

QUAKER CONCERN FOR THE ABOLITION OF TORTURE (Q-CAT)

Briefing 27

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Ministers distance themselves from spooks

Guardian – Richard Norton-Taylor and Nick Hopkins. Defence blog 12/09/11

- Blair latest to deny knowledge of MI6 'rendering' of dissidents to Gaddafi's Libya
- Serious implications for accountability of security and intelligence agencies
- **Libyan rebels' Tripoli military commander Abdel Hakim Belhaj is threatening to sue MI6 and the CIA.**

Ministerial cover for particularly controversial operations is regarded by MI6 as essential... Whitehall officials are therefore far from happy about how present and former ministers are distancing themselves from the way MI6 helped to "render" two Libyan dissidents to Gaddafi's secret services in 2004 at a time the Blair government was cuddling up to the Libyan dictator. Abu Munthir and Abdul Hakim Belhaj (a leader of the anti-Gaddafi militia supported by Britain and Nato), had been leaders, it is alleged, of the militant LIFG [the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group].

Whitehall sources insist that in its dealings with Libya, MI6 was complying with "ministerially authorised government policy". Tell-tale documents were found in the abandoned offices of Moussa Koussa, Gaddafi's former intelligence chief, who became close to MI6 during talks in 2003 which led to Libya giving up its nuclear and chemical weapons programmes.

On 5 September, the day after newspapers quoted extensively from the documents, Jack Straw, foreign secretary at the time, stated: "No foreign secretary can know all the details of what intelligence agencies are doing at any one time"... Have Britain's security and intelligence agencies been out of control - or not? We need to know. Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? - who will guard the guards themselves? - is a vital question in any healthy democracy. Judging by what Blair and Straw have been saying, it certainly was not ministers.

Former MI6 chief says ministers approved Gaddafi links

Richard Norton-Taylor - guardian.co.uk, 15/09/11

Sir Richard Dearlove, who was head of MI6 when British agents helped to send Muammar Gaddafi's opponents back to Libya, where they were tortured, said on Thursday that intelligence co-operation with countries with poor human rights records had always been cleared by ministers... Whitehall officials have already insisted that intelligence cooperation with Gaddafi's Libya was authorised by ministers.

However, Labour ministers at the time, including Tony Blair and Jack Straw, have distanced themselves from MI6's co-operation with Gaddafi's security services, as has Lady Eliza Manningham-Buller, then head of MI5. Dearlove said that MI6's co-operation with Gaddafi's regime against extremism was "uncomfortable" and "pragmatic". But he denied MI6 enjoyed a "cosy" relationship with the regime.

Papers found abandoned in the Tripoli offices of Moussa Koussa, Gaddafi's former foreign minister and intelligence chief, showed how MI6 was involved in sending suspected extremists back to Libya. They included Abdul Hakim Belhaj, a former prominent member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which had links with al-Qaida, and who is now military commander in the Libyan capital.

Referring to the forthcoming Gibson inquiry into allegations that British security and intelligence agencies colluded in the torture and abuse of terror suspects, Dearlove said that he should not say more about co-operation with countries which did not share the UK's views about human rights.

Nato stops sending prisoners to Afghan jails over torture fears

Jeremy Kelly in Kabul and Richard Norton-Taylor – guardian.co.uk. 6/9/11

Nato has suspended the transfer of detainees to some Afghan jails after fears they were being subjected to systematic torture. British defence officials have said. The directive, issued this week, comes ahead of the imminent release of a UN report into detainees that is expected to be highly critical of the Afghan police, who process many of the detainees through the fledgling justice system...

An Uruzgan tribal elder has provided the Guardian with mobile phone footage of a man being stripped naked in front of a few dozen other men who, amid laughter from the onlookers, is then briefly chased with a stick that they threaten to sodomise him with. The elder, Mohammad Dawood Khan, said the perpetrators were all Uruzgan police and while none were wearing uniforms, a police truck is parked next to the group.

Separate research by human rights observers has uncovered medieval-like torture systems, including a stretching rack, and reports of a juvenile detention centre head who together with his son raped teenage inmates.

Torture charity calls on UK to halt deportation flight to Sri Lanka

Ian Cobain - guardian.co.uk, 27/9/11

Britain is being urged to halt plans to deport a planeload of Tamils to Sri Lanka on Wednesday amid fears they will be at risk of being detained and tortured on arrival. Up to 50 failed asylum seekers are due to be forcibly removed from the country aboard an aircraft chartered by the UK Border Agency. The plan has alarmed a number of NGOs, including a medical charity that treats victims of torture, which fears the British government cannot be sure that those deported will be safe in Sri Lanka. Freedom from Torture, formerly known as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, said it received 199 referrals for clinical assistance for Sri Lankans last year and a similar number this year. It said it had clinical evidence that a number of these people have been tortured in Sri Lanka since the end of the civil war in May 2009, some after being returned to the country...

Amnesty International said it had documented evidence that failed asylum seekers had suffered torture in Sri Lanka after being removed from Australia. The UK Border Agency deported 555 people to Sri Lanka last year, 235 of them failed asylum seekers...

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