

Canada feared U.S. backlash over man trapped in Sudan Officials warned against allowing Abdelrazik to return

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Senior Canadian intelligence officials warned against allowing Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen, to return home from Sudan because it could upset the Bush administration, classified documents reveal.

"Senior government of Canada officials should be mindful of the potential reaction of our U.S. counterparts to Abdelrazik's return to Canada as he is on the U.S. no-fly list," intelligence officials say in documents in the possession of The Globe and Mail.

"Continued co-operation between Canada and the U.S. in the matters of security is essential. We will need to continue to work closely on issues related to the Security of North America, including the case of Mr. Abdelrazik," the document says. Although heavily redacted, the documents illuminate a government keen to placate the Bush administration, irrespective of the guilt or innocence of Mr. Abdelrazik, who has lived in the lobby of the Canadian embassy in Khartoum for nearly three months.

"He's at the mercy of the Americans," Mr. Hameed said, adding the Canadian government is "fighting tooth and nail" against his effort to prove he has "a right to return home." The documents, dated April 30, 2008, and marked "Secret - Canadian eyes only" also designate Mr. Abdelrazik, a citizen who has never been charged with a crime, as "involved in Islamic extremist activities."

Mr. Abdelrazik was imprisoned in Sudan while visiting his ailing mother in 2003, apparently because Canadian counter terrorist agents asked the Sudanese secret police to pick him up.

The Abdelrazik documents - prepared by senior intelligence and security officials in Transport Canada, the unit that creates and maintains Canada's own version of the terrorist "no-fly" list - make clear that it was the U.S. list that kept Mr. Abdelrazik from returning to Canada when he was released from prison three years ago.

That appears to contradict the explanation by former foreign minister Maxime Bernier who told the House of Commons that "Mr. Abdelrazik is currently notable to return to Canada on his own because he is on the United Nations' list of suspected terrorists."

Mr. Abdelrazik is on the UN's so-called 1267 list - named for the resolution cosponsored by Canada that created it - but the travel ban allows specific exemptions, including

travel for medical reasons, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to return to the country of citizenship.

Mr. Abdelrazik was jailed in Sudan's notorious Kober prison, where he says he was beaten and tortured. Previously obtained documents, marked

"CSIS" - a reference to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service - say he was imprisoned "at our request" meaning at Canada's request.

CSIS agents interrogated Mr. Abdelrazik with the co-operation of Sudan's security services in December, 2003, while he was in Kober prison. Mr. Abdelrazik says he told Canadian diplomats he was being tortured in Kober, but they didn't care.

The classified Transport Canada documents show the Bush administration labelled Mr. Abdelrazik a terrorist threat on July 20, 2007, the same day he was released by the Sudanese government, which said it could no longer imprison a man they deemed to be innocent.

He was also put on the Bush administration's Transportation Security Administration's "no-fly" blacklist at the same time.

Two days later, Lufthansa and Air Canada refused to allow Mr. Abdelrazik to fly home to Montreal from Khartoum via Frankfurt. That was before Canada had its own no-fly list and more than a year before the Bush administration succeeded in adding Mr. Abdelrazik's name to the UN list of alleged al-Qaeda operatives.

Most international airlines are unwilling to risk sanctions by the Bush administration and refuse to carry anyone on the U.S. blacklist even if they are flying a route that doesn't involve a U.S. stop or airspace.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government made it clear to Air Canada that even without its own list, it didn't want the airline to allow Mr. Abdelrazik on its flights.

"If you should revisit your position on transporting Mr. Abdelrazik, the government of Canada would expect you to discuss arrangements for such travel with us," the airline is warned in another government document, also marked secret.

The two senior officials whose names are attached to the secret document naming Mr. Abdelrazik as an "Islamic Extremist" - Isabelle Desmartis, director of security policy for Transport Canada, and Debra Normoyle, director-general of security and emergency preparedness at Transport Canada - did not return calls for comment.

"The words are defamatory," Mr. Hameed said, referring to the "Islamic Extremist" label.

The description echoes that used by the RCMP to describe Maher Arar, who received an apology and was paid more than \$10-million in compensation by Ottawa for its complicity in identifying him to U.S. counter terrorist agents, who then sent him to Syria where he was tortured.

In the final report of the Arar commission of inquiry, Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor concluded "the RCMP had no basis for this description, which had the potential to create serious consequences for Mr. Arar in light of American attitudes."

Mr. Abdelrazik denies any link with Islamic extremists groups or al-Qaeda.

He says he simply wants to return to his family in Montreal.

Foreign Affairs officials say in correspondence with Mr. Hameed that the Canadian government supports removing Mr. Abdelrazik from the UN blacklist of alleged al-Qaeda suspects, but the government declines to confirm that publicly.

Meanwhile, the government continues to refuse to issue Mr. Abdelrazik anew Canadian passport. His previous one expired while he was imprisoned and his Sudanese jailers returned it to the Canadian embassy.

Canadian diplomats say they would issue him emergency travel documents, but only if he had an airline ticket.

That is impossible as long as he remains on the U.S. no-fly list.