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The CIA Came at Night

On the Trail of a Rendition

by JEFFREY ST. CLAIR
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They came for Jabour at night. He was ordered by the men to turn around and face the wall, while his hands were cuffed and his legs shackled. A blindfold was fastened to his head. He was led from his cell in an Islamabad jail to a waiting van.

Jabour was then driven to an airport and marched into a bathroom, where his blindfold was removed. He was confronted by a group of Americans, talking to each other in sign language.

A doctor approached him. He took Jabour's blood pressure and then injected him with a drug. Jabour began to feel dizzy. A black hood was placed over his head and he was led onto a military plane. His hands were cuffed behind his back. His legs were locked to a d-ring on the floor of the plane. "I knew it was the end of my life," Jabour said later.

This is the story of a rendition, just one account from the hundreds of men who have been snatched, tortured and dehumanized in the post-911 wars.

Marwan al-Jabour is a Palestinian who was born in Amman, Jordan. In 1994, he moved to Pakistan, where he pursued his education. In the spring of 2004, Jabour was detained by Pakistan's notorious ISI after having dinner with a friend and university professor in Lahore. He

was taken to a detention facility where he was interrogated about his friend and about the location of Arab militants.

Through the night he was beaten, kicked and repeatedly shocked with an electric prod. Two days later, three American agents entered his cell and questioned him about his ties to al-Qaeda. He repeatedly denied having any relation to terrorists.

Jabour was detained in Pakistan for nearly a month, where he was tortured regularly and savage threats were made against his wife and two children. He was bound for four consecutive days and refused even the right to urinate. He was never charged with a crime or allowed to see a lawyer. Then the Americans came again.

The men who put him on the plane that night worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. The prison they flew him to was a ghost site, a secret CIA interrogation facility, in some redacted corner of Afghanistan.

Two guards led Jabour to a dark cell, three feet wide and six feet long, where his clothes were cut off. One of his hands was cuffed to an iron ring in the wall. His feet were chained to a similar ring welded to the floor. Two video cameras were trained down on him. Loudspeakers blared heavy metal music, hour after hour, night after night. He was left standing in the cell naked.

The guards returned the next morning, shaved his head and his beard, unchained him and led him, still naked, to an interrogation room. Inside, there were ten people, including two women and a doctor. The doctor was filmed as he probed Jabour's naked body. He was then pushed into a chair and his legs and hands cuffed. A large, thickly muscled man called the "Marine" stood ominously behind him.

His interrogators warned Jabour to cooperate fully or he would be stuffed into the Dog Box. The man pointed to a small wooden box, three-feet by three-feet in size. Jabour was shown hundreds of photographs, quizzed about each. This went on day after day, week after week, month after month. He was fed rancid food from cans. Arbitrarily, his captors would chain him into contorted stress positions for hours at a time.

For more than two years, he followed the same routine. His legs were always shackled, his cell dark, his eyes blindfolded as he was moved from cell to interrogation room. Jabour's answers remained the same. He was not a terrorist. He didn't know the men in the photographs. He never associated with Al Qaeda.

Unknown to Jabour, in late June 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that detainees held by government as enemy combatants came under the protection of the Geneva Convention. Four weeks later, Jabour was told that he was going to be transferred again. Once more Jabour was stripped naked. This time he was forced to wear a diaper.

Again his naked body was filmed by his captors. Cotton balls were stuffed in his ears and taped over his eyes. A thick rubber band was strapped around his head. A mask was buckled around his face. "I felt like a mummy," Jabour later told Human Rights Watch investigators.

Before he was put on the plane, Jabour was pushed around by his captors and forced to sit in a chair next to another prisoner. He heard three gunshots and then was shoved into a small plane for a four-hour flight to Jordan, where he was ultimately turned over to the Israelis and released in Gaza. He had been held prisoner under orders of the CIA for more than two- and-a-half years.

Jabour has been free now for seven years. Still he waits for justice. When will it come? Who will deliver it?

We assess this sequence of horrors soberly. Our teeth gnash; our stomachs quiver. Our outrage intensifies with the revelation of each iniquity. For we are people of conscience and empathy. We feel shame and anger at the revolting crimes committed by our government, in our name. Because we express our disgust, we feel morally superior to the torturers.

But what have we done?

Ask Jabour. He knows.