

TRADING RENDITIONS FOR OIL CONTRACTS

In September, Libyan rebels found a collection of documents that seemed as if they had been specially packaged to cause the US and—especially—the Brits a great deal of embarrassment. They detailed the rendition to Libyan torture of one of the leaders of the anti-Qaddafi uprising, Adul Hakim Belhaj. Today, the Guardian has a long, important article detailing the story behind that package of documents. Go read the whole thing—but here's the chronology it lays out.

1. In the lead-up to efforts to make friends with Qaddafi in 2002 and 2003, the Brits reversed their long-standing tolerance of members of the anti-Qaddafi Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)
2. As part of this effort, they tried to expel "M" in an immigration proceeding protected by their version of State Secrets (the form of tribunal the Cameron government is trying to expand)
3. At the same time, they started working to deliver Belhaj to Qaddafi; in November 2003, the British assured Libya they were working with Chinese intelligence to capture him
4. In March 2004, the secret court rejected "M's"

deportation from the UK, accusing the Home Office of deliberately exaggerating ties between LIFG and al Qaeda

5. Also in March 2004, Belhaj and his four months pregnant wife, Fatima Bouchar, were held in a facility on or near the Thai airport for five days; Belhaj was tortured
6. On March 8, they were then rendered to Libya; the rendition flight stopped for refueling in Diego Garcia (the plane would proceed from Libya to Iraq to render Yunus Rahmatullah—the US prisoner who won a habeas petition in the UK—to Afghanistan)
7. Two weeks after Belhaj and Bouchar arrived in Libya, Tony Blair visited Libya and Shell announced a £110m deal for oil exploration off Libya's coast
8. Bouchar was released after four months—just before she delivered her first child; Belhaj and another LIFG leader, Abu Munthir al-Saadi, were held six years
9. In early sessions with British interrogators, Belhaj and al-Saadi were

told they would receive better treatment if they claimed LIFG had ties to al Qaeda [Note this was in a period when we had reason to want to have good reason to hold a bunch of Libyans we had captured in Afghanistan]

10. In 2005 the British declared LIFG a terrorist organization and expelled members, including "M"; presumably they used intelligence gathered in Libya using torture

In short, the British appear to have traded a handful of LIFG members to lay the groundwork for an expanded oil relationship with Qaddafi—a relationship that would culminate, in 2009, with the exchange of Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset al-Megrahi for some BP contracts [see chetnolian's correction on this point].

And along the way, in a process that parallels what has happened as we've killed off Taliban leaders with drone strikes, LIFG grew more extreme.

By early 2005, the British government had been forced to conclude that the capture of the more moderate elements among the LIFG leadership, such as Belhaj and al-Saadi, had resulted in a power vacuum that was being filled by men with pan-Islamist ambitions. Among a number of documents found in a second Tripoli cache, at the British ambassador's abandoned residence, was a secret 58-page MI5 briefing paper that said "the extremists are now in the ascendancy," and that they were "pushing the group towards a more pan-Islamic

agenda inspired by AQ [al-Qaida]”.

Well then, if Libya ends up going sour or chaos continues to leach into Mali, I guess we'll only have ourselves and Obama's celebrated Libyan intervention to blame.

That and the crimes we committed 8 years ago all so the Brits could get Libyan oil.

One final comment. As it becomes increasingly clear how our former partners in crime can make life difficult if they lose their power, I wonder if it changes US willingness to back our old partner in torture in Egypt?