

ABDELRAZIK

## Pointing fingers and a right of return

March 21, 2009 – Globe and Mail

The Abdelrazik affair gets curiouser and curiouser. Yesterday, Canada's civilian spy agency publicly declared itself innocent of having Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen, arrested by Sudan in 2003 on suspicion of terror links. Then who had him arrested? Is CSIS implying that some other Canadian institution (perhaps Foreign Affairs, which pointed a finger at CSIS in official documents) did wrong somehow?

But the real question is why the Conservative government has left Mr. Abdelrazik to languish for nearly 11 months in the Canadian embassy. None of its answers make sense. None have any credibility. And every time Canada's objections are shown to be empty, the government tosses up another one.

At the same time, two cabinet ministers, Jason Kenney and John Baird, are speaking out for the release of the Canadian Bashir Makhtal, detained in Ethiopia for two years without charges. Why, if one detainee can be defended, is the government doing cartwheels to find new ways to keep Mr. Abdelrazik from coming back to Canada?

At this point, the Abdelrazik affair is not really about whether the Sudanese-born Canadian is a terrorist bad guy. It's about due process for a citizen. But it's worth emphasizing that CSIS and the RCMP have certified in writing that Mr. Abdelrazik is not a danger. Sudan also says it has nothing on him. If Canada's own security agencies believe he is not guilty of anything, this country's refusal to allow him back is a terrible comment on its commitment to its citizens abroad.

And now, CSIS is trying to put distance between itself and the Abdelrazik affair. It asked yesterday for an independent inquiry from an oversight body, the Security Intelligence Review Committee. CSIS seems to be feeling wrongly accused. A SIRC inquiry might help CSIS, but it won't help Mr. Abdelrazik get home.

What on earth is the Canadian government doing on this file? It declares that it cannot fly a citizen home because his name is on a UN watch list of suspected terrorists. Yet the UN has published guidelines saying that countries do not have to bar entry to people on the watch list. Some on the watch list have flown on military flights, others on commercial flights.

CSIS, which has just been through two public inquiries, both involving Canadians tortured in Syria (and in one case Egypt), says its hands are clean, implying that someone else's may be dirty. Scores of Canadians have volunteered, at some legal risk to themselves, to pay for Mr. Abdelrazik's flight home. Sooner or later, the Canadian government will have to supply some answers on this file.

Citizens have a right of return. Canada should allow Mr. Abdelrazik to come home. His return may embarrass the government, but that embarrassment will only grow worse with each day that goes by.