

EXILED IN KHARTOUM

CSIS asked Sudan to arrest Canadian, files reveal

Abdelrazik is 'first case of Canadian rendition,' MP says

PAUL KORING

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Canadian security operatives asked Sudan - a country with a notorious record of torture and abuse in its prisons - to arrest and detain Canadian citizen Abousifian Abdelrazik, according to heavily redacted Canadian documents, marked "secret."

The newly obtained documents provide the strongest evidence to date that Canadian Security Intelligence agents engaged in the Bush-era U.S. practice of getting other countries to imprison those it considered security risks abroad rather than charge them with any crime.

"Now we have the smoking gun, that our government through CSIS was responsible for Mr. Abdelrazik's incarceration" in Sudan, NDP MP Paul Dewar said yesterday.

Along with The Globe and Mail, Mr. Dewar is in possession of the documents obtained as part of Mr. Abdelrazik's court battle to return to his family in Montreal.

CSIS, which has never explained its murky role in the imprisonment and overseas interrogations of Mr. Abdelrazik, denied it had him arrested in Khartoum. The agency did, however, keep him under surveillance for years in Montreal before he left to visit his ailing mother in Khartoum in 2003.

"CSIS does not and has not arranged for the arrest of Canadian citizens overseas," Isabelle Scott, a spokeswoman for the intelligence agency said in an e-mail yesterday. "In the case of Mr. Abdelrazik, CSIS reiterates that it acted in accordance with the CSIS Act, law and policy."

But the newly released documents, including one dated Dec. 16, 2006, marked secret and sent from Khartoum to senior Foreign Affairs and security officials in Ottawa, says "Abousifian Abdelrazik was arrested on September 10, 2003 [words blacked out] recommendation by CSIS, for suspected involvement with terrorist elements."

Later in the same document, an extensive summary of the Abdelrazik case up to that date, it is confirmed that Sudan's secret police believe Mr. Abdelrazik is innocent.

Sudan's security agencies are fed up with CSIS for washing its hands of the case "despite the fact that initial recommendations for his detention emerged from CSIS," the document says.

"As far as I know, this is the first case of Canadian rendition," Mr. Dewar said, referring to the now-outlawed and discredited U.S. Central Intelligence Agency practice of having suspects picked up abroad and sometimes even sent to third countries, where brutal treatment and harsh interrogation methods were common.

"The pattern is similar to the Bush administration use of rendition. How else can we explain that CSIS - Canada's CIA - was requesting that a foreign government incarcerate one of our citizens in some kind of preventative detention ... put him in jail because he might be dangerous, this was exactly what the Bush philosophy was," Mr. Dewar said.

Mr. Abdelrazik says he was beaten and tortured during nearly two years in Sudanese jails, an account consistent with Canada's own internal reports on the Khartoum's regime's grim human-rights record.

In an effort to discredit his accounts of torture, Canadian Justice Department lawyers have tried to get Mr. Abdelrazik to say scars on his abdomen were self-inflicted mutilations.

Sudan's security apparatus makes no effort to obscure its willingness to use brutal methods. Last month, Sudan's intelligence chief Salah Gosh publicly threatened "to sever the limbs of those who attempt" to indict President Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

The apparently useful working relationship between CSIS and Sudan's National Security and Intelligence Agency carried risks that were well understood by Canadian officials. In another secret memo, sent just before the CSIS interrogation team headed for Khartoum less than a month after Mr. Abdelrazik was imprisoned, a senior Foreign Affairs official warned that "Ahmed El-Mahdi, a Canadian citizen and suspected war criminal" had once held the post of Sudan's Director of Foreign Security.

"We will advise CSIS of this, before any CSIS team travels to Khartoum," he added.

In a motion circulated yesterday, Mr. Dewar proposed that Parliament's Foreign Affairs committee summon CSIS director Jim Judd, "to explain Canada's role in the arrest of Canadian citizen Abousfian Abdelrazik by Sudan's National Security and Intelligence Agency on September 10, 2003."

Successive Canadian governments have never explained the role of Canadian agents in Mr. Abdelrazik's imprisonment. But a trove of previously secret documents show Canadian diplomats were ordered to refuse his plea for consular assistance when U.S. counter-intelligence agents interrogated him.

CSIS agents also flew to Sudan where they questioned Mr. Abdelrazik in a Khartoum prison.

The new documents add credence to another, previously disclosed document, stamped "CSIS," that said Mr. Abdelrazik was imprisoned "at our request" - meaning Canada's.

Mr. Abdelrazik is now living in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum. The Harper government refuses to issue him a passport. Its long-standing promise to give him emergency travel documents if he secured a reservation to fly home to Montreal was broken when a confirmed itinerary was arranged. Foreign Affairs officials now insist he must first have a fully paid-for ticket. He is destitute and the government has threatened to charge anyone who loans or gives him money for a ticket.

The Harper government says it sought Mr. Abdelrazik's removal from the UN Security Council's list of al-Qaeda operatives more than a year ago. He was originally added to the list - the only living Canadian on it - by the Bush administration. Although the blacklist includes a travel ban, the right to return home is explicitly permitted.

"The effective banishment of Mr. Abdelrazik is intentional," says Ottawa lawyer Yavar Hameed, who has been handling the case for free for more than a year. "By keeping him in the embassy they can have him under closer surveillance."

Then foreign minister Maxime Bernier said he was granting Mr. Abdelrazik "temporary safe haven" in the embassy, but he has been living there since April last year.

TIMELINE

1990

Mr. Abdelrazik, fleeing the violence of a civil war and coup in Sudan, arrives in Canada and is granted political refugee status.

1995

He becomes a Canadian citizen.

2000

After the arrest of Ahmed Ressam, the millennium bomber, Mr. Abdelrazik and other Muslims living in Montreal come under close surveillance by Canadian counter-terrorism agents. Mr. Abdelrazik says it amounts to harassment so severe that he calls the Montreal police for help. He is never charged with any crime, denies any connection with al-Qaeda and testifies for the prosecution at Mr. Ressam's trial.

2003

MARCH 23

He arrives in Khartoum from Montreal, travelling on his Canadian passport to visit his mother.

DECEMBER

Interrogated by people he identifies as "Canadians." While in prison, Mr. Abdelrazik says he was repeatedly beaten and tortured. In an affidavit this year, he admits to telling his interrogators "what they wanted to hear."

2004

The United States puts Mr. Abdelrazik on the "no fly" list. Most international airlines abide by the list, fearing they will be denied landing rights in the United States if they don't.

JULY

Mr. Abdelrazik is released from prison after 11 months. He was expected to fly home to Canada with a Lufthansa-Air Canada ticket paid for by his family. A Canadian diplomat was to escort him on temporary travel papers because his passport had expired.

JULY 23

The flight home is scrapped at the last minute when Air Canada and Lufthansa refuse to carry him on the grounds that he has been added to the U.S. no-fly list, even though routing doesn't involve a U.S. stop. Senior officials in Ottawa order diplomats in Khartoum not to tell Mr. Abdelrazik about the U.S. no-fly list but to tell him that the government of Canada is powerless to tell airlines to transport him. He's required to live in a police-owned and monitored house.

SEPTEMBER 29

Senior Sudan official warns Canadian diplomats that "Sudan realized however that keeping an innocent man in detention was a human-rights violation. So far, they had prevented him from having access to news media and HR organizations but this could not go on forever. He thought that protest and public attention to this story would impact adversely on both our countries. In particular, it would tarnish Canada's reputation in Arab countries."

NOVEMBER 24

Then-PM Paul Martin arrives in Khartoum on a Canadian military Airbus with seating for more than 150. Embassy officials thwart Mr. Abdelrazik's efforts to meet with PM and the aircraft leaves with scores of empty seats. A senior official travelling with the prime minister meets Mr. Abdelrazik.

2005 APRIL 13

"Canada's senior diplomat in Sudan agrees to tell Mr. Abdelrazik "I can assure you that the Govt of Canada has had no involvement whatsoever in any decision to place your name on such lists."

MAY 9

Senior Foreign Affairs diplomat warns that Mr. Abdelrazik "has reached the end of his rope, he has no money, no future, very little freedom and no hope. Should this case break wide open in the media, we may have a lot of explaining to do."

JULY 26

Sudan Minister of Justice issues Mr. Abdelrazik a formal document exonerating him. We "did not find any evidence" linking him to terrorism or crime or al-Qaeda.

OCTOBER

He is rearrested. Canadian consular access is denied. But an undated and heavily redacted Canadian Foreign Affairs document marked secret and carrying a CSIS stamp says he was imprisoned "at our request," but it isn't clear whether that was the first, second or both times.

2006

JULY 20

He is released from prison after 10 months as the Sudanese say they cannot hold an "innocent" man. A Canadian diplomat, in a message to Ottawa, says he "appears to be a broken man," but Ottawa tells diplomats to tell Mr. Abdelrazik they won't give him a passport or travel documents.

JULY 23

The United States formally designates him a terrorist "for his high-level ties to and support for the al-Qaeda."

JULY 31

He's added to UN Security Council terrorist blacklist by the U.S.

2007 MAY 15

Mr. Abdelrazik is called by the Sudanese secret police for an interrogation by a visiting FBI anti-terrorist team. He asks for Canadian consular help, but Ottawa expressly forbids diplomats in Khartoum to escort him. After the interrogation, Canadian diplomats report to Ottawa that Mr. Abdelrazik was told that "he will never return to Canada" unless he co-operates fully.

NOVEMBER 15

RCMP anti-terrorism branch formally tells Harper government that it has "conducted a review of its files and was unable to locate any current and substantive information that indicates Mr. Abdelrazik is involved in criminal activity."

2008 FEBRUARY 22

Despite RCMP's exoneration, CSIS's most recent terrorist update summary still says "Abdelrazik received training at the Khalden camp in Afghanistan in 1996 and is important Islamic Jihad activist."

MARCH 25

Maxime Bernier, the Canadian foreign minister, visits Khartoum. His chief of staff and MP Deepak Obhrai meet with Mr. Abdelrazik, who lifts his shirt to show scars that he says were from torture and beatings while in prison.

APRIL 29

Mr. Abdelrazik seeks refuge in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum. Mr. Bernier grants him "temporary safe haven," suggesting that he poses no threat to the embassy but may be at risk of re-imprisonment in Sudan.

SEPTEMBER 15

Etiihad Airlines agrees to fly Mr. Abdelrazik from Khartoum to Toronto via Abu Dhabi on this date. But the Canadian government fails to deliver on its long-standing promise, first made in 2004, that Mr. Abdelrazik, like all Canadian citizens, is entitled to emergency travel documents to return home.

DECEMBER 23

Passport Canada adds a new condition - a fully paid-for ticket, not just a confirmed reservation - must be presented before Mr. Abdelrazik will be issued emergency travel documents. Mr. Abdelrazik is destitute. The government says it must seize his assets and anyone who gives him any money is committing a crime.

Source: Paul Koring