Britain accused of collusion in torture in Somalia

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Mohammed Ahmed Mohamed, a 27-year-old British citizen of Somali descent, was allegedly tortured in Somalia with the complicity of UK authorities. He was then flown to Britain, where his democratic rights were further abused.

Claims by Mohamed's lawyers are backed up by another man only referred to as "CF". Both are attempting to sue the British government for damages.

Last week, a *Guardian* article reported that Mohamed arrived back in the UK from Somalia in March 2011, after effectively being subjected to extraordinary rendition. This involves the secret abduction of individuals who are claimed to be "terrorists", pioneered by the United States with British complicity, who are then sent to nations that practice torture. In the case of Mohamed, his lawyers allege he was subjected to a rendition back to the UK.

Mohamed disappeared after a visit to a mosque in London on November 1. He had been under a Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure (TPIM) for almost two years. TPIMs are antidemocratic "control orders" in which a person's movements are strictly monitored.

Mohamed disappeared after he entered the mosque and removed his electronic tag. He left the mosque disguised in a woman's burka. Border Agency officials, MI5 officers and reportedly undercover soldiers were then mobilised in a dragnet to find him.

He had been due to appear at a court hearing over claims he had breached the terms of the TPIM. Details about Mohamed's legal action against the UK's Foreign Office, Home Office, Ministry of Defence and the Attorney General only emerged at the High Court after a judge lifted an anonymity order against him. The order was lifted after Mohamed's disappearance from the mosque, in order to assist in his apprehension.

Mohamed travelled to Somalia in 2007 and was detained there with CF in January 2011. CF had travelled to Somalia in 2009, and both were flown back to the UK in March 2011. Their legal action against the UK government claims that "officers and agents...by their acts and omissions, procured, induced, encouraged or directly caused, or were otherwise complicit in" their detention, assault, mistreatment and torture while in Somaliland.

Mohamed's solicitor, Gareth Pierce, said outside the court, "We have the most serious concerns in relation to a young man who was hideously tortured in Somalia for two months, was forcibly and illegally deported to this country and where the question has been repeatedly raised of the complicity of the British authorities and the security services in that unlawful removal."

On Britain's alleged involvement in the abuse and rendition of Mohamed and CF, the *Guardian* reports, "It appears that, in January 2011, CF wished to return to the UK via Addis Ababa, and asked Mohamed to help him travel across Somaliland and on to the Ethiopian border. On the night of 14 January, while staying in a house in the town of Burao, the pair heard a helicopter hovering overhead. Moments later, a group of armed and uniformed men burst through the front door, forced hoods over their heads and tied their hands tight behind their backs".

It continues, "CF claims he could hear the leader giving orders in English, with a British accent. At one point, the hoods were said to have been lifted briefly so that their faces could be checked against what appeared to be mugshots. Both men say they were fingerprinted and that DNA swabs were taken from inside their cheeks; CF says 'Bravo 1' was written across his forehead."

For the next several days, both men allege that "they

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faced mock executions and severe beatings, and were then held in brightly lit cells at a prison in Somaliland. CF claims he was kept naked for a period, and was once half-strangled with a piece of cloth. When a UK Foreign Office consular official visited CF a month after his detention, he recorded that marks, apparently from handcuffs, were visible on CF's wrists."

Both men say they were interrogated repeatedly, being posed questions based on information that can only have been supplied by the British authorities. The local media reported that their capture "was the result of a joint operation by British and Somaliland intelligence officers."

On March 13, both were forced aboard a flight to Dubai. The *Guardian* reported that Mohamed "begged to be returned instead to Somalia, to be reunited with his family. In Dubai, they were put aboard another flight, to London, and guarded en route. Neither man was aware of any formal deportation process."

Facts have since emerged, reported by the *Guardian*, pointing to Britain's role in these heinous events. According to the newspaper, Home Secretary Theresa May "had signed Mohamed's control order on 13 January 2011, the day before the pair were arrested. Then it became clear that in March that year, two days before the pair were taken from prison and forced aboard an aircraft, MI5 had sent an email to police at Heathrow giving precise details of the flight upon which the men would be arriving at the airport."

Mohamed was stopped and asked 118 questions under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. This was the same legislation used to illegally detain, in August of this year, David Miranda, the partner of former *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald.

The MI5 e-mail requested of the police, "We would be grateful if you would NOT be drawn into any discussion with MOHAMED regarding HMG [Her Majesty's Government] involvement in his arrest." It added, "You should be aware that any such write up is likely to be disclosable in any future civil proceedings."

Following hours of questioning, Mohammed was told he was being put under a control order (the predecessor of TPIMs) and that he would have to live in Ipswich, in the east of England, with stringent prohibitions on his activity.

MI5's claim that the two men were involved in terrorism poses the question, why were they allowed to live among the general population? When news broke of Mohamed's disappearance from the mosque, May said he did not pose "a direct threat" to the public.

To conceal the role of its operatives in alleged torture and abuse of a British citizen, the British government is utilising a new antidemocratic law, passed earlier this year. Lawyers representing the government's spy services are using provisions of the Justice and Security Act. This means that any evidence possessed by the government supporting such allegations will in all likelihood never be made public. The Act allows for such material only being heard by a court in secret. Even the part of a court's final judgment referring to such evidence would be concealed.

Yet more draconian legislation is being prepared by the government, including powers to make "terror suspects" stateless. May is planning the removal of UK passports from such individuals, even if they have no other citizenship and become "stateless" as a result.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government has already confiscated the UK passports of 16 individuals who have dual nationality.

International human rights conventions signed by Britain, including the United Nation's 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, prevent a government from making stateless a person with only one citizenship. May has asked officials to investigate how to circumvent these conventions. A law to this effect could be enacted through an amendment to the immigration bill now going through parliament, according to the *Financial Times* .

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