

Sami Al Saadi (former Libyan dissident against el-Qaddafi, subject of extraordinary rendition)
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A: It's better that I tell you the story in brief so you can hear it firsthand from me, not from the newspaper. During my youth I was in Libya during high school and university we had some activities - political activities, very minor, small, political activities. We used to hand out leaflets against the ideology of Muammar and the Green Book. In 1984 I was arrested for a brief time, for a month or so. My brother, Adel, was arrested around the same time, but he stayed in prison for 4 years.

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: From Tripoli. My brother was released in 1988 and I was rearrested alongside with my older brother and brother-in-law in 1989. And both of my brothers, they were martyred in the Abu Salim Massacre when 1200 people were shot.

Q: what year was the massacre?

A (by the translator): 1996. As for my brother-in-law, he stayed 12 years in prison from 1989 until the year 2000.

My family's status, we were well off but the Gadhafi regime had seized all of what my father possession, properties and money.

Q: Where was your wealth from?

A: My father was one of the oldest Tripolitania merchants - he lived until he was 110 - so he started out really early.

Q: As a merchant?

A: As a merchant.

Q: Did your father live to see your brothers martyred?

A: Yes, he was very, very sad. It was very sad for my father because he only had daughters, he only had 3 boys, 2 of which died and I was in exile. That's a summary of what the family had been through. People accuse me of going to Afghanistan and adapting carrying arms against Muammar Gadhafi, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I was a member of a secret resistance group even before I heard about Afghanistan. I left to Afghanistan and the secret organization was found out by the regime so they captured or arrested whoever they could capture and the rest fled and we met again in Afghanistan and we reorganized ourselves.

Q: Which secret organization – LIFG (Libyan Islamic Fighting Group)?

A: The roots to founding LIFG. It was known as Awatha Zuwawi group and Awatha Zuwawi was the son of a very famous, well known caricaturist. I was a member of the Awatha Zuwawi group. In '88 I went to

Afghanistan. It is known that Afghanistan has a lot of groups operating inside it, there are a lot of ideologies, different ideas and different directions and in the 90s we were asked by al Qaeda to join them. And we had refused because we were concentrating on the resistance against the Libyan regime.

Q: Was this in meetings?

A: They sent us letters, we were in Turkey at the time, and they sent us letters asking us to join.

(Turkey?): My story with Afghanistan is divided into two. There were two periods in which I lived in Afghanistan. There was the period at the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s when there was the fight against the Soviet Union and after the fall of the Soviet Union and when the Afghans started fighting each other we pulled out from Afghanistan. I lived between Turkey and other places in Europe and then I went back to Afghanistan in the year 2000.

Q: Were you married then?

A: I was married.

Q: In what year were you born?

A: 1966. All of the groups and the Arabs who were in Afghanistan at the time they know that us as a group, we were opposing the ideology of al Qaeda. I personally had more than one meeting with bin Laden. The last meeting it was 1 month before September 11 in Kandahar. There was a discussing between me and him about the legitimacy of striking the Americans out of Afghanistan.

Q: Striking Afghanistan?

A: (Clarification by translator) Hitting the Americans using Afghanistan as a base.

A: And since I was there and I knew for a fact the Taliban did not agree that al Qaeda launches their attacks from Afghanistan, the Taliban were opposing the idea. Now this period I gave you brief information if you don't have any questions about this period we can skip to the...

Q: Tell me more of meeting w/Osama.

A: So basically there was a lunch invitation for many people and at the time there was some weirdness in our relationship as groups. We received the invitation for lunch so we arrived late.

Q: We? Libyans?

A: Arabs in Afghanistan. So when we arrived late we sat at the corner in the end of a big tent. After awhile he asked me to come and sit beside him and I had said I'm uncomfortable here, but he insisted that I come and sit beside him. So he knew very well our stand from his group because we are based in Kabul not Kandahar. And around that time there was a big rumor going on that there's going to be a big hit coming soon and there was a hit before that in Cole in Yemen, there was a warship, and we speak publicly to the people and he had heard about our stand and he wanted to discuss...

Q: You criticized the hit?

A: (clarification by translator) Yes.

A: Now we go back in the same year in the year 2000, go back in time a bit, not the same meeting - another meeting even before Cole, the warship. So in that meeting, early in the year 2000, there was me and Omar Osman, he is known in the West now, and that's bin Laden he was promoting the ideology of al Qaeda and at the time the Taliban did not agree on using Afghanistan as a base for that kind of operations and that's when we had the discussion and didn't agree with the way of striking people or launching an attack. So because of this meeting and because of announcing our stand to the circles of Kabul he knows about our stand and that's why he wanted to talk to me. So in that tent Osama bin Laden was saying to me "it's not within Mohammed Omar's rights to tell me not to do these things" so I was discussing him back and we were talking about the differences in our ideology and as I was walking out Osama bin Laden told me "I wish that you review your stand" and I had told him "this is our stand and we had discussed this so many times" and that was the last time I had met Osama bin Laden.

Q: After the Cole there was rumor of a big hit?

A: Yes but there was no more information. We didn't know where, against who, or when or any other information.

Q: What was the essence of disagreement w/ Osama?

A: The disagreement was about the ideology, as I have told you before, there are more than a few reasons why we shouldn't do this. One of which, in Islam taking a visa to a specific country, a visa is considered a contract of insurance between you and that country as a host. You cannot go there and backstab them. And also when you give the visa to a non-Muslim for your country as a visitor that means that you trust them. So when they come, in Sharia, you cannot backstab someone who trusted you. Also in our book that we had written in prison we had written about this specific thing, it is forbidden to kill any ambassador or anybody who is a visitor inside the country, foreign delegations included, because – and also you are obliged to secure those characters, those individuals.

There is an ayah in our Quran, a passage...there is an, it's called an ayah, a passage from our Quran from tawbah, which means repentance, the idea of the ayah is that if somebody who is a non-Muslim, even a non-believer, comes to you and seeks refuge you are obliged by Islam – Islamic law – to give them the refuge and secure their path until they reach their destination.

Q: Where were you on 9/11?

A: In Kabul.

Q: How did you hear the news?

A: I was walking to the bakery to bring some bread for supper, I had run into one of the guys who were with us in Kabul so that guy was passing by with his car so when he saw me he said "Get in, get in. Didn't you hear?" I told him "I want to buy some bread" but he told me "It's important get into the car" and he

had told me that he had just seen it on the news, he told me about what happened and he told me about the airplane that hit the tower.

Q: What did you think about what America would do? Was it unfair to America? Would US overreact?

A: We had expected that the reaction would be big and we had expected that a strike would be carried out the same day or the day after, like it happened in Nairobi. Strike on Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Sudan.

Q: It didn't happen after 1 day. Rather one month.

A: After preparing everything.

Q: Did it make you think back about your conversation with Osama?

A: Yes, then it was clear that Osama wasn't convinced with what we had told him.

Q: Were you or other Libyans happy that it happened?

A: What I had seen in Kabul that day, not just talking about Libyans, I'm talking about Arabs and everybody, everybody was afraid. There was fear in the air.

Q: No celebration?

A: No. There were some people who would say things but that's because how America's treating this part of the world. But it wasn't celebration, it was analyzing, more or less. The same day we expected an immediate reaction so we left Kabul with our families. We just went outside of town, to Logan(?), for a brief time and another small village and then we left for Pakistan. So I don't think it was a celebratory atmosphere. Everybody was afraid.

Q: What are the places in which you've lived?

A: Pakistan, Iran - he (Sami) was captured, Malaysia, China that's where he (Sami) was arrested, Hong Kong, Libya. He was arrested in Iran and then shipped to Malaysia.

Q: How did you make money?

A: For example, in China we opened a merchant office - we had some business.

Q: What kind of business?

A: It was an office for online purchasing. I was arrested in China and then I was transferred to Hong Kong. That was 2004. It was around February or March. I arrived in Libya on the 28th of March, 2004. So it must have been late February.

Q: Who arrested you?

A: Chinese.

Q: When did you first encounter Americans?

A: On the contrary of what happened to Abdelhakim Belhadj, the Americans never showed up in my case. On the night before I was handed over, I was flown to Libya I was put in a small room with my family. It was a bench like this. I was not sleeping, but almost asleep and we had guards in the same room - female guards in the same room, standing – they were talking in their own language, but in their conversation I could hear the word “CIA” repeated more than once.

Q: Who were these people, Chinese?

A: (clarification by translator) Hong Kong.

Q: Americans were never seen?

A: They were always behind the curtains. So after I was in prison in Libya one of the people came to me and he told me one of my friends had been handed over from Mauritania and he arrived. And I had asked “Who captured him, the Mauritanian government?” And the guard said “Do you think that the Mauritanian government can pull any strings? The people who brought him are the same people who brought him brought you – the Americans.”

Q: The Moussa Koussa documents (found by Human Rights Watch after the fall of Qaddafi’s regime were proof for you, right?

A: Before that there were only clues here and there, but that was the solid evidence that proved they were behind it. It was a letter from the CIA to Moussa Koussa saying that we had handed over Sami Saadi with the help of MI6. And for the record the Americans came twice to Libya to interrogate me in Libya.

Q: in prison?

A (clarification by translator): In Libyan prison.

Q: Not in uniform, right?

A: Civilian clothes.

Q: Did they say they were Americans?

A: It was either them or the Libyans who told me they were Americans.

Q: They didn’t hide it?

A: No.

Q: How long were you in Libyan prison? And your family. In 2004 - how many children did you have?

A: Four. The smallest was 6. The youngest was 6.

Q: Your youngest wrote the letter to the British?

A: That's my eldest daughter.

Q: Return to Libya in 2004 - what happens to your family and what happens to you?

A: So when they got us off the plane they were covering my head and my wife's head. They took us to Tajura, to the prison of external security, my family had stayed in Tajura for two months or two and half months and I stayed for 3 years in Tajura then I was transferred to Abu Salim prison and I stayed there for 3 years.

Q: Same prison where your two brothers died, right?

A: Yes. The cell's dimensions were 1.8 meters by 1.9 meters, very small cell. (Q: didn't get out during the day at all?) They would get us out at specific timings for interrogations or the clinic or to meet some of the prisons.

Q: Meals and toilet in cell?

A: (head nod).

Q: Did you see anyone from Human Rights Watch or ICRC?

A: There's someone who came once in Tajura I don't know from which organization.

Q: Not in Abu Salim?

A: In Abu Salim one of the organizations came and they got us outside to meet them but there was pressure on us not to talk to them.

Q: Were you tortured/beaten in Abu Salim/Tajura?

A: For the first month in Tajura there was [better] treatment and then it had changed.

Q: To what?

A: Depends on, for example, in the interrogation when they feel like I'm withholding information or not cooperating they don't talk to me in the interrogation room they send me to the torture room where beatings and torture happen.

Q: What was the torture?

A: Beating with their hands and their feet and using electrical wires. And also by tasers, using taser and electricity.

Q: Electric wires to hit or shock?

A: To hit.

Q: Tell me about getting out.

A: 23rd of March 2010. But before that I was sentenced to death.

Q: By a judge?

A: Yeah, it was a court order. The court room was inside Abu Salim prison.

Q: How did you escape the sentence?

A: There was a pardon on some of the prisoners.

Q: Was this LIFG reconciliation [brokered by Saif el-Qaddafi in 2010]?

A: (answered by translator) Yes.

Q: Did Saif Islam [Saif el-Qaddafi], did his participation save your life?

A: He was the one who adopted this change.

Q: Should the Libyan government be friendly with U.S./U.K. government?

A: This subject is between countries and governments – the show must go on. They have interests here that we must provide and we have interests in them. My case is a personal case and it's a personal justice case. As long as I find a legal way to get justice, I will practice it.

Q: You have a current legal action?

A: Against MI6. Uh huh.

Q: And America?

A: So far nothing.

Q: Are you angry about America?

A: Not against the American people. I know there are some of them who opposed to these actions, but put yourself in my shoes if your whole family had been kidnapped and your kids witness their father passed out on a plane and they witness their father and mother being handed over to a dictatorial regime, a ruthless man, with their heads covered like they were on their way to their execution – you would be angry. At the same time these governments wave the slogans of human rights and respecting humanity on their own lands.

Q: Was your wife abused? Was she pregnant?

A: She wasn't pregnant. There was no beating, but most of the time they use words to abuse her.

Q: How many children do you have now?

A: Still 4. I thank you for this, I'm not just saying that. I wish that all the rights organizations would hear our account first hand and also the Western media not get the information secondhand and come to speak to us and hear our story from our side.