

In order to prevent any details of its torture record being publicly disseminated, the Bush administration threatened the British government with withdrawal of intelligence sharing if they allowed a court to publish the redacted evidence. Foreign secretary David Miliband denied this on Wednesday, but the letters from the US have been released by Channel 4 News. And their message is unmistakable. The first letter:

*"I write with respect to proceedings ... regarding Mr Binyam Mohamed," the letter said. "We note the classified documents identified in your letters of June 16 and August 1, 2008, to the acting general counsel of the Department of Defence ... the public disclosure of these documents or of the information contained therein is likely to result in serious damage to US national security and could harm ... intelligence information sharing arrangements between our two governments."*

The second:

*"Ordering the disclosure of the US intelligence information now would have only the marginal effects of serious and lasting damage to the US-UK intelligence sharing relationship, and thus the national security of the UK ..."*

That is a threat to hurt the security of a very close ally unless the British government intervenes into a court process to suppress evidence of US torture. In a critical test of the Obama administration, the demand that such evidence be suppressed was reiterated. (I don't know by whom. Panetta isn't in place yet. Brennan? Clinton?) And that's how illegal torture spreads throughout a legal and military system to undermine alliances as well as the rule of law. The poison of Cheney is still in the system. And it will be for a long time. That was the point: the crimes and blunders they committed were such that their successors find themselves, willy nilly, implicated in them.

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