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Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

By Amy Morello

Last week the [Guantanamo Periodic Review Board](#) (PRB) held a hearing for Mohammed Ahmed Ghulam Rabbani, a 46-year-old Pakistani citizen who has been on [hunger strike](#) for more than two years to protest his detention without charge or trial. He's been imprisoned at Gitmo since September 2004.

According to the [U.S. government](#), Rabbani is a former sweets maker and professional driver who served as a financial and travel facilitator for prominent al-Qaida leaders [Khalid Sheikh Muhammad](#) and USS Cole mastermind [Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri](#) from 1997 until his arrest in September 2002. The government claims he ran safe houses for al Qaeda in Karachi, Pakistan and helped al Qaeda fighters and their families with travel logistics.

It also maintains that Rabbani's access to KSM and several key al-Qaida figures positioned [him] to play a support role in al-Qaida operations, including, they claim, the planning for an attack in the Strait of Hormuz and possibly the al-Qaida anthrax program.

For his part, Rabbani claims any work he did for al Qaeda was not motivated by a religious cause or agenda, and stresses that he was working for money. Rabbani's [personal representatives](#) affirmed as much, insisting that he was purely business-minded and did not really care to find out who he was working with. They believe Rabbani has grown in maturity and now understands the consequences and importance of knowing who you are working with.

Rabbani's government [detainee profile](#), while noting that he has been relatively non-compliant while in U.S. military custody, says that most of his infractions occurred between 2013 and 2015 and were likely to protest his separation from his brother. Rabbani has provided little information of value and even recanted several of his earlier statements about his support for al-Qaida. But the United States believes he remains steadfast in his support for extremist causes and groups, though in the unclassified portion of the hearing, the only basis it offered for this assertion was information obtained from an unnamed source with first hand access to Rabbani.

What his government profile fails to note, however, is that Rabbani was arrested in a case of [mistaken identity](#); he had been assumed to be senior al Qaeda leader [Hassan Gul](#). According to the Senate Intelligence Committee [torture report](#), this fact was discovered by U.S. authorities just [one day after](#) his 2002 arrest. However, as the report also reveals, Rabbani was nonetheless rendered to [a CIA black site](#) shortly thereafter where he was held for over 18 months and subjected to [unauthorized enhanced interrogation techniques, including](#) forced standing, attention grasps, and cold temperatures without blankets.

Shelby Sullivan-Bennis, Rabbani's [private counsel](#), reiterated this, emphasizing that Rabbani has spent a harrowing fourteen years in detention. Rabbani's personal representatives say he remains a peaceful man who wants only to reunite with his family and become a contributing member of society. They stated that he has never expressed any anti-American sentiments to [them] and repeatedly affirmed that he has no desire to harm anyone upon his release from detention.

Sullivan-Bennis also [focused](#) on Rabbani's ability to reintegrate back into society if he were released. She noted that Rabbani's warm and close family, located in both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, are eager to support Rabbani with housing and employment opportunities. The [Life After Guantanamo Project](#) has also pledged to assist Rabbani with whatever he may need to facilitate his transition.

Rabbani would prefer to be transferred to Pakistan where his wife and children live, but is willing to be sent anywhere the Board recommends. He has also expressed complete willingness to participate in a [rehabilitation program](#) if the government sees fit to arrange it.

There remains one Guantanamo detainee eligible for an initial Periodic Review Board hearing. This hearing is scheduled for this Thursday. Human Rights First strongly applauds the completion of these initial hearings, which is a key element of President Obama's [plan](#) to close the infamous detention facility.

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