

Canadians secretly interrogated Abdelrazik, papers show

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Canadian agents secretly interrogated Canadian Abousfian Abdelrazik in a Sudanese jail as early as October of 2003, while keeping the rest of the government and his family in the dark about his whereabouts.

Newly obtained government documents, now in the possession of The Globe and Mail, also show that in a secret briefing to then foreign affairs minister Maxime Bernier, officials admitted as recently as last year that Mr. Abdelrazik had been originally imprisoned in Khartoum at the request of mysterious “Canadian” authorities.

The briefing note for Mr. Bernier, who had signed documents seeking Mr. Abdelrazik's removal from a UN terrorist blacklist, was dated February, 2008. It confirmed: “We were not informed of his arrest until November 2003, when Sudanese authorities advised us he was detained at the request of the government of Canada (please see attached memo for more detail).”

That eight-page memo apparently detailing which Canadian authorities arranged with Sudan's notorious secret police to arrest and imprison Mr. Abdelrazik has been cleared for release – but only with every single word, including the page numbers, blacked out.

Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen who had been detained in Sudan, is seen in this family photo.

Meanwhile, Canada's spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, has railed against Foreign Affairs documents suggesting Mr. Abdelrazik was imprisoned by Sudan at the request of CSIS. It went so far as to demand an investigation by its oversight body – the Security Intelligence Review Committee – to clear its name, insisting CSIS “does not, and has not, arranged for the arrest of Canadian citizens overseas.”

However, in a letter dated April 14, CSIS confirmed in writing to SIRC that its agents interrogated Mr. Abdelrazik “in October 2003 ... while he was in detention in Sudan.”

What isn't explained is how CSIS agents could have known Mr. Abdelrazik was in prison in Sudan when – according to the ministerial briefings – the rest of the Canadian government and his family didn't know Mr. Abdelrazik's whereabouts until the following month.

“Perhaps they kept Foreign Affairs in the dark,” said Paul Dewar, the NDP MP who has championed Mr. Abdelrazik's case and whose office obtained the briefing notes prepared for Mr. Bernier. “We can't have our spy agency interrogating citizens without telling the rest of the government,” Mr. Dewar said.

In an effort to force the government's hand, Mr. Dewar has a motion demanding that Mr. Abdelrazik be brought before Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. A vote on the motion is expected later today although Conservative MPs may attempt to block or delay it.

Mr. Dewar said it was impossible to reconcile the various timelines and conflicting claims revealed in government documents. "It's either incompetence or ignorance, perhaps both," he said. "What is clear is that we are not getting the straight story."

Although the most recently obtained documents confirm another glaring discrepancy in the claims made by various government agencies involved with Mr. Abdelrazik, a review of thousands of pages of document in The Globe's possession shows that not everyone in the Foreign Affairs ministry was unaware of Mr. Abdelrazik's imprisonment.

In an Oct., 16, 2003, e-mail marked "secret," officials of the intelligence unit of Foreign Affairs note that CSIS agents will pass on details of their then just-completed interrogation of Omar Khadr in Guantanamo and planned to "send two officers to Sudan next week to interview Abdelrazik."

The government of Stephen Harper is now blocking Mr. Abdelrazik's return to Canada and fighting his bid in federal court to force Passport Canada to made good on its previous promise of an emergency one-way travel document.

His lawyer, Yavar Hameed, has said he believes the government is trying to keep a lid on its long involvement in getting Mr. Abdelrazik imprisoned and keeping him out of the country, perhaps at the behest of the U.S. government.

The briefing note for Mr. Bernier of February, 2008, also confirms what had been widely assumed: that it was the Bush administration that put him on the UN Security Council terrorist blacklist, days after it labelled him a terrorist suspect. In what seems to have been a censoring error, the usual government redaction leaves at the "request of the U.S." partially exposed.

Although CSIS long regarded Mr. Abdelrazik as a terrorist suspect, it now says he is just a consular case and that it has no objection to his return home.

Canada rejected Sudan's offer to fly him home after it too cleared him and said it could no longer hold an innocent man as the behest of foreign agents.

Mr. Abdelrazik was cleared of any wrongdoing in writing by both CSIS and the RCMP in November, 2007. The Canadian government then formally applied to the UN Security Council to have him removed from the terrorist blacklist. That was vetoed, presumably by the Bush administration, which claims he is a close confidant of Abu Zubaydah, the senior al-Qaeda member whose evidence is now suspect because he was water boarded more than 80 times in secret CIA prisons.

Meanwhile, Mr. Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen with family in Montreal, continues to live in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum. Last month, hours before he was to return home after

six years of imprisonment and enforced exile, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon formally labelled him a threat to Canada and ordered that a previously promised one-way emergency travel document be denied.