

Ahmed Belbacha

 [Ahmed_Belbacha_Photo_jpg_240x240_q85.jpg](#) [1]

Current status: Cleared, no charges

Ahmed Belbacha has been returned to his native Algeria.

by Andy Worthington

A former footballer, Ahmed Belbacha was born in Algiers in 1969. He left his homeland in 1999, after receiving death threats from militants because he worked for a government-run oil company, and sought asylum in the UK.

Ahmed lived and worked in Bournemouth, first at a laundry and then at the Swallow Royal Hotel, where he was responsible for cleaning John Prescott's room during the 1999 Labour Party conference. For his diligence, he received a thank-you note from the Deputy Prime Minister and a tip for his service.

Read [Reprieve for Ahmed Belbacha](#) [2], by Clive Stafford Smith, Cori Crider, and Ahmed Ghappour," Amherst Bulletin, November 6, 2009.

In June 2001, with his asylum appeal still pending, Ahmed took a holiday in Pakistan, where he was seized and sold for a bounty to US forces. After being interrogated by the CIA, he was moved to the US prison at Kandahar airport, where he suffered severe abuse, and was flown to Guantánamo in February 2002.

In 2006, a military review board found that Ahmed did not pose a threat to the United States or its allies, and in February 2007 he was approved for release from Guantánamo. Unfortunately, the British government refused to accept his return to the UK. In June 2003, while Ahmed was in Guantánamo and unable to help with his own case, his asylum appeal had been denied. Although it was likely that he would have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the UK, he was, of course, unable to apply for it from Guantánamo, and the British government therefore washed its hands of him. When the government requested the return of five British residents in August 2007, Ahmed was not one of them.

Since last June, appeals have been passing through the US court system to prevent Ahmed's return to Algeria, where he faces the very real risk of torture by the Algerian security services, and death threats from the militants who forced his escape from his homeland in the first place. Despite being held in isolation for at least 22 hours a day, Ahmed has stated that he would rather stay in Guantánamo than return to Algeria.

Nevertheless, his seemingly endless isolation in Guantánamo, combined with his constant fears of repatriation, have contributed to a serious decline in his mental health. In the last few months, it has been revealed that Ahmed has been put on suicide watch after attempting suicide, and in recent visits with his lawyers, he has explained how his fears and his isolation have made him feel "mentally sick."

The US government is clamouring to repatriate cleared prisoners (to countries where they face the risk of torture) as part of its ongoing attempts to scale down Guantánamo's population. Since July, five Algerian prisoners have been returned to Algeria, where their fate is uncertain. Human rights observers have long established that foreign nationals returned to Algeria face a legal process that is more akin to Russian roulette than a fair trial. Imprisoned on their return, some prisoners are made to produce "confessions" that are later used against them, while others are subsequently released. There appears to be no way of working out how these decisions are made.



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