

UK terror trial collapses because defendant briefed MI5

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A scheduled Old Bailey trial of British citizen and former Guantánamo prisoner Moazzam Begg collapsed last week, when all seven terrorism-related charges against him were dropped at a pretrial review.

Attempting to explain, West Midlands Police stated that new evidence had come to light which had “a significant impact on key pieces of evidence that underpinned the prosecution’s case”. The force’s Chief Constable added, “explaining what this newly revealed information is ... would be unfair and inappropriate as they are no longer going to be tested in court.”

The police did not want to reveal that the case collapsed due to the revelation that intelligence officials from MI5 had extensive contacts with Begg and that he fully briefed the domestic spy agency on his activities before and after his trips to Syria. The *Guardian* reported October 2 that court documents “included minutes of meetings that MI5 officers and lawyers held with Begg, at which he discussed his travel plans and explained he was assisting opposition fighters in their war against Bashar al-Assad’s regime.”

Begg was one of four people arrested in February this year on suspicion of attending a terrorist training camp in Syria between October 9, 2012 and April 9, 2013, possessing documents for a purpose connected to terrorism and funding terrorism. The other three people were charged on suspicion of facilitating terrorism overseas.

Begg had been brutally tortured and held in the notorious Bagram Prison in Afghanistan and at Guantánamo for almost three years, mostly in solitary confinement, before he was released in 2005.

The facts known are that he made several trips to Syria after civil war broke out in 2011. The most recent was in December 2012.

Since being released from prison in 2005 he has campaigned, with the Caged organisation, on behalf of prisoners detained at Guantánamo and other secret detention sites and those who have been illegally rendered to countries including Syria, Libya and Egypt. Many of these actions were carried out with the “complicity of the governments of the US, Canada, France, Sweden, Germany, Denmark and Britain”, said Begg.

Begg states that during his first visit to Syria he was investigating reports of US and British government illegal rendition (kidnapping) operations, compiling reports and interviewing former prisoners of the Assad regime.

A *Guardian* article following the collapse of the case stated that the second Syrian visit by Begg “was to help to run a training camp in the countryside near Idlib, northwest Syria, where opponents of the regime could undergo physical exercise and acquire the rudiments of first aid and military training, with fake wooden guns.”

Begg’s lawyer told the pretrial hearing, “He has never made any secret of his visits to Syria and on two occasions informed authorities of his travel plans.

“Mr Begg did not train anyone for the purposes of terrorism as defined in the 2001 act. Mr Begg says he was involved in training young men to defend civilians against war crimes by the Assad regime.”

The trial was due to begin on October 6, but ended at a pretrial review on October 1. At the hearing, Begg pleaded not guilty to all the charges. Prosecution lawyers then told the court that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) had decided there was insufficient evidence to continue with the prosecution, after “new material” emerged. The judge formally acquitted Begg of all charges and he was released from prison hours later.

Begg states that his contacts with MI5 began after he published an August 16, 2012 blog, stating that he had uncovered evidence that MI5 had intercepted a phone call by a British Libyan dissident living in Syria who was then tortured and rendered to Libya.

Begg authored another blog, published December 24, 2013, in which he revealed he had been contacted by an MI5 officer. He wrote, “A few months later, in October 2012, I was called by an MI5 officer who said they wanted to talk to me about my views on the situation in Syria after having read my article. I told them that they must be aware that I was investigating several leads regarding British and American complicity in rendition and torture in Syria. They called back after consulting with their lawyers and said they understood that and would still like to meet. I agreed to speak to them and meet at a hotel in East London. Both MI5 *and* me had our lawyers present.”

In the meeting, Begg said MI5 had raised concerns about “the possibility of Britons in Syria being radicalised and returning to pose a potential threat to national security. *I told them that Britain had nothing to worry about, especially since British foreign policy, at the time, seemed in favour of the rebels.*” [emphasis added]

Begg wrote, “At the end of the meeting I was assured by MI5 that my proposed return to Syria to continue my work would not be hindered, and it wasn’t.”

Nothing was left to chance by MI5, with court documents revealing that Begg’s car was bugged, with the listening device in place for more than a year.

Begg explains that in the week leading up to his December blog being written, he returned from a trip to South Africa and “was met upon arrival at Heathrow by officials who served me with a notice to seize my passport under the ‘Royal Prerogative’ stating that it was assessed my previous visits to Syria had constituted involvement in terrorism.”

It is obvious at this stage that all elements of the state were not au fait with MI5’s relations with Begg. The *Guardian* reported, after the collapse of Begg’s trial, “West Midlands police officers were furious that MI5 had withheld the minutes of its meetings with Begg for so long.”

The CPS for its part said, “If we had been made aware of all of this information at the time of charging, we would not have charged.”

Sections of the *Chmediah*, such as focused attention on whether Begg himself fought against Assad, or trained anyone else to fight, and on his views on the “fact that some of the groups you worked with [in Syria] are now proscribed.”

This is deliberate obfuscation.

The revelations in the Begg case in reality expose every justification used by British imperialism for its ongoing military action in Iraq against ISIS, and its planned operation in Syria against Assad, as a massive fraud.

The devastating sectarian civil war against Assad was stoked by the US and Britain. From the beginning, the imperialist powers backed the numerous Islamist proxy forces aligned against Assad. One British MP estimated that at least 1,500 Britons had gone to fight against Assad, equating to “more than twice as many Muslims than are serving in the British Army.”

Only one conclusion can be drawn from the information made public by Begg. As with MI5’s agreement with Begg, there is no doubt that the decision of many of those Britons to fight Assad in Syria was well known to the intelligence agencies and that their departure was green-lighted. Equally, there is no question that among these formerly hailed as “freedom fighters” were those who joined up with the Al Qaeda offshoot ISIS, as the US and Saudi-sponsored civil war in Syria spilled over into Iraq, and who are now the new “terrorist” bogeymen.



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