

Terror is no excuse for abandoning a citizen

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Every new document that is unearthed, every new piece of information that is leaked points to an utter failure on the part of successive Canadian governments to extend the most basic of rights to one of this country's citizens, Aboufian Abdelrazik.

The latest document to emerge, the Globe and Mail reports, is a briefing note that states that Canadian Security Intelligence Service officials interviewed Abdelrazik in October 2003, a month before any other branch of the government or even Abdelrazik's family knew where he was being held.

Abdelrazik, now 47, was in Khartoum, Sudan. He's still there, now living in legal limbo in the Canadian embassy. He says he was tortured in Sudanese jail.

In a murky tale worthy of John Le Carré, Abdelrazik was branded a terrorist on the basis of torture-induced information from a man with shrapnel in his brain and no memory. This "informant," Abu Zubaydah, was reportedly subjected to water-boarding in secret CIA prisons more than 80 times.

Zubaydah was described as a senior Al-Qa'ida member by the Bush administration. His British lawyer denies that Zubaydah was any such thing, describing him instead as a stateless Palestinian with brain injuries.

If there were plausible reasons to think that Abdelrazik had harboured terrorist plans or assisted somehow in terrorist acts, the one legal course of action for Canada to follow is to bring him home, charge him and try him, or revoke his citizenship. If not, he should be free to return to Canada. He's a citizen. Instead Ottawa has put successive roadblocks in his way.

A government that thinks it can pick and choose the citizens to whom it will grant the protection of the law is a government no citizen can trust.

Far too much in this case suggests that successive governments - the Liberals and now the Conservatives - thought, and continue to believe, that simply invoking the word terror gives carte blanche. This thought should send a chill down the spine of any Canadian citizen. Where Abdelrazik can go, so can we all.

Abdelrazik has now been cleared of any criminal wrong-doing by CSIS and the RCMP, but Stephen Harper's government stubbornly clings to its decision to leave him in Sudan as a security risk, with no other explanation.

If our government can do this to one citizen, it can do this to any citizen.

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