

UK: Blair government colluded in extraordinary rendition of Libyans

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Documents produced in a court case in London show that former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and British intelligence were complicit in the rendering of dissidents to Libya to be tortured and interrogated.

The case brought by 12 opponents of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi refutes claims by leading figures in the former Labour government and the present Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, above all those of Blair, that Britain had no involvement in the CIA's extraordinary rendition and torture programme. They reveal Blair for what he is: a criminal and a liar.

The case comes at a time when Blair is coming under increasing pressure over his role in delaying the findings of the Chilcott Inquiry into the Iraq war, now not expected until after the general election in May.

Blair wrote a fawning letter to then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, addressing him "Dear Muammar," saying, "I trust that you, and your family, are well," and signing it, "Best wishes yours ever, Tony."

According to the *Guardian*, the purpose of the letter, written in April 2007 when Britain was collaborating in efforts to send dissidents back to Libya, was to inform Gaddafi that the UK was about to fail in its attempts to deport two Libyans allegedly linked to an opposition organisation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

Blair said that he was "disappointed" that Britain would be unable to send more regime opponents back to Libya. He wrote, "With regret, I should let you know that the British government has not been successful in its recent court case here involving deportation to Libya. I am very disappointed by the court's decision."

He added, "I believe it is essential that this decision is not allowed to undermine the effective bilateral co-operation which has developed between the United

Kingdom and Libya in recent years. We have made such progress. It is important, for the good of both our peoples, that we continue to do so, not least in the crucial area of counter-terrorism."

He wanted to offer "a personal word of thanks" to Gaddafi "for your assistance in the matter of deportation."

He commented on "the excellent co-operation of your officials with their British colleagues," which was "a tribute to the strength of the bilateral relationship, which has grown up between the United Kingdom and Libya. As you know, I am determined to see that partnership develop still further."

Blair's letter is one of hundreds of documents recovered from abandoned government offices in Tripoli after the 2011 NATO-led invasion of Libya to topple the Gaddafi regime and install a puppet government—an illegal war in which Britain took full part. The documents are being studied by a team of London lawyers who are bringing damages claims on behalf of a dozen Gaddafi opponents that claim they were targeted by the two countries' agencies, to piece together the evidence of Britain's involvement.

It is for this reason that the British government sought to have the case struck out without admitting liability, to prevent any exposure of its criminality, lies and cover ups. But the High Court threw out the bid, saying that the allegations "are of real potential public concern" and should be heard and dealt with by the courts.

The government is unlikely to accept the decision that will mean officials being called to give evidence under oath without an appeal.

For years after 9/11, around 54 foreign governments including the Blair Labour government helped the CIA set up "black sites" in their own countries, provided

intelligence to kidnap, interrogate and torture detainees and allowed their airspace and airports to be used for secret flights transporting detainees.

Blair and other ministers, including former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, denied allegations of British involvement in mistreatment of detainees, and mounted a cover-up operation. These denials have been proved to be lies during court cases brought by detainees—notably that of British resident Binyam Mohamed, held as a suspected “enemy combatant” in Guantanamo Bay between 2004 and 2009. He and 15 others received around £1 million in compensation after UK courts proved in 2010 that MI5 were complicit in their unlawful interrogation and torture. Ministers authorised the multi-million pay-out to British men who were held in Guantanamo Bay to prevent their evidence of Britain’s collusion with the US emerging in open court.

In December 2012, the British government paid out £2.2 million to Libyan dissident Sami al-Saadi and his family, who stated under oath that the British intelligence authorities forcibly transferred them to Libya where he was subsequently detained and tortured.

Another Libyan, Abdel Hakim Belhaj, has initiated a civil case against the British government and three officials for “extraordinary rendition.” Belhaj offered to call off the proceedings in exchange for just £3 in damages, an admission of liability for what was done to him and his wife, and an apology from the British government. The government rejected the offer and sought to get the courts to block the case.

Last October, the Court of Appeal ruled that the case could be heard in the English courts, as it involved particularly grave violations of international law and human rights, and was not barred by either state immunity or the act of state doctrine. It rejected the Foreign Office claim that it would damage the UK’s foreign relations and national security interests.

In the 2011 operation, NATO backed the very same Islamist forces, the LIFG, of which Belhaj was a leader and whose members it was earlier illegally rendering to Libya. The same powers now once again oppose the Islamists in the ongoing civil war in the war-torn country.

The current case is being brought by 12 Gaddafi opponents—six Libyan men, the widow of a seventh,

and five British citizens of Libyan and Somali origin—against Britain’s spy agencies, MI5 and MI6, the Home Office and the Foreign Office. Using evidence from the recovered documents, they are alleging false imprisonment, blackmail, misfeasance in public office and conspiracy to assault, and demanding damages. They claim that the British government worked closely with Libya and used information from two opposition leaders, Sami al-Saadi and Abdel Hakim Belhaj, both illegally rendered to Libya where they were tortured, as evidence against them during partially secret proceedings in London.

The men’s lawyers argue that the information led to five of the 12 men being subject to control orders. Furthermore, neither the High Court nor the Special Immigration Appeal Commission were aware of the UK’s role in the kidnapping of the two men who provided the information against the men or that the information was extracted under torture, which would have been inadmissible evidence in court.

As these cases demonstrate, the entire state machinery is involved in criminality: torture, abduction, extraordinary rendition and the denial of due process. More fundamentally, they are the direct outcome of a broader criminal enterprise—the commissioning of illegal wars of aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq, the criminal sponsorship of “regime change” in Libya and Syria and routine assassinations by drones of people deemed terrorists in Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere.

That the government is seeking to stop such cases getting to court testifies to its plans for further criminality, including supporting and arming Al Qaeda-linked outfits as part of the US-led scheme to stoke up a sectarian civil war and install a client government in Syria, and a possible intervention against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, prior to regime change in Iran.

There is no question that the British government will use the same methods at home to deal with the growing working class opposition to social inequality and ever-worsening social and working conditions.



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