

Blair and Brown Governments Gory with Torture

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*Even I was taken aback by the sheer scale of British active involvement in extraordinary rendition revealed by [yesterday's report](#) of the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee. **Dominic Grieve** and the committee deserve congratulations for their honesty, integrity and above all persistence. It is plain from the report that 10 Downing Street did everything possible to handicap the work of the committee. Most crucially they were allowed only to interview extremely senior civil servants and not allowed to interview those actively engaged in the torture and rendition programme.*

Theresa May specifically and deliberately ruled out the Committee from questioning any official who might be placed at risk of criminal proceedings – see para 11 of the report. The determination of the government to protect those who were complicit in torture tells us much more about their future intentions than any fake apology.

In fact it is impossible to read paras 9 to 14 without being astonished at the sheer audacity of Theresa May's attempts to obstruct the inquiry. They were allowed to interview only 4 out of 23 requested witnesses, and those were not allowed "to talk about the specifics of the operations in which they were involved nor fill in any gaps in the timeline". If the UK had a genuinely free media, this executive obstruction of the Inquiry would be the lead story. Instead it is not mentioned in any corporate or state media, despite the committee report containing a firm protest:

14. The Committee considered this denial of access to witnesses to be incompatible with the terms under which the ISC had agreed to conduct the Inquiry. We were adamant that we must hear from officers who were involved at the time, as this was essential if the Inquiry was to be thorough and comprehensive and be in a position to reach properly considered, balanced and fair views about the facts. The Committee considered that the terms and conditions imposed by the Prime Minister were such that it would be unable to conduct an authoritative Inquiry and produce a credible Report.²³ We therefore asked the Prime Minister to reconsider on 23 March 2017.²⁴ No response has been received.²⁵ The Committee has therefore concluded – reluctantly – that it must draw a line under the Inquiry. This is regrettable.

It is worth reflecting that the Tory government has acted time and time again to protect New Labour's **Tony Blair, David Miliband, Jack Straw** and **Gordon Brown** from any punishment for their complicity in torture, and indeed to limit the information on it available to the public. The truth is that the Tories and New Labour (which includes the vast majority of current Labour MPs) are all a part of the same elite interest group, and when under pressure they stick together as a class against the people.

Despite being hamstrung by government, the Committee managed through exhaustive research of classified documents to pull together evidence of British involvement in

extraordinary rendition and mistreatment of detainees on a massive scale. The Committee found 596 individual documented incidents of the security services obtaining “intelligence” from detainee interrogations involving torture or severe mistreatment, ranging from 2 incidents of direct involvement, “13 to 15” of actually being in the room, through those where the US or other authorities admitted to the torture, to those where the detainee told the officer they had been tortured. They found three instances where the UK had paid for rendition flights.

My own evidence to the Committee focused on the over-arching policy framework, and specifically the fact that **Jack Straw** and **Richard Dearlove** had agreed a deliberate and considered policy of obtaining intelligence through torture. The report includes disappointingly little of my evidence, as the Committee has taken a very narrow view of its remit to oversee the intelligence agencies. This is the only part of my evidence included:

130. This was not unique to the Agencies. Their sponsoring Departments appear to have adopted the same approach. We heard evidence from a former FCO official, Craig Murray, who suggested that “there was a deliberate policy of not committing the discussion on receipt of intelligence through torture to paper in the Foreign Office”.

In July 2004, when he was Ambassador to Tashkent, he raised concerns about the use of Uzbek intelligence derived from torture in a formal exchange of telegrams with the FCO. Mr Murray drew our attention to FCO documents from the same time, which we have seen, one of which referred to “meetings to look at conditions of receipt of intelligence as a general issue”. He told us that the meetings “specifically discuss[ed] the receipt of intelligence under torture from Uzbekistan” and “were absolutely key to the formation of policy on extraordinary rendition and intelligence”.

Mr Murray told us that, when he had given evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee about this, they sought the documents from the FCO which replied that the “meetings were informal meetings and were not minuted”. He went on to say:

“the idea that you have regular meetings convened at director level, convened by the Director of Security and Intelligence, where you are discussing the receipt of intelligence from torture, and you do not minute those meetings is an impossibility, unless an actual decision or instruction not to minute the meetings has been given.... Were it not for me and my bloody-mindedness, ... you would never know those meetings had happened. Nobody would ever know those meetings had happened.”

131. We note that we have not seen the minutes of these meetings either: this causes us great concern. Policy discussions on such an important issue should have been minuted. We support

Mr Murray’s own conclusion that were it not for his actions these matters may never have come to light.

Jack Straw to this day denies knowledge and involvement and famously told Parliament that the whole story about rendition and torture was a “conspiracy theory”.

Unless we all start to believe in conspiracy theories and that the officials are lying, that I am lying, that behind this there is some kind of secret state which is in league with some dark forces in the United States, and also let me say, we believe that Secretary Rice is lying, there simply is no truth in the claims that the United Kingdom has been involved in rendition full stop, because we have

not been, and so what on earth a judicial inquiry would start to do I have no idea. I do not think it would be justified.”

In fact I strongly recommend you to read the whole [Hansard transcript](#), from Q21 to Q51, in which Jack Straw carries out the most sustained bravura performance of lying to parliament in modern history. The ISC report makes plain he was repeatedly involved in direct authorisations of rendition operations, while denying to parliament the very existence of such operations.

For over a decade now the British government, be it Red Tory or Blue Tory, has been refusing calls for a proper public inquiry into its collusion with torture. The ISC report was meant to stand in place of such an Inquiry, but all it has done is reveal that there is a huge amount of complicity in torture, much more than we had realised, which the ISC itself states it was precluded from properly investigating because of government restrictions on its operations. It also concluded in a [separate report](#) on current issues, that it is unable to state categorically that these practices have stopped.

The Blair and Brown governments were deeply immersed in torture, a practice that increased hatred of the UK in the Muslim world and thus increased the threat of terrorism. Their ministers repeatedly lied about it, including to parliament. The British state has since repeatedly acted to ensure impunity for those involved, from Blair and Straw down to individual security service officers, who are not to be held responsible for their criminal complicity. This impunity of agents of the state is a complete guarantee that these evil practices will continue.

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