

By Debra Sweet

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The U.S. government's case against Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani who holds an advanced degree from Harvard, will go to the jury Monday in federal court here in New York City. I've been in the courtroom, and several times in the overflow room with dozens of supporters and reporters.



Dr. Aafia Siddiqui in Afghan custody July 17, 2008

Even when we are only watching the trial through cameras in the overflow rooms, we are forced to give ID to enter, all to bolster the impression that Dr. Siddiqui is a dangerous terrorist, and that we are dangerous for caring what happens to her. Everyone entering the courthouse goes through airport style security screening, but to go into her trial, one must be searched again.

Petra Bartosiewicz wrote for Time magazine in [A Pakistani on Trial – With No Pakistani Reporters](#) :

*Although Siddiqui is not charged with any terrorism-related crime, security concerns are paramount though the procedures seem to be unevenly enforced. During the lunch break on the first day of the Siddiqui trial a group of Muslim men praying in the waiting areas outside the*

*courtroom were afterwards asked to leave the floor. That prevented them from securing a place in line for the afternoon session. Several Muslim women in hijabs were also given similar instructions, but others in the same area, dressed in business attire, including this reporter, were permitted to stay. On the second day of the trial metal detectors were posted outside the courtroom and individuals were asked for photo identification and their names and addresses were logged by court security officers. At the close of proceedings on Thursday defense attorney Charles Swift protested the practice. "The suggestion is that the gallery may be a threat," said Swift, calling the measure "highly prejudicial."*

Judge for yourself whether the New York Daily News, which calls Siddiqui "[Lady al Queda](#)" (absent any evidence produced at trial), or The Washington Post which headlines "Government: Let al-Qaida-linked scientist testify" is part of the prosecutor's team.

Petra, who is writing a book on US terrorist prosecutions, has been in the trial every day, blogging and linked at [CagePrisoners.org](#). Her article in November 2009 Harper's [The intelligence factory: How America makes its enemies disappear](#) is a deeply researched piece going behind the US government's public case against Siddiqui, and, more broadly, the existence of a network of secret detentions and prisons the US operates. On Aafia Siddiqui:

*When I first read the U.S. government's complaint against Aafia Siddiqui, who is awaiting trial in a Brooklyn detention center on charges of attempting to murder a group of U.S. Army officers and FBI agents in Afghanistan, the case it described was so impossibly convoluted—and yet so absurdly incriminating—that I simply assumed she was innocent. According to the complaint, on the evening of July 17, 2008, several local policemen discovered Siddiqui and a young boy loitering about a public square in Ghazni. She was carrying instructions for creating "weapons involving biological material," descriptions of U.S. "military assets," and numerous unnamed "chemical substances in gel and liquid form that were sealed in bottles and glass jars." Siddiqui, an MIT-trained neuroscientist who lived in the United States for eleven years, had vanished from her hometown in Pakistan in 2003, along with all three of her children, two of whom were U.S. citizens. The complaint does not address where she was those five years or why she suddenly decided to emerge into a public square outside Pakistan and far from the United States, nor does it address why she would do so in the company of her American son. Various reports had her married to a high-level Al Qaeda operative, running diamonds out of Liberia for Osama bin Laden, and abetting the entry of terrorists into the United States. But those reports were countered by rumors that Siddiqui actually had spent the previous five years in the maw of the U.S. intelligence system—that she was a ghost prisoner, kidnapped by Pakistani spies, held in secret detention at a U.S. military prison, interrogated until she could provide no further intelligence, then spat back into the world in the manner most likely to render her story implausible. These dueling narratives of terrorist intrigue and imperial overreach were only*

*further confounded when Siddiqui finally appeared before a judge in a Manhattan courtroom on August 5. Now, two weeks after her capture, she was bandaged and doubled over in a wheelchair, barely able to speak, because—somehow—she had been shot in the stomach by one of the very soldiers she stands accused of attempting to murder.*

Dr. Siddiqui, whose brother Mohammed and many supporters are following the trial closely, is not on trial for terrorism charges, but for, as the government puts it, what happened in the “3 minutes” inside the Afghani police building on July 18, 2008. She denied, on cross examination last week, picking up a gun, or shooting it.

From what I can observe, and have read, Dr. Siddiqui is deeply traumatized and has reason to be distrustful of the courts, the military, the FBI, who questioned her without introduction while she was in hospital recovering from the gunshot wounds. She said, several times in court — and was removed for breaking the rule because she did so — that she was held in a secret prison, and her children were disappeared, and that she was tortured.

I saw reporters snicker at that. Isn't that a delusional idea, that a Pakistani could be held in a secret prison? Remember George W. Bush, and Barak Obama as well: “We do not torture.” She must be crazy, and guilty, to assert such a thing.

Then comes this piece by Anand Gopal, reporting for The Nation this week, [Obama's Secret Prisons](#) :

*Sometime in the last few years, Pashtun villagers in Afghanistan's rugged heartland began to lose faith in the American project. Many of them can point to the precise moment of this transformation, and it usually took place in the dead of the night, when most of the country was fast asleep. In the secretive U.S. detentions process, suspects are usually nabbed in the darkness and then sent to one of a number of detention areas on military bases, often on the slightest suspicion and without the knowledge of their families.*

*This process has become even more feared and hated in Afghanistan than coalition airstrikes. The night raids and detentions, little known or understood outside of these Pashtun villages, are slowly turning Afghans against the very forces they greeted as liberators just a few years ago.*

Dr. Siddiqui was found, disoriented, in Grazni Afghanistan, having disappeared from her home in Pakistan five years earlier. No one has said where she was. Pakistani human rights organizations, and some at the trial, have urged me to mention, and look into the disappearance of *thousands* of Pakistanis at the hands of the secret police, ISI, who are paid many millions by the US government to be part of the so-called “war on terror”.

These disappearances and deaths, this police state, are the responsibility of the US government, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton, by funding, by political support and pressure to do the dirty work that amounts to the “war on terror” while the US chooses to say “we do not torture.”

But this is an administration which has dramatically the use of unmanned drones to target alleged “terrorists,” thereby killing hundreds of civilians in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and now Yemen and Somalia. A poll last year in Pakistan, by al Jazeera found only 9% of adults supporting the drone attacks, because of concerns that they are killing innocent civilians.

[Sebastain Abbot](#) in the Huffington Post:

*“The U.S. government doesn’t even suggest what the proportion of innocent people to legitimate targets is,” said Michael Walzer, a renowned American scholar on the ethics of warfare. “It’s a moral mistake, but it’s a PR mistake as well.”*

As part of this “war on terror”, the US prosecutors have produced no physical evidence that Dr. Siddiqui held or fired a gun on July 18, 2008. As Dr Siddiqui said, “I walked towards the curtain. I was shot and I was shot again. I fainted.”

I don’t expect justice for Dr. Aafia Siddiqui this week. Even if she were to be found not guilty on all charges — which the evidence supports — what will her future be? Where are her children?

Will she get back the lost years and be able to tell her story?

And I don't expect an end to the illegitimate "war OF terror" until people living in the United States reject the dangerous direction their government is taking, against the interests of humanity.