

Masud Hasnain

Clearance

I have had many strange surprises, but this was the most unexpected.

I have had my security clearance issued since sometime August or September of 2002. I have also been going to all sorts of places that the U.S. government needed me to go, including several times to Iraq.

I have never had any problems or issues raised with my clearance. I started going to GTMO in August of 2005, the week Katrina hit New Orleans, and it was at GTMO where I heard the news of Katrina and the floods. I was there with Major Mori who was defending the Australian David Hicks. Since then I have been at GTMO every other week if not back to back with some short breaks here and there for various reasons. No U.S. government department ever raised any issue with my clearance.

Suddenly on May 14 at around 10:00 p.m. (which is close to my bedtime) my mobile phone rang. It was Siham Nur Hussien of Clifford Chance. She asked if she was talking to Masud Hasnain, a cleared Arabic interpreter, and if I was free to go to GTMO the next week. I confirmed that.

GTMO requires that it be given at least three to four weeks advance notice to make the arrangements and give an approval. As soon as I heard that there was a need for an interpreter within a few days, I immediately sensed trouble. She did not mention what happened or why she had asked me on such short notice, only that there was an issue with the interpreter they were supposed to have traveled with. Later on I learned that for some reason his security clearance had been withdrawn by the government, but she did not have time to explain. We agreed and she breathed a sigh of relief. She would make the necessary arrangements and call me back.

Two weeks before that there were heavy rains in Virginia, and my basement had flooded with two inches of water. I was able to pump the water out the day of the flooding, but I could not take care of it entirely as I had to go to GTMO. I was in the middle of my cleaning of the basement when Siham called me. Of course, I was going to bed after working the whole day in the basement, and still there was a lot of work remaining. I had planned a few other things, including buying a car for my children, during that week and the next week as my next planned visit to GTMO was not until after the Memorial Day holidays. But everything was put on hold.

I informed my wife about the change of plans, and as I had been traveling on short notices for the last eight years, she was used to this.

Siham called me, and I could sense a difference in her voice. She informed me that the government had an issue with my clearance; it had been revoked. I saw RED.

What happened? Did I do something wrong? After giving it some thought, I realized that maybe the government was using interpreter security clearance as means to harass GTMO attorneys—an indirect way of making the attorneys' work difficult.

My clearance was being held by a company called JTG, my last employer for which I worked on a government project in Virginia before taking assignments to go to GTMO. I had worked for JTG for a few months during 2006 but resigned as I did not like working in a government environment with its typical government office politics. However my security clearance remained under their sponsorship.

In early February of 2008, CCR had called me and asked me if I would like to get top-secret clearance for a high value detainee (HVD). Getting higher-level clearance is always sought after, so I agreed. They had sent me all the paper work and asked me to send the completed forms and the fingerprint card to Jennifer Campbell of the DOJ. I asked CCR about the progress of the clearance but they had no information. This was a blessing in disguise.

Siham asked me many questions about my clearance, and this caused me some concern. Lucky for my habit of filing everything, I was able to locate the completed paperwork. However, I had a very difficult time sleeping that night.

After several of phone calls between CCR, the DOD, the DOJ, Clifford Chance, and JTG, a conference call was arranged between Clifford Chance, JTG and myself. After a short discussion, we came to an agreement; however, I was unhappy with it. I could work for Clifford Chance as a contractor for JTG. JTG required a contract with Clifford Chance and that I would provide services to Clifford Chance as an employee of JTG. I would like to thank James Hosking of Clifford Chance for immediately raising the issue of conflict of interest because I did not want to work through JTG. However, I agreed if that was the only option.

Another option came up shortly after that conference call as a result a phone call from the DOJ. I was asked if I had sent in paperwork for the top-secret clearance that I was supposed to have sent earlier, and I confirmed. The DOJ wanted to see the paperwork again. Luckily, I had located all the paperwork. I was then asked by the DOJ to fax the paperwork in again. I also had to send in my authorization for DOJ to perform credit check on my background and other related formalities. I was then asked to in come to the DOJ immediately. This was around 12:00 p.m. Friday.

I jumped into the car and went straight to Falls Church Metro station and took a train to Union Station, the DOJ happens to be a few blocks from Union Station. As I was walking to the train my mobile rang and it was JTG and they asked me for my daily rate, as they were preparing a contract for Clifford Chance to sign. Everybody wants to make money on somebody else's effort.

I got to the DOJ just after 1:30 p.m. My fingerprints were taken within minutes. My credit check was being processed while I was on my way there. The person in charge at the fingerprint department said that it usually took two to three business days to get the results of finger prints because the data is sent to the main computer systems in another part of the country; however, they had sent a request earlier, and they were hoping for the best.

We went to Jennifer's office and she gave me a briefing for the new security clearance that was being processed and then we waited. After half an hour, Jennifer received a phone call from Siham and was informed that JTG has sent them a binding contract, i.e. Clifford Chance would be held responsible for that the amount. I have no idea what that amount was. Jennifer asked Siham to hold on as she has some hope. Within fifteen minutes, I was all set to go; I had interim clearance under the sponsorship of the DOJ. Hurray! This happened around 3:00 p.m.

I walked out, I felt that I was bouncing and not walking on the ground. On my way back, I saw the same two young women who had stopped me earlier. I stopped and asked them to offer me what they had to sell. The young women, who appeared to be typical college students, said that they were from ACLU as part of a campaign unhappy with the way our government was treating prisoners in places like Abu Ghuraib and Guantanamo, and they wanted my support.