

New revelations detail Canada's complicity in torture

Roger Jordan
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The Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) and its *Fifth Estate* investigative program have provided further proof that Canada's security agencies and government connived in the illegal detention and torture of Canadians in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The CBC obtained thousands of pages of secret documents that detail how the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), the country's premier spy agency, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) actively participated in the arrest, detention without trial, interrogation, and torture of three Canadians in Syria.

Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad El-Maati and Muayyed Nureddin were all arrested by the authoritarian Syrian regime between 2001 and 2003 at the instigation of Canada's police and intelligence agencies. Then, over a period of many months, Canadian authorities connived with their Syrian counterparts in their detention and interrogation. This included providing Syria's secret police with questions to ask the men and helping ensure that they remained detained under brutal conditions. Amnesty International has described Almalki's cell as a "grave."

Almalki had been identified by the CSIS and the RCMP as a "suspect" in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. They alleged he had ties to Osama bin Laden through a charity he briefly volunteered for in Afghanistan. One memo shows the RCMP initially labelled him a potential "procurement officer" for al-Qaida. But after two weeks of round-the-clock surveillance, an RCMP officer bluntly noted in a report, "O Div task force are presently finding it difficult to establish anything on him other than the fact that he is an Arab running around."

This did not stop the CSIS from issuing a global terrorist alert about Almalki, which they forwarded to the FBI and CIA. They also supplied the information to Syrian intelligence with the full knowledge that Almalki, who ran an electrical engineering business, would be detained by them the next time he traveled to Damascus.

El-Maati and Nureddin endured similar fates. El-Maati was targeted by the CSIS and the RCMP because he spent time in Afghanistan in the 1990s. He was stopped by US border guards who found a map of buildings in Ottawa in El-Maati's truck. The map included the marked locations of Atomic Energy of

Canada, Eldorado Nuclear Ltd., HBW Virus Labs and HBW Disease Control, and the RCMP concluded on this basis that El-Maati was plotting to attack nuclear and biological facilities. By contrast, Alex Neve of Amnesty International referred to the map as a photocopy regularly given to delivery drivers so they could find their way around Ottawa.

When El-Maati travelled to Syria to get married, he was detained on information supplied by Canadian authorities.

The most well-known case of Canadian-sponsored rendition and torture during this period was that of Maher Arar, who was detained by US agents while changing planes in New York, flown to Syria and tortured for over a year. He later received C\$10.5 million in damages after filing a suit against the Canadian government for its role in his detention and abuse.

The latest revelations substantiate the *World Socialist Web Site's* contention that under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, Canada's security agencies practiced their own rendition-style program under which they fingered terror suspects against whom they had little if any evidence and sent them to countries notorious for abusing prisoners. This enabled the intelligence agencies to circumvent the prohibitions in Canadian law on detention without trial and the use of torture and other "enhanced interrogation" techniques.

Canada's complicity in illegal rendition and torture programs was overseen by the Liberal governments of Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, which embraced the "war on terror" narrative to justify a vast clampdown on democratic rights at home and a substantial increase in Canadian military operations abroad in alliance with US imperialism. With the passage of their 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act, the Liberals undermined long-standing judicial norms, including the right to remain silent, while introducing a catch-all definition of terrorism that could be used to justify state suppression of working-class opposition, including political general strikes. They also vastly expanded the power of the intelligence agencies to conduct comprehensive surveillance on the Canadian population, including the systematic perusal of the metadata of electronic communications.

The Chretien Liberal government deployed troops to Afghanistan, where Canadian forces played a decisive role in the US-led neocolonial occupation of the impoverished Central

Asian country. It was later revealed that Canadian troops were complicit in the torture of hundreds of Afghan “prisoners of war”—most of them poor peasants who had been detained during security sweeps—who were subsequently handed over to Afghan’s notorious intelligence directorate.

The current Liberal government of Justin Trudeau, notwithstanding its rhetoric about “change” during last year’s election, has not lifted a finger to undo any of the crimes of Canadian imperialism. In fact, it is preparing the ground for new ones by escalating Canada’s role in the principal US military-strategic offensives around the globe, in the Middle East and against Russia and China.

Despite the emergence of damning new evidence implicating Canada in war crimes, the Trudeau government formally rejected calls in June for a public inquiry into the torture of the Afghan prisoners of war. This is fully in line with the policy of the Harper Conservative government, which went as far as proroguing parliament in December 2009 to block a parliamentary investigation into the Afghan detainee issue, then flouted a House of Commons order to hand over documents about the detainees when parliament reassembled.

The Trudeau government has also equivocated on its pre-election promises to amend the Harper government’s Bill C-51, deciding to backtrack and hold a phony public consultation before announcing any changes. The 2015 law vastly increases the coercive powers of the state, including empowering the CSIS to violate virtually any law when actively “disrupting” vaguely defined national security “threats.”

Canada also has a ministerial directive still on the books that, in violation of international law, authorizes the intelligence agencies to make use of information that was obtained by torture. Issued by former Conservative Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews, the directive could be rescinded by the current Liberal public safety minister, Ralph Goodale, at the stroke of a pen, but he has refused to do so. In a statement to the CBC, Goodale merely noted that he “continues to assess ministerial directives to ensure that they both protect our rights and freedoms, and keep Canadians safe.” The intelligence agencies, which strongly support the maintenance of the torture directive, also continue to share information with foreign intelligence agencies, even if there is a strong likelihood this could result in individuals being tortured.

Two government public inquiries—one led by Justice Dennis O’Connor into the Arar case, and another by retired Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci into the detention and torture of Almalki, El-Maati and Nureddin—were part of a concerted cover-up by the ruling elite and an exercise in damage control.

O’Connor whitewashed the role of the CSIS and the RCMP by declaring that they were not involved in Arar’s detention by the US or his torture, while Iacobucci absolved the CSIS and the RCMP of any responsibility for the arrest of the trio. This was in spite of the fact that he acknowledged that Canada had provided information to Damascus that was, in the case of

Almalki, “inflammatory, inaccurate, and lacking investigative foundation.”

Reflecting the determination of the Canadian ruling elite to sweep its criminal activity under the carpet, lawyers for Almalki, El-Maati and Nureddin only gained access to the documents containing the latest revelations after a lengthy legal battle. The information contained in them is to be used when court proceedings begin next year on lawsuits the trio has brought against the Canadian government.

Canada’s collusion with the Syrian authorities did not end with the three men’s detentions. The documents obtained by the CBC reveal that Canada’s ambassador in Damascus, Franco Pillarella, arranged for questions drawn up by the RCMP to be hand delivered to the agency torturing Almalki. Pillarella later boasted about his relations with Syria’s security services, proclaiming, “No ambassador has ever, with my exception, had access to the head of military intelligence.”

Questioned on his readiness to hand information to Syrian intelligence despite its use of torture being public knowledge, Pillarella cynically responded that while reports of the use of torture were widespread, unless a person had witnessed torture, “one cannot say for a certainty that this is what would happen.”

Michel Cabana, the RCMP inspector who oversaw the preparation of questions to be asked of Almalki while he was tortured, is now the RCMP deputy commissioner.

To put an end to his brutal torture, El-Maati confessed to being part of preparations for an attack on parliament and that he was an accomplice of bin Laden. Although Canadian authorities were well aware Elmaati was being tortured, the RCMP deemed his confession credible and stepped up security on Parliament Hill.

No government officials made any attempt to free the three men. In fact, the main concern during El-Maati’s detention was that diplomatic officers working in the Canadian embassy in Damascus would get wind of his internment and expose the RCMP’s secret operations. “If consular section approaches the Syrians and asks for access to this guy [El-Maati] they could uncover O Div’s operation,” a Rome-based intelligence operative wrote.



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