gaddafi's regime. They expose as lies the claim that the seven-month US-led NATO bombing of Libya had anything to do with humanitarian concerns over the Gaddafi regime's abuse of democratic rights. They also throw light on the "war on terror" propaganda employed by the UK government after the 9/11 attacks.

The material concerns the anti-Gaddafi Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), founded by Libyan members of the CIA-backed mujahideen who fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Throughout the 1990s, the LIFG had sought to overthrow the Gaddafi government. In 1996 the LIFG almost killed Gaddafi with a car bomb in Sirte, his home town. Although the LIFG was labelled a terrorist organisation by the US State Department, the renegade MI5 officer David Shayler alleged that Britain's MI6 had been involved in the operation.

Shayler's account was backed up by French intelligence experts, Guillaume Dasquié and Jean-Charles Brisard, in their book *Forbidden Truth*. They asserted that Libya had been the first country to issue an Interpol arrest warrant for Osama Bin Laden in March 1998, over Al Qaeda's involvement in the 1994 murder of German anti-terrorist agents in Africa. US and British intelligence agencies resisted the warrant, however, allegedly due to MI6's involvement in the attempt on Gaddafi. Five months after the warrant was issued, more than 200 people were killed in the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In 2003-2004, as relations between imperialism and Libya began to thaw, due to Gaddafi's willingness to support the "war on terror" and abandon Libya's nuclear programme, Libyan intelligence asked for the assistance of the CIA in locating then LIFG leader Abdul Hakim Belhaj and his

deputy, Sami al-Saadi.

The CIA immediately agreed to locate him and within a few days, it had contacted Libya, stating it had information on the whereabouts of Belhaj and his pregnant wife. "We are planning to take control of the pair in Bangkok and place them on our aircraft for your country," the fax said.

After being captured with his wife, and boarded on an Egyptian airline bound for Libya, Belhaj was held in jail for six years in Tripoli, three of them in solitary confinement. He says he suffered regular torture. His wife was also held in captivity for two months.

The British government, via its intelligence operatives, played the central role in handing Belhaj's location to the CIA. Belhaj was turned in to the CIA after colleagues of his informed British diplomats in Malaysia that he wished to claim asylum in Britain. He was allowed to board a flight to London, only to be seized when his plane landed at Bangkok. According to Belhaj he was first tortured at Bangkok airport, including being suspended from a ceiling.

Britain played a leading role in his interrogation. Last month, a mass of secret documents were found at the headquarters of Libya's External Security Organisation. The papers were found by the US-based Human Rights Watch and journalists in the office of Moussa Koussa. Koussa was in charge of the External Security Organisation until 2009, when he became Libya's foreign minister.

Among the files found was a 400-page record of the interrogations of Belhaj.

The *Guardian* reports that the files contain a 39-page report, "Briefs for Detainees", authored by British intelligence. The report was written in three sections in March, June and October 2004. The newspaper notes, "The first section is dated the month of Belhaj's arrest, and sought answers on everything from his private life to his military training, activities in Afghanistan and links to al-Qaida. There were also personalised questions for Saadi."

A previous document found in Tripoli was a letter from Sir Mark Allen, then MI6 director of counter-terrorism, to the Gaddafi regime in 2004. This confirmed British

intelligence's role in Belhaj's capture and interrogation. Belhaj's rendition was "the least we could do for you and for Libya to demonstrate the remarkable relationship we have built over recent years," Allen wrote.

Shortly after writing that letter, Allan left MI6 to work for the oil giant BP.

Another document published by the *Guardian* Monday reveals the concerns of British intelligence that the seizure of Belhaj and al-Saadi, had led to the strengthening of Al Qaeda in Libya.

The document said that the pair's removal from the LIFG leadership had enabled more extremist forces to develop "a relatively close-knit group" based on the call for the ouster of Gaddafi and the creation of an Islamic state.

According to the *Guardian*, a briefing paper entitled, "UK/Libya eyes only—Secret", which was prepared "by the security service for a four-day MI5 visit in February 2005, said that following the seizure of its two key leaders [Abdul Hakim Belhaj and Sami al-Saadi] the year before the group had been cast into a state of disarray."

The document stated, "The extremists are now in the ascendancy" and were "pushing the group towards a more pan-Islamic agenda inspired by AQ [al-Qaida]".

None of this was of any real concern to the British bourgeoisie. The documents also contain correspondence between the Gaddafi government and the last two UK Labour Party prime ministers, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. One letter dated 25 July, 2007 from Gordon Brown to "Dear Colonel Qadhafi" testifies to the closest of relationships between the UK and the Libyan government. Brown's letter states that he is looking forward to "working together to ensure that the conditions are right for British business to increase their investment in Libya, for Libya to invest productively through the City of London and for companies of both countries to strengthen their commercial links".

Another letter from Brown refers to the moves by BP to gain access to the vast oil resources of Libya: "I know that BP are looking forward to early Cabinet approval of their agreement with Libya so they can begin many years of mutually productive investment in the development of the Libyan economy".

The documents confirm the Labour government's central role in the rendition system of secret detention and torture. They also raise questions about Britain's involvement with Moussa Koussa, the former long-time head of Libyan intelligence and foreign minister. Koussa had lived in the UK as the Libyan ambassador, before being expelled in 1980. As a trusted advisor of Gaddafi, Koussa was instrumental in advising him to carry out what became known as the "Deal in the Desert" with Blair in 2004.

Earlier this year Koussa defected from the Gadaffi regime. The UK Foreign Office later confirmed that he arrived in the UK on a flight on March 30. Since his defection some sources have identified him as a long-time MI6 agent.

This week, BBC's *Panorama* current affairs journalist Paul Kenyon alleged that among the crimes committed by Koussa was his authorisation of a reported massacre of prisoners at the Abu Salim prison in 1996. Kenyon documented the existence of letters between British intelligence and Koussa. One letter from a senior member of MI6 states, "Dear Moussa, such a shame you couldn't join us for Christmas lunch."

Koussa was not arrested while in the UK. Despite the Conservative-led government of Prime Minister David Cameron claiming that he wasn't immune from prosecution, he was protected by Special Branch security officers. He had his assets unfrozen in the west at the behest of the UK government.

After being formally questioned over possible involvement in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, he was allowed to leave Britain in April, just a few weeks after arriving. Kenyon commented of his exit, "Perhaps the UK let him go because he knew secrets which the British government would prefer never to surface".

Panorama located Koussa living in luxury in a five star hotel in Doha, Qatar.

When it suits the geo-political ambitions of the major imperialist powers, as with Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and many others, yesterday's "freedom fighter" can very quickly become today's "terrorist", and vice versa.

Today, along with other ex-LIFG members, Belhaj is the military commander of Tripoli, after playing a leading role in the NATO-backed onslaught against Libya for regime change. Also playing a prominent role in the new US-backed puppet regime as Belhaj's deputy is Sami al-Saadi.



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