



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 17, 2012

British and U.S. Intelligence Accused of Aiding Torture of Libyan Rebels

A [New York Times story](#) reports that in the statement released by Crown Prosecution Service and Scotland Yard the scope of the investigation was said to include “two allegations of British involvement in the American-run process of so-called extraordinary rendition of terrorist suspects during the [Gadhafi] era.”

The accusations against the secret British spy agency were said to be “so serious that it is in the public interest for them to be investigated now.”

One of the anti-government fighters supposedly tortured by Gadhafi’s secret police was Abdul Hakim Belhaj. Unlike many others who faced a similar fate, Belhaj survived to tell the tale.



Curiously, Belhaj not only outlived his one-time captor, but he now sits at the head of the Tripoli Military Council. He is described as “one of the most powerful figures in the interim government” that took control of Libya after the fall of the Gadhafi government.

There is another, perhaps more interesting aspect of Belhaj’s personal history. Before ascending to his present position, Belhaj was a leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

In March 2011, [The New American’s Alex Newman cited several authorities](#) on the intimate relationship between Belhaj’s group and al-Qaeda. Newman wrote:

According to U.S. and British government sources ... al-Hasidi is part of the al-Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). The organization represents the second largest contingent of foreign fighters in Iraq battling coalition forces.□□ A study by the U.S. military concluded that the Libyan group had an “increasingly cooperative relationship with al-Qaeda.” In 2007, that “culminated in the LIFG officially joining al-Qaeda.” Al-Qaeda, it should be noted, said earlier this month that the Libyan rebellion would lead to imposition of “the stage of Islam” there.□□ In 2004, former Director of Central Intelligence at the CIA George Tenet actually warned the Senate Intelligence Committee about the same Libyan group. “One of the most immediate threats [to U.S. security] is from smaller international Sunni extremist groups that have benefited from al-Qaeda links. They include ... the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group,” he said.□□ The organization is officially on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations. But according to countless news reports, the U.S. government has been covertly funneling arms to the Libyan rebels for weeks, via Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other nations.

An [article published by Time magazine](#) lays out the events leading to Belhaj’s capture and torture.



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In 2004, as part of a joint CIA and MI6 operation, authorities arrested him and his pregnant wife at the Kuala Lumpur Airport as a suspect in the U.S.-led war on terror. CIA agents then delivered him to the Abu Salim prison in Libya, where he says he was routinely beaten, suspended from the ceiling by his wrists and forced to take drugs. He claims that during interrogations led by British security agents he made hand gestures to covertly express he was being tortured.

According to reports, Belhaj's wife was released by the Libyan secret police shortly after giving birth. Belhaj and 200 other detainees were released in March 2010. From there, Belhaj worked with rebel militias until taking command of the force in Tripoli in August of last year.

Libya released Belhaj and around 200 other Islamists in March 2010. He went on to command rebel forces in Tripoli in August 2011.

Belhaj asserts that he suffered severe physical and mental harm at the hands of his Libyan, British, and American captors and has since filed suit naming the former government of the United Kingdom and MI6 officials as defendants. In his complaint, Belhaj accuses British agents who were present during his interrogation of ignoring his attempts to inform them by hand gestures of the brutal torture he was enduring at the hands of his Libyan captors.

The second case being investigated by Scotland Yard concerns the capture and detention of another Libyan rebel, Sami al-Saadi.

Not surprisingly, al-Saadi is also a former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. His experience with forced rendition on the part of British intelligence was summarized in the *Time* article:

Authorities detained him [al-Saadi], his wife and their four children in Hong Kong in 2004, subsequently forcing them on a plane to Tripoli. Upon arrival, they were allegedly handcuffed and hooded, and had to sit with their legs bound together with wire. He watched his young daughter lose consciousness before being separated from his family and imprisoned. It's one of the few known rendition cases involving an entire family (with children ages between 6 and 13).

As in the case of his former comrade, al-Saadi accuses Libyan and British officials of subjecting him to years of torture before finally releasing him in 2010.

To bolster their cases against the government of the U.K., both men have pointed to a collection of previously classified documents discovered after the fall of Gadhafi's government that "appeared to implicate British officials in cooperating with Colonel [Gadhafi's] agents. The allegations date to a period when former Prime Minister Tony Blair reversed decades of Western hostility to Colonel [Gadhafi] after the Libyan leader renounced support for terrorism and gave up ambitions to acquire unconventional weapons."

The duplicitous relationship between the West and central members of the Gadhafi regime seems to be more despicable than even originally suspected. Take the case of Moussa Koussa, for example.

Koussa was the head of the Libyan intelligence agency from 1994 to 2009, and was considered one of the country's most powerful figures. From 2009 until he defected to the U.K. in March 2011, Koussa was the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Gadhafi government.

The *New York Times* reports that after days of questioning by agents of MI6 and Scotland Yard, Koussa was allowed to emigrate to Qatar "where he has been seen in recent months living in a luxury hotel." [Additional reports out of the U.K.](#) reveal that Koussa's assets were unfrozen and he is allowed to travel without restrictions throughout the European Union.



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The British government's release of Koussa has caused concern among many in England and Scotland, as he is suspected by some in Scottish law enforcement of having participated in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. That terrorist bombing claimed the lives of 270 people.

There is credible evidence that Koussa, even if not personally involved in the bombing, could provide crucial information about the event, as in the 1980s he was a leader of the Libyan Bureau for External Security (the Mathaba), which has been linked to the Lockerbie bombing.

Regarding his knowledge of the Lockerbie bombing, [one observer speaking to the BBC](#) said of Koussa, "This is a guy who knows everything."

For his part, the American-educated Koussa [released a statement](#) declaring his absolute innocence of all charges being leveled against him:

I have never tortured anyone nor been involved in torture; neither was I present at the massacre at Abu Salim prison.

I also had no involvement of any kind or knowledge of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988.

Scotland Yard's decision to investigate MI6's role in the abuse, torture, and rendition of several former Muslim suspects has caused a diplomatic chill between London and Washington, particularly as the legal discovery process leads to the release of many documents exposing embarrassing details of the CIA's secret rendition program and the tangled web woven among Washington, London, Tripoli, and al-Qaeda.

Photo of Abu Salim prison in Tripoli: AP Images



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