

Pakistanis Protest Conviction of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui

By [Sara Flounders](#)

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Militant organized demonstrations of outrage and anger took place throughout Pakistan when news of a guilty verdict for Dr. Aafia Siddiqui was announced on Feb. 3. A jury in a New York federal court found Siddiqui guilty of seven counts, including attempted murder and armed assault without premeditation.

Siddiqui's trial had been front-page news for weeks in Pakistan. Civil rights, religious and women's organizations marched, demanding the return of this "daughter of the nation" to Pakistan.

The U.S.-educated doctor of neuroscience has come to symbolize the many hundreds of Pakistanis who have been secretly disappeared, detained and tortured, as well as the national outrage at the continuing deadly U.S. drone attacks. In 2003, at the age of 30, Siddiqui disappeared along with her three children from a street in Karachi.

Many in Pakistan had hoped that the overwhelming lack of any evidence would result in a not-guilty verdict. The prosecution could produce no bullets, bullet holes, injuries, fingerprints or residue to tie Siddiqui to attempted murder of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

The Hollywood image of "fairness" and "innocence until proven guilty" in U.S. courts are powerful illusions. But the verdict was no surprise to anyone who has followed the frame-up trials of hundreds of U.S. political prisoners. Given that the U.S. has the largest prison population in the world, in addition to thousands in secret prisons, Siddiqui's assertion that she was tortured for years in secret prisons is all too believable.

The government charges were preposterous. Siddiqui had supposedly been arrested in July 2008, five years after her disappearance. The U.S. claims that when U.S. military personnel came to interrogate her after the arrest, Siddiqui grabbed a U.S. soldier's M4 gun, fired off two rounds and shot herself while being subdued.

Questions of how the bullets failed to hit a single one of the 20 to 30 people in the small, crowded room, or hit any wall or floor, or leave any residue were never answered. Witness testimonies often contradicted their earlier sworn testimonies and the testimony of others. The prosecution urged the jury to ignore science and irrefutable facts and believe the contradictory testimony of U.S. Special Forces soldiers and FBI agents.

Despite all claims of impartiality, U.S. Judge Richard M. Berman limited the entire case to what happened in the two-minute period of Siddiqui's interrogation. Siddiqui's disappearance, torture and missing children could not be addressed.

Although Siddiqui was never charged with terrorism, claims that she wanted to blow up sites

in New York City were repeatedly raised. Fear and endless vague charges of terrorism were the most powerful weapons the government had. They were not restricted from using them.

The courtroom atmosphere was one of siege. Every attempt at intimidation and fear was used. There were double checkpoints for entry into the courtroom, and anyone attending the trial had his or her home address and driver's license number recorded. Nevertheless, the courtroom was packed every day of the trial, and overflow rooms with video conferencing of the trial were required.

Siddiqui's supporters in New York City admire her enormous intransigence and determination after a year and a half of solitary confinement, usually under terrible conditions and after suffering life-threatening wounds from the U.S. shooting, followed by brutal and humiliating strip searches before any visit or courtroom appearance. In the face of all this Siddiqui clearly rejected her trial and the whole image that what took place in the New York courtroom was about fairness, truth or justice.

Free Dr. Aafia Siddiqui!

Return her home to Pakistan!

Free all secretly detained and tortured prisoners!

Flounders attended parts of Siddiqui's trial.

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