

US Senate committee agreed to conceal UK complicity in CIA torture

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The UK government had redactions made to the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) interrogation. Britain's collusion in the torture of individuals who were illegally seized by US authorities is now established.

The 500-page report, itself a heavily-redacted summary from a 6,000 page still-classified document, reveals the CIA operated a brutal and systematic programme of torture and abuse. For decades, successive British governments have slavishly supported every war, including the illegal invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, out of which the CIA's torture regime emerged. Yet the Senate's summary contains not a single reference to the UK intelligence agencies, despite citing cases in which they were intimately involved.

The government of Prime Minister David Cameron had previously maintained that it did not ask the Senate Intelligence Committee to make any redactions to the report. Downing Street was still maintaining this lie on Wednesday, the day the report was published. Asked by reporters if any redactions had been sought, Cameron's spokesman said there had been "none whatsoever, to my knowledge."

On Thursday, Cameron's deputy official spokesman said, "My understanding is that no redactions were sought to remove any suggestion that there was UK involvement in any alleged torture or rendition. But I think there was a conversation with the agencies and their US counterparts on the executive summary. Any redactions sought there would have been on national security grounds in the way we might have done with any other report."

On Friday, it was revealed that Home Secretary Theresa May, among other senior UK government officials, met members of the US Senate committee

working on the CIA report. Another who met the committee was Lord West, who previously held the post of chief of defence intelligence and from 2007-10 was Chairman of National Security Forum in the last Labour government.

On Friday, opposing calls for a public inquiry into British complicity in torture, West told the BBC, "[I]'m sure there may be the odd case where an agent was aware what the Americans were doing, but that has now been sealed off because they are very clear now what the position is."

He later told Sky that an inquiry would be "a waste of time", adding: "What are we trying to prove? *The only thing one might find is 10, 15 years ago maybe an agent or maybe two agents were aware waterboarding was going on, indeed may even have been in the same building.*" [Emphasis added]

Such claims have no credibility whatsoever.

Among several cases relating to British intelligence agency operations mentioned in the report is that of Binyam Mohamed, a British citizen who was tortured and then sent to Guantanamo Bay under the US's illegal "extraordinary rendition"—kidnappings and torture programme. In 2010, the British Court of Appeal agreed to release an earlier ruling, in the face of fierce opposition from the Labour government, that the UK intelligence body MI5 had colluded with US authorities in Mohamed's torture.

The Mohamed case revealed the extent of British intelligence collusion with its US counterparts, with the UK government insisting that disclosure in court of MI5 and MI6 cooperation with the US authorities would prevent the CIA from sharing intelligence information with Britain in future.

Conservative MP David Davis, who poses as a defender of civil liberties, said, "Downing Street's U-

turn on its previous denial that redactions had taken place tell us what we already know—that there was complicity, and that it wasn't reflected in the Senate report.”

Addressing Mohamed's case, Davis said, “We know from the behaviour of the previous government with respect to the Binyam Mohamed case that the term national security includes national embarrassment.”

Two other cases cited are those of Sami-al-Saadi and Abdel Hakim Belhaj. Both were prominent Libyan dissidents who were abducted in joint UK/US operations and then sent for torture by former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's secret police.

Saadi was taken with his family, including children aged 6, 9, 11 and 13, from Hong Kong and rendered to Tripoli. Belhaj and his expectant wife were abducted in Bangkok the same year and rendered to Tripoli by the CIA. They were allegedly flown via Diego Garcia, the British territory in the Indian Ocean. Belhaj was imprisoned for six years, during which time he was abused, hung from walls and forced into ice baths. Belhaj says he was also interrogated by MI6 officers who again turned a blind eye to his treatment.

Diego Garcia, a tiny Indian Ocean atoll that has been leased by Britain to the US for decades, is not mentioned in the report. Successive UK governments have denied accusations that Diego Garcia was used as a “black site” prison and that US rendition flights landed there. As far back as 2002, the *Washington Post* reported that Diego Garcia was “one of a number of secret detention centers overseas.”

In August the *Observer* first revealed that the UK government had approached the US Senate to censor information. This was regarding Britain's involvement in rendition and torture through the use of Diego Garcia. In a letter to human rights group Reprieve in July, then foreign secretary William Hague said, “The UK government has not sought to influence the content of the Senate report.”

Hague added, “We have made representations to seek assurances that ordinary procedures for clearance of UK material will be followed in the event that UK material provide[d] to the Senate committee were to be disclosed.”

Commenting on the US Senate report, Reprieve spokesman Donald Campbell said, “We already know that the UK was complicit in the CIA's shameful

rendition and torture programme. What we don't know is why there is no mention of that in the public version of the Senate's torture report.”

The report also refers to the case of Moazzam Begg, a British Pakistani citizen who was originally detained at his home in Islamabad in February 2002 by Pakistani agents and handed over to US forces. He was brutally tortured and then held at Bagram airbase, Afghanistan, for one year before being transferred to Guantanamo Bay in February 2003. Here he was beaten, deprived of sleep and detained, mostly in solitary confinement, before being released in 2005.

The Senate report claims, “While still in Pakistani custody, Begg provided reporting on UK-based extremists in the context of terrorist training camps, including information on an individual...”

This led to the arrest of a suspected terrorist Dhiren Barot: “The operation... resulted from the investigative activities of UK government authorities,” the report states.

Begg opposes the Senate's version of events, maintaining that any information extracted from him was by means of torture. In a letter to the *Independent Wednesday*, his lawyers rejected the claim that he “volunteered or co-operated in the provision of information to any intelligence service.”

The letter adds, “Insofar as he was tortured and under extreme and unlawful continuing duress for three-and-a-half years in Bagram and Guantanamo he, as every other individual subject to such treatment, cannot be regarded in any proper sense of the words to have ‘given or provided information’ voluntarily.”



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