

Torture & the Case of Aafia Siddiqui

**By
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The conviction of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui on Feb. 3 of this year for attempted murder raised widespread outrage in Pakistan, Siddiqui's home country. Born in Karachi in 1972 and educated at MIT in the US, Aafia Siddiqui is not a likely candidate for being caught up in this web of terrorism counter terrorism.

Siddiqui was married through an arranged marriage while in the US and subsequently became quite active in a Muslim mosque in her area. By 2002, with her marriage on the rocks, she moved back to Karachi, although she made several return visits to the US. The purpose of these visits is under dispute. In March of 2003, the FBI issued an alert for her and within a few weeks Siddiqui disappeared from the streets of Karachi. Although the Pakistan Minister of the Interior stated that she had been turned over to US authorities, the US denies ever having held her until 2008. In July of that year, she was allegedly found wandering around the streets of Ghazni, Afghanistan with her son, and was picked up and held. At one point, US authorities were brought in to question her. According to these authorities (including the FBI), Siddiqui, who was lying in a bed behind a curtain, picked up a rifle one of the US security members had left lying around and started to shoot at them. Before she could do so, she was shot several times in the stomach area. According to Siddiqui, she merely looked around from behind the curtain, possibly with the intent to escape, one of the FBI men yelled "she's loose" and they shot her. In any case, no rifle with her prints on it has ever been produced, nor has any other evidence been produced that would confirm the official story.

Different accounts of her whereabouts from 2003 to 2008 have been given by different members of her family, her ex-husband, the US and Pakistani authorities. As an article in Harpers (11/09) said: *'Perhaps the most believable account came from Ali Hasan, senior South Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch... "My professional view," he said, "is they're all lying. Siddiqui's family is lying, the husband is lying, the Pakistanis are lying, the Americans are lying, for all I know the kids are lying. And because they're all lying the truth is probably twenty times stranger than we all know."*

"Gray Lady"

According to some, Siddiqui was held at the Bagram military base in Afghanistan where she was known as the "gray lady." Her moaning and cries were said to have echoed so tragically throughout the prison that some fellow prisoners went on hunger strike in protest against her treatment there. None of the prisoners are known to have ever seen this "gray lady", but even if it was not her, enough stories of conditions there would lead one to believe that there was some woman prisoner who was crying in agony and terror there.

Conditions at Bagram are more or less hidden from world view (except for the torturers and their victims). What cannot be so easily hidden is the ongoing use of torture by US forces as well as their complicity in that use by others. On the one hand, there is the use of "extraordinary rendition", under which the US ships captives to other countries that are

known to use outright physical torture. For instance, there is the case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen of Syrian descent who was arrested in 2002 in New York as he was changing planes headed for his home in Canada. Flown to Syria, he was tortured for a year and then released without any charges. There are several other known such cases.

Jose Padilla

On the other hand, there is the case of Jose Padilla. Born in Brooklyn NY, Padilla spent considerable time behind bars where he ultimately converted to Islam. Arrested in 2002, Padilla spent nearly four years in solitary confinement, a form of mental torture in itself. Nobody knows what really happened to him during those years because he refuses to discuss it, such is his state of terror and confusion to this day.

Today, there are probably many thousands of Padilla's and Suddiqui's held by the US and their proxies like Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan, etc. These methods of torture are not used to obtain useful information. Intelligence experts agree that the victims end up simply saying with they think their torturers want to hear, so there is no means of knowing whether the information gathered from them is reliable. As the Harpers Magazine article reported: *"The leader of one FBI counterterrorism squad recently told the New York Times that of the 5,500 terrorism-related leads its twenty-one agents had pursued over the past five years, just 5 percent were credible and not one had foiled an actual terrorist plot."*

Torture Covered Up

Despite this, all wings of US capitalism conspire to continue this brutality. The US media more or less covers up its widespread use. The US courts time after time have allowed it to continue. From Pakistan to Egypt, the allies of US capitalism collaborate in this torture. When Pakistani Supreme Court Chief Justice, Iftakhar Chaudry, started investigating his regimes' complicity in torture, he was removed from the bench by then president Musharref. This sparked off such a massive protest movement that eventually Musharref had to leave office. The present regime, after much resistance, had to reinstate Chaudry, but evidently only on the condition that he drop this investigation.

Such is the commitment of US capitalism to these brutal methods, and this in the world's foremost capitalist democracy. The question is why they are so committed to continuing the use of torture.

Terrorize a Population

On the one hand, the primary opposition to the domination of US capitalism throughout the Muslim world is coming from wings of the capitalist class in that part of the world. Since they cannot organize a popular, working class opposition (which would be counter to their own class interests), they have financed and helped organize the terrorist attacks. The widespread and increasing use of torture by the US regime and its proxy regimes is meant as a means of counter-terrorism. As word spreads of what happens in the Bagrams of the world, and in the prisons in Egypt, Syria and other similar countries to which the US sends prisoners for more brutal and direct torture, the hope is that the masses of the people in these parts of the world will be cowed into refusing cooperation with al Qaeda

and similar groups, thus cutting them off from their base. Capitalism cannot succeed in terrorizing an entire population, but this has never prevented them from trying in the past.

Divide Working Class

But there is another and equally dangerous aspect to this use of torture by the US regime: In reality, groups like al Qaeda represent little but a nuisance to US capitalism. They can do nothing but further destabilize already precarious regimes as well as cost the US money in fighting them. Even where Islamic fundamentalists seize power, as in Iran, for instance, the most they can do is ally themselves with rivals of US capitalism such as the Soviet Union. What they cannot do is create a genuine revolution nor end the domination of US capitalism throughout the world.

There is a force that can do this, however: A united and militant world working class. This force would have to come into conflict with both the forces of US capitalism as well as of the Islamic terrorist groups and the capitalists who stand behind them. As it grows, such a united world working class would have to solidify its international links. Of growing importance today would be the links between workers in the Western world and their brothers and sisters in the Islamic world. To the extent that it is even discussed in the United States, the propaganda justifying the use of torture is part of the overall attempt to get US workers to distrust and fear their brothers and sisters in the Muslim world. The way these policies are carried out, anybody who attempts to develop such solidarity would potentially be subject to these methods.

NOTE TO EDITOR: If you wish, and if you think it would be helpful for my getting a visa in the future, you might want to include an editor's note that the author was recently denied a visa for Pakistan, for which he had applied in order to attend the LPP's recent congress.