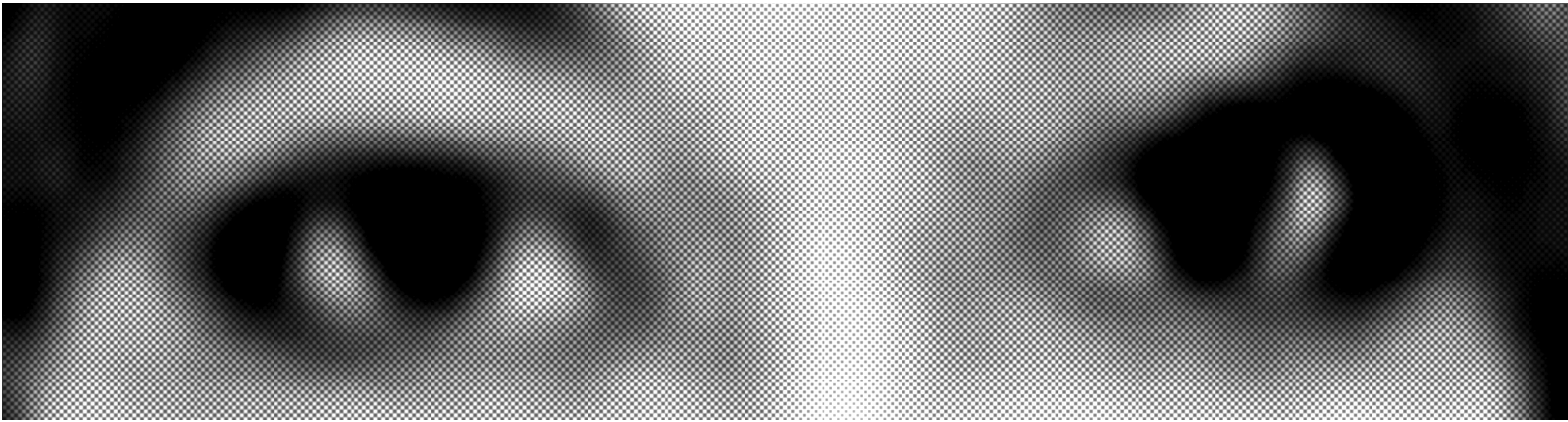


CAGEPRISONERS

AAFIA SIDDIQUI
a case of lies and inconsistencies



About Cageprisoners

Cageprisoners is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee which operates as a human rights NGO. The organisation seeks to work for political Muslim detainees, specifically those interned as a result of the 'War on Terror' and its peripheral campaigns, by raising awareness of the illegality and the global consequences of their detention. By promoting due process, the vision of the organisation is to see a return to the respect of those fundamental norms which transcend religion, societies and political theories.

Cageprisoners comprises of an advisory group which includes patrons, seasoned activists, lawyers, doctors and former detainees. From the group, a board has been elected which oversees the strategy and management of the organisation and its employees. By working in such a way the working environment of the organisation can constantly be reviewed in light of its aims and objectives.

CAGEPRISONERS

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Cageprisoners
27 Old Gloucester Street
London
WC1N 3XX

Telephone: 00 (44) 20 8123 9750
Email: contact@cageprisoners.com

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Introduction

The 'War on Terror' has claimed the lives and dignity of hundreds of thousands of Muslims since its inception after the 9/11 attacks. Cases of torture and ill-treatment have spanned the entire globe as Muslim communities have become subject to the wide-sweeping policies of detention without charge.

The 'War on Terror' has not discriminated at all against the young, old, rich, poor, educated or illiterate. The primary ingredient for suspicion is being Muslim and in the sight of security services pursuing policies of illegal rendition and torture or, other more unscrupulous agencies seeking lucrative cash rewards. Aafia Siddiqui and her family fit both categories, and from there a story was developed within the US administration to deem her education and background a threat. That internal narrative led to the complete destruction of her and her family's lives.

The case of Aafia Siddiqui has brought with it a wave of emotion from all corners of the world. The detention of this woman, and allegedly her children, has evoked condemnation from politicians, lawyers and activists all over the world. In an environment where the abuses in the 'War on Terror' are becoming increasingly known, the case of Siddiqui stands as an anomaly within the new era of openness under the Obama administration.

From the day of her initial detention, no information regarding Aafia Siddiqui seems consistent, especially in relation to information released by the US administration. Her various alleged persona can give the impression of an extremely high level Al Qaeda operative. However, at the same time, the statements of lawyers, family and friends render her incapable of any acts of terrorism.

The purpose of this piece is to try and separate the facts of Siddiqui's life from the fiction, and as a result, show that the lies that have been told about her are completely inconsistent with her treatment.

Exposing the truth in the case of Aafia Siddiqui is of the utmost importance to all those who believe in the value of due process and the rule of law. For six years, this mother of three has been placed through some of the most unimaginable forms of detention, all due to her religious convictions. It is now time for her to be released without charge and to be reunited with her children and repatriated back to Pakistan.

[Asim Qureshi – Senior Researcher]

Background

Completing her early education in Pakistan, Siddiqui moved to live near her brother in Texas in 1990 and attend the University of Houston. Excelling in her academic achievements, she managed to gain a transfer to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to study Biology. She stayed in the university's all-female dormitory, McCormick Hall, where fellow students described her as being a studious woman who was devout in her religious beliefs but, was by no means an extremist.

During her time at MIT, Siddiqui joined the on campus Muslim Student Association (MSA). Her activity within the association was geared towards the teaching of Islam to non-Muslims in order to better their understanding of the faith and invite them to join. Her emphasis in her life on bettering the conditions of Muslims even pervaded her academic achievements. During her sophomore year at MIT, she won a grant of \$5,000 to study the effects of Islam on women living in Pakistan.

After graduation, Siddiqui's parents began the search to find her a husband. A suitable match was soon found in Mohammed Amjad Khan, a medical student and the son of a wealthy family. Like Siddiqui, Khan was looking to make a life for himself in the US and did not feel threatened by Siddiqui's aspirations to further her career.

Allegation 1: Aafia Siddiqui is Al Qaeda's microbiologist/biochemical expert.

On 7th April 2004, MSNBC's Newsweek identified Aafia Siddiqui as a microbiologist and, according to her lawyer, Elaine Whitfield Sharp, references were being made to her being involved in biochemical warfare.

After her completion of her biology degree at MIT, Siddiqui went on to do a doctorate in cognitive neuroscience at Brandeis University while her husband finished his medical studies. Media reporting painted Siddiqui as a microbiologist, geneticist or neurologist, fields which were very far from what she was actually doing.

In reality, Siddiqui's PhD was based on the concept of human beings learning by imitation. When questioning Professor DiZio, one of her supervisors, regarding her research and how it could be used by Al Qaeda, he clearly stated that it was highly unlikely that she would have the technical knowledge to be involved with such things. Her PhD focused on the use of computers to understand human behaviour and had nothing to do with biochemical weapons.

Allegation 2: Aafia Siddiqui funded banned organisations in the 90s

According to Newsweek, Siddiqui was found to have funded Benevolence International and the Al Kifah Refugee Center - both of which have been banned by the UN.

Although the allegations against her seem plausible, the environment under which Siddiqui raised the money should be understood. During the conflict in Bosnia, the aid efforts for the Bosnian people were strongly encouraged and even the ability of Westerners to fight in the conflict. Countries such as the US and UK did not hinder those who wished to assist the beleaguered people in the Balkans. Siddiqui's involvement was only a small part of the wider efforts taking place. Emails sent from her account, which have now been made public, showed very clearly that her efforts particularly concentrated on the plight of orphans in Bosnia and that her attempts to aid such victims were quite sincere. There is no record of any of her emails being in relation to raising funds for violence but rather focused on the humanitarian disaster in the country.

Allegation 3: Aafia Siddiqui was moving conflict diamonds out of Liberia to fund Al Qaeda operations

According to various new outlets and a UN investigation, in the middle of June 2001, Siddiqui landed in Liberia having flown from Quetta, Pakistan. An hour long drive to the airport in the intense heat did not seem to faze her despite wearing her headscarf. The driver of the car, who was to later become the chief informant in the UN-led investigation, described a woman in a headscarf who kept to herself. She went straight to her designated point, the Hotel Boulevard in the capital Monrovia, where men were waiting to tend to her needs. They knew that a high-profile Al Qaeda operative was arriving, and Siddiqui was that person. These claims were to be raised after a 'Seeking Information' poster was issued relating to Siddiqui which was recognised by the taxi driver in Monrovia.

Her lawyers have already proven that she was in Boston that entire summer running playgroups for children and yet this lie was circulated as a matter of fact without any corroboration.

The allegations that Aafia Siddiqui could have been running conflict diamonds out of Liberia in the summer of 2001 holds no basis in fact. Her lawyers have already proven that she was in Boston that entire summer running playgroups for children and yet this lie was circulated as a matter of fact without any corroboration.

Within days of the 9/11 attacks, the FBI launched the PENTTBOM investigation – thousands of foreign Muslims were detained and placed through vigorous checks and, in many cases, detained for long periods without charge. The wide net of suspicion was cast and it soon became difficult for many Muslims to live in the US due to harassment they faced by the FBI and other authorities. As a result, Siddiqui and her husband returned to Pakistan.

Detention

On the morning of 1st March 2003, Pakistani authorities arrested Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. His arrest led to the disappearance of Aafia Siddiqui. Authorities say that it was Khalid Sheikh who gave her name up to the Pakistani authorities.

Due to the secretive nature of the interrogation that took place by the US and Pakistani authorities, it is impossible to corroborate whether or not he actually gave Siddiqui's name and in what capacity he knew her.

Siddiqui's mother claims that it was only a matter of days after her daughter's disappearance that a man arrived at the family home on a motorcycle. He told her that if she ever wanted to see her daughter and grandchildren again, she should keep quiet about the whole affair.

The last Siddiqui's mother saw of her was when her daughter was getting into a taxi with her three children – the youngest only six months – bound for Karachi airport on 30th March 2003. For the next five years, no one was to see or hear of them except for those detainees who testified to her presence in Bagram.

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Allegation 4: Aafia Siddiqui disappeared on 30th March 2003 on her own accord.

According to Pakistani officials who commented on the case of Siddiqui's disappearance for the government, they had no knowledge of her whereabouts and were officially still looking for her. A senior Pakistani security officer explained to the Associated Press that they were attempting to locate her but that she had gone underground.

According to the Pakistani Urdu press, the family had been seen being picked up by the Pakistani authorities and taken into custody. A spokesman for the Pakistani interior ministry and two unnamed US officials confirmed these reports in the press. However, within the same week, both had retracted their statements saying that Siddiqui had fled. Chicago's NBC later claimed that Siddiqui was being interrogated by American intelligence officials.

On 8th August 2008, the Daily Times newspaper in Pakistan made reference to documents that existed which confirmed that the Military Intelligence of Pakistan had detained Aafia Siddiqui and her three children on 30th March 2003 and, that they had been handed over to the FBI.

Allegation 5: Aafia Siddiqui is armed and dangerous.

Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Robert Mueller III on 26th May 2004 made a public appeal to the American people in helping the law enforcement agencies to find six men and one woman with ties to terrorism. The one woman that was shown in the pictures was Aafia Siddiqui. Ashcroft specifically commented that, "credible intelligence from multiple sources indicate that al Qaeda plans to attempt an attack on the United States in the next few months." He further added that the seven, including Siddiqui, "...should all be considered armed and dangerous."

The mention of Aafia Siddiqui's whereabouts by the FBI stands in stark contrast to the information that has now been revealed since her re-emergence in US custody. The inclusion of Siddiqui on the list of seven suspected terrorists was either used in order to heighten the sense of fear amongst the American public about the threat of terrorism or, that different departments were dealing with her and there was no communication between them. What is becoming clear however, is that Siddiqui was already in US custody at the time the announcement was made.

Allegation 6: Aafia Siddiqui was never detained by the US prior to 2008.

Questions asked by journalist Yvonne Ridley and Cageprisoners to the US administration have resulted in a complete denial that Aafia Siddiqui was ever in US custody. With efforts from UK House of Lords Peer, Nazir Ahmed, the US administration decided to disclose for the first time that a female detainee had been kept at Bagram but that it was not Siddiqui and refused to disclose the nationality of the individual. The US authorities continue to allege that Siddiqui was never detained at Bagram except for a brief period after 18th July 2008 to treat her for a gunshot wound.

Cageprisoners first considered that Aafia Siddiqui may be detained in Bagram, in 2006, when the video testimonies from the Bagram escapees emerged, affirming the presence of a female prisoner of Pakistani origin, with the prisoner ID '650'. After his release from Guantanamo Bay, Moazzam Begg related that he had heard the screams of a woman in Bagram, which continued to haunt him and the other prisoners. He managed to obtain confirmation by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), that indeed a woman had been detained at Bagram. Any likelihood that Aafia Siddiqui was the woman Begg heard screaming however was eliminated due to the fact that her kidnapping in Pakistan occurred after his transfer from Bagram to Guantanamo.

Despite official insistence by the US that Aafia Siddiqui was not detained at Bagram, the most recent evidence – other than the statement of Siddiqui herself in 2008 – came in 2009 with the release of former Guantanamo detainee Binyam Mohamed. In an interview with Cageprisoners he states that he saw a female detainee who was Pakistani in origin, around the age of Siddiqui and also had been educated in the US.

The last piece of information was given to him by the US guards. On being shown the picture of Aafia Siddiqui, Mohamed declared that the woman he saw in Bagram was one and the same. Once again her location was placed in Bagram and her time detained there consistent with the detention of Binyam Mohamed.

Re-emergence

For five years there was no trace of Aafia Siddiqui and her three children. In the most bizarre set of events, the family went from fading into obscurity to becoming international news. Siddiqui's re-emergence came at a time when her case was being raised publicly and pressure was being applied on the Pakistani government from all quarters.

On 7th July 2008, Cageprisoners patron Yvonne Ridley and then Director Saghir Hussain held a press conference in Pakistan regarding the Aafia's case which resulted in mass international coverage and a renewed interest from Pakistani media and political figures. At this time, the former President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, was still in power and was coming under much criticism for his role in the disappearance of Pakistani nationals and the removal of the judiciary. Within three weeks of the international press storm whipped up by press conference, an FBI agent visited the Texan home of Siddiqui's brother and informed him that she was arrested and being detained in Afghanistan.

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Allegation 7: Aafia Siddiqui was detained by the Afghan Police on 17th July 2008

[Taken from official US indictment] On or about the evening of July 7, 2008, officers of the Ghazni Province Afghanistan National Police (“ANP”) discovered a Pakistani woman, later identified as SIDDIQUI, along with a teenage boy, outside the Ghazni governor’s compound. ANP officers questioned SIDDIQUI in the local dialects of Dari and Pashtu. SIDDIQUI did not respond and appeared to speak only Urdu, indicating that she was a foreigner.

Regarding SIDDIQUI as suspicious, ANP officers searched her handbag and found numerous documents describing the creation of explosives, chemical weapons, and other weapons involving biological material and radiological agents. SIDDIQUI’s papers included descriptions of various landmarks in the United States, including in New York City. In addition, among SIDDIQUI’s personal effects were documents detailing United States military assets, excerpts from the Anarchists Arsenal, and one gigabyte (1 gb) digital media storage device (thumb drive).

SIDDIQUI was also in possession of numerous chemical substances in gel and liquid form that were sealed in bottles and glass jars.

The narrative of her arrest given by the US differs starkly from the account given by the Afghan authorities. In their version, Siddiqui is supposed to have had pieces of paper which clearly marked targets in Ghazni and particularly the governor’s compound. The suspicion that they claim was that Siddiqui was about to carry out a suicide bombing mission against the governor of Ghazni along with her son. The US version raises one very obvious question: If she was about to carry out a suicide mission in Afghanistan, why would she be carrying the details of targets in the US?

Allegation 8: Aafia Siddiqui attempted to kill US officials on 18th July 2008

Taken from official US indictment] On or about July 18, 2008, a party of United States personnel, including two FBI special agents, a United States Army Warrant Officer (the "Warrant Officer"), a United States Army Captain (the "Captain"), and United States military interpreters, arrived at the Afghan facility where AAFIA SIDDIQUI, the defendant, was being held.

The personnel entered a second floor meeting room. A yellow curtain was stretched across the length of that room, concealing a portion of it from sight. None of the United States personnel were aware that SIDDIQUI was being held, unsecured, behind the curtain.

The Warrant Officer took a seat with a solid wall behind him and the curtain to his right. The Warrant Officer placed his United States Army M-4 rifle on the floor to his right next to the curtain, near his right foot. The weapon was loaded, but was on safe.

Shortly after the meeting began, the Captain heard a woman's voice yell from the vicinity of the curtain. The Captain turned to the noise and saw SIDDIQUI in the portion of the room behind the curtain, which was now drawn slightly back. SIDDIQUI was holding the Warrant Officer's rifle and pointing it directly at the Captain.

The Captain heard SIDDIQUI say in English, "May the blood of [unintelligible] be directly on your [unintelligible, possibly head or hands]." The Captain saw an interpreter ("interpreter 1"), who was seated closest to SIDDIQUI lunge at SIDDIQUI and push the rifle away as SIDDIQUI pulled the trigger.

The Warrant Officer saw and heard SIDDIQUI fire at least two shots as Interpreter 1 tried to wrestle the gun from her. No one was hit. The Warrant Officer heard SIDDIQUI exclaim, "Allahu Akbar!" Another interpreter ("Interpreter 2") heard SIDDIQUI yell in English, "Get the fuck out of here", as she fired the rifle.

The Warrant Officer returned fire with a 9mm service pistol and fired approximately two rounds at SIDDIQUI's torso, hitting her at least once.

The above testimony given by FBI Special Agent Mehtab Syed explains how Aafia Siddiqui ended up with a gunshot wound to her torso while in Afghan detention. The entire story was signed off as part of the indictment against Aafia Siddiqui on 31st July 2008. For the less than discerning reader, the story seems quite unlikely – this becomes accentuated however when the text of the statement is read more closely with an understanding of the reality. Aafia Siddiqui is a woman of 5'2" and very petite. To suggest that she would have the ability to jump undetected from behind a curtain, pick up a heavy M-4 rifle, and then still have time to fire off two shots borders on the implausible. Indeed the entire situation presented by the FBI agent seems fabricated. It is also noteworthy that if Siddiqui did manage to obtain this weapon and fire the rounds as alleged, it is the first case of its kind, especially since thousands of men have been detained by US personnel since the invasion of Afghanistan.

Scepticism about the US version of events is heightened even more when a simple chronology of events is examined. On 19th July 2008, the Associated Press released an article about a conflict between US and Afghan forces over the jurisdiction of a female detainee. In that report, it is related that the female detainee was shot in the course of arguments relating to jurisdiction. The report by the AP was issued one day after the incident and two weeks before there was any official recognition that Siddiqui had even been detained.

Allegation 9: Aafia Siddiqui is guilty of two counts of criminal acts

According to the US indictment, Aafia Siddiqui was extradited to the US from Afghanistan for allegedly, “unlawfully, willingly, and knowingly...[prepared to]use a deadly and dangerous weapon and...forcibly assault, resist, oppose, impede, intimidate, and interfere.” Also she is alleged to have attempted to kill officers and employees of the United States.

The above two counts of criminality serve to act as one of the most confounding conundrums of the eight years of the War on Terror. Siddiqui was allegedly found in Afghanistan, attempting to attack an Afghani compound (at least according to the Afghanis) – thus, she should be tried for committing a war crime in the arena of conflict, or she should be tried for attempting to commit an act of terrorism, or even for having a child soldier with her. The internationally serious crimes of terrorism and war crimes were completely ignored by the US in their indictment of Siddiqui. They have indicted her for two far lesser offences and, in a jurisdiction which is outside of the country where the incident took place.

Further, this is the first time that a non-US citizen has not been designated an ‘enemy combatant’ and detained at one of the many bases around the world. Why was Aafia Siddiqui sent to the US mainland when no foreign detainee before her was treated in such a way? Why was Siddiqui not sent to Guantanamo Bay?

Considering the list of allegations that have been levied against Siddiqui over the last five years, there was not a single reference to her involvement in international terrorism during her indictment. Questions must be raised as to why such seemingly important points have been completely ignored for the sake of indicting on lesser offences? It is indeed these last points that are so troublesome for those who have studied this case in detail. They do not correspond at all with the history of the case.

A case of lies and inconsistencies

This document was produced in order to highlight just a few of the allegations that have been made about Aafia Siddiqui over the last five years of her ordeal. The responses to the allegations show that there are many worrying aspects to the case in the way that she has been portrayed and treated.

It is understandable that the US administration would rather that Siddiqui was indicted for some crime than no crime at all – her freedom would be potentially embarrassing for the country, especially after all the hate that was built up around her persona.

This is a case however, where the facts very much speak for themselves. Once the layers of lies and inconsistencies are peeled back, the essence of the case against her remains largely defunct. Yes, she may have at some point given money to an organisation which is now unpalatable to the US – which previously was not – however, that does not make her a terrorist, nor does it make her an attempted murderer.

This case is not just about Siddiqui though, it is also about her three children. One of them returned safely to Siddiqui family in Karachi, the others however remain missing. This family has already been forced to endure years of separation and detention; it is time that they were freed and reunited with one another. In order to do this, the truth of the case must be exposed and the reality brought to the world's attention.

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