

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CIAR)

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

https://www.cair.com/op_ed/muslim-man-sentenced-to-life-without-air-travel/

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By Gadeir Abbas and Adam Soltani

Published in [The Oklahoman](#) on February 13, 2013.

Years ago, Saadiq Long an American citizen born in Oklahoma served in our Air Force with distinction. For a time, he even provided technical support to military aircraft destined for combat. Who could have guessed that such a man would be deemed too dangerous to board commercial aircraft?

But that is what the FBI has done to Saadiq. Earlier this month, the FBI prevented him from boarding his flight from Oklahoma to Qatar where he lives with his wife and daughter. Last year, the FBI twice prevented Saadiq from flying to Oklahoma from Qatar to visit his gravely ill mother.

It was only after a flurry of media attention, a petition with thousands of signatures and the intervention of Department of Justice officials that the FBI relented. Saadiq finally flew home to Oklahoma in November, just in time to spend what may be the final Thanksgiving he shares with his sick mother.

But his return to Oklahoma only marked the beginning of a campaign of FBI harassment. Unmarked vehicles followed him. FBI agents approached family in intimidating fashion. On one occasion, the FBI misled local authorities into believing that Saadiq and his sister were felons evading arrest, which they are not. Predictably, this last episode caused Saadiq and his sister to be yanked from their vehicle at gunpoint, handcuffed and tossed to the ground.

After all of this, Saadiq wants only to go home to be with his wife and daughter. But he cannot, because the FBI won't let him board a plane to get there.

This can't be because the FBI thinks Saadiq is much of a danger. For one, Saadiq flew into the United States less than three months ago. He wasn't dangerous then. He isn't dangerous now. In fact, Saadiq sent the FBI a letter in advance of his most recent flight informing the agency of his itinerary, not exactly the approach of a would-be terrorist. Additionally, while Saadiq can't fly, he can still ride buses and trains, travel across bridges and go to the mall. He does these things without the FBI's intervention because none is needed: Saadiq is peaceful and law-abiding.

What's most alarming about Saadiq's ordeal is that the FBI will never have to explain its actions. When it comes to separating Saadiq and many others from family via its ever-growing and always secret watch lists, the FBI is judge, jury and executioner. Saadiq hasn't been indicted, charged or convicted of any crime. And yet the FBI has claimed for itself the power to impose permanent punishment upon Saadiq: life without air travel.

If FBI agents can impose this sentence on Saadiq, they can do the same to any of us. For Saadiq's sake and our own, let's demand that the FBI cease preventing Saadiq from traveling to his family.

453 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Tel: (202) 488-8787

Fax: (202) 488-0833

www.cair.com

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