

THE GUANTÁNAMO BAY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Feroz Ali Abbasi

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Feroz Ali Abbasi conducted by Ronald J. Grele and Kanishk Tharoor on May 31, 2011. This interview is part of the Guantánamo Bay Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

3PM

Session One

Interviewee: Feroz Ali Abbasi

Location: London, United Kingdom

Interviewer: Ronald J. Grele and Kanishk Tharoor

Date: May 31, 2011

Q: This is an interview through the Columbia University Oral History Research Office with Feroz Abbasi? Today's date is May 31, 2011. The interview is being conducted in London. The interviewers are Kanishk Tharoor and Ron Grele. This is an interview for the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. I guess where we would like to begin is with your early life, to understand who you were as young man, coming of age as a Muslim in England.

Abbasi: Subhaana Rabbiyal A`laa. What do you mean, what age do you want me to start at?

Q: Start wherever you want to start. Wherever you feel the beginning is.

Abbasi: The beginning? I will just cover my background from the beginning in brief. I was born in Entebbe, Uganda. My father is Pakistani. My mother is Nubian. Her background is that the grandfather, or the great grandfather, came from southern Sudan, and then settled in northern Uganda. At eight years old, I came to the United Kingdom with my mother and my brother and sister. I was schooled here, primary school, secondary school and college. I was doing fine in secondary school, and then college. I know the U.S. has a different system. College does not mean university. It is just two years before you go to university here. During college I had a kind of crisis.

Q: Slow down. I think we will take it much more slowly.

Abbasi: Alright.

Q: Do you have any memories of your early life in Uganda, before you left?

Abbasi: Yes, I remember throwing things at the monkeys when we were going to school. Then the monkeys would throw things back. I remember the tadpoles in the water. I remember a plant, when you touch it it kind of droops, closes up and droops. I remember being scared of the chameleons. I remember my mother sitting with my sister out in the front of the house. Then a black mamba approached from behind. I said to mum, “Mommy, snake!” Then I remember later on, the drunken neighbor — he was drunk, and at the same time, he was having a battle with the snake in the distance. I remember the locusts. One time we went out and then — it was near night — and then we were collecting the locusts. I think it was locusts. Whatever, it was insects. We ate them. It was nice. I remember stealing my friend's toy. I think it was a lorry. My mother told me to take it back. I had to take it back, and say sorry, which was very shameful. Then I remember a boy coming over and he had one of these kind of camera things, the tourist type things that you pay, and then you look into it. Then you see images like the Eiffel Tower.

Q: What was the town like where you were living in Uganda?

Abbasi: Entebbe?

Q: Entebbe.

Abbasi: I just remember it as dusty, but it was okay. I do not remember too much about it. I came here when I was eight, so there are my early, early memories. But it was sunny. I just remember it sunny.

Q: Where did you settle in England?

Abbasi: Croydon.

Q: Do you remember much about that neighborhood?

Abbasi: Croydon. I have lived in Croydon for two decades. I have been here two decades. So yes, I know it. It is where I am from in London. In terms of memories, I went to school here. Primary school, secondary school, college

Q: Do you remember what it was like making the switch from living in Uganda and coming to Croydon?

Abbasi: Well, I was eight years old, so it was just not a big issue. The second thing is you would think that there would be racism, or a racial aspect to the transition, or people would treat you differently, but it was not an issue for me. In Uganda, since my father is Pakistani, I did not belong to a tribe. I looked different. So coming over here, I was still in school. My schools,

primary school and secondary school, were majority white. There were very few black people. But it was not an issue for me, because I was always different.

Q: Do you have any memories of facing any racism at the time?

Abbasi: No. It surprised me that in primary school and in secondary school, the children themselves, my peers, had understood that racism is wrong. They really did not like racists. They did not like people who were racist in general. They knew it was wrong. So, it was not something that I faced on a frequent basis.

Q: What kind of a student were you?

Abbasi: I do not know. Maybe it is because of Africa, my genes. I am the kind of student that does my own work. I am self-motivated. My mother instilled into me the importance of education and learning. Maybe it is a genetic thing as well. That is the way I was inclined. I did okay. I was not the brightest. I was not the best. I was not getting As or stars all the time, but I was doing fine.

Q: Where did you go to college? To university?

Abbasi: To university? I actually went to university after coming back from Guantánamo.

Q: Let us go to your education before Guantánamo.

Abbasi: College was John Ruskin.

Q: To do what?

Abbasi: I was doing my A levels. Like I said, I was going through a crisis. I started off with four A levels, which was unusual at that time. I don't know why I was doing that. I would think to myself that I was setting myself up for a fall. I do not know why. I started off with four A levels. It was chemistry, physics, math, and electronics. I dropped chemistry, and then math. I was not doing too well. I took up General Studies. Basically, I just scraped through. When it came to college, I barely made it.

Q: Did you have any idea what you were studying for? What your future would be?

Abbasi: Yes. It comes from Uganda. I had this thing about welfare, because our background is poverty. We were poor. I had this idea that welfare was important. But I had this idea — I was just a kid — that if robots can do the work, people can have more leisure time. I had this interest in science and electronics and electronic engineering. Then I wanted to go into artificial neural networks because that was the next generation of computers. That was what I was looking to go into.

Q: When you were growing up in Croydon, what sense did you have of the Uganda that you left behind? Did you ever go back there? Did you stay in touch with relatives?

Abbasi: No. I think that was because I am growing up. I am going from eight to about sixteen or seventeen. Because we were immigrants in this country, there were restrictions on travel and not going back in order to get your British citizenship. That restricted us from going back. We went back in 1999. I was eighteen, maybe nineteen. I think eighteen. I don't know why, but with that side of the family, we never kept in touch. My mother keeps in touch. Obviously, these are her brothers and sisters and uncles, and so forth. In terms of us, there was not any real connection with the Ugandan community here. Only in small ways. You've got friends. You see each other sometimes, but not in a real meaningful way.

Q: You mentioned crisis a number of times. Was that a religious crisis?

Abbasi: Yes.

Q: Do you want to talk about that?

Abbasi: My mother used to tell me that I was Muslim. But then, she used to tell me that I was Arab as well, because I was Muslim. It was just a joke. Because the Arabs are Muslim, so if you are Muslim, you are Arab. I remember that in Uganda, she did tell me one time to go into the mosque, and to do like everyone else. I went in and I did not know what I was doing. So I saw someone washing their feet, I washed my feet. I was very young, younger than eight years old. Then I went into the prayer hall, and I saw people praying. Then they were praying, not the obligatory prayer, because it is that standardized, systematized, but they were praying their own

individual prayer. I was confused. I managed to do a prostration, but that was about it. I remember that.

Coming to the UK, and in primary school, I had this idea that I was Muslim, but I did not know what that meant. One of the memories that I remember of primary school, I showed them how to prostrate, and they laughed. I was just a kid. Not in bad way, not in a bad way. I was playing with them as well. But when you hit puberty, as it were, you are told you are Muslim, but there is nothing there. There is no definition of what Muslim is. What does it mean? In secondary school, I was atheist. That went through the whole of secondary school. At about sixteen, a friend of the family — he was young, in his late twenties — he died of a brain tumor.

I did not think it affected me that much. It affected me, but I carried on. Sixteen, I had my GCSEs — those are your qualifications you get after secondary school. You have to study for them. I had to revise for those. I revised. I was happy with my result from the — well, actually, no, I was not. I would have been happy with my result from the GCSEs but, for some reason, when I did get the result, it did not mean anything to me. That was a big blow, because from eleven years old to sixteen, five years, I had studied just to get these results. These would lead on to A levels. These would lead on to university. These would lead on to my career. That was the plan. But for some reason, I get the results, and they are good results. I should have been happy with those results, but I was not. The thing is there is a disjuncture. When you leave secondary school, you go to college. In secondary school, they treat you like children. In college you are treated like an adult, immediately. With that kind of freedom, it tripped me up in a way. I did not know what to do.

I had to think about my future. What was my purpose in life? I said to myself, "Let's say my purpose in life is making money. I'll make loads of money." But the thing was that death — if I die, no matter how much money I made, it will not stay with me. I am the type of person that if I do something, I like it to last. I do not like things being taken away from me once I have worked hard, and I feel that I have earned them.

I said, "Women." But the same thing, you die.

Whatever I thought of, the culmination of it was that it just meant nothing. I was one of those people who would visualize success. So you know, I would be successful in one thing or another thing. I liked martial arts. You visualize that you are an excellent martial artist, and so forth. But every time you imagined the peak, there was always a depressing drop. That there is nothing after that. That really threw me. I started asking questions about the purpose of life.

What I was taught in school is that when you have a question, you go and look in the books and get the answer. I went to the local book shop, and I started to look in the spiritual section. I picked up a few books. The one I picked up on was Zen Buddhism. I pick up Zen Buddhism. I start reading about Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism had some answers to those questions. They were not the right answers, but I did not know they were not the right answers. "This was great," I thought to myself, "these are the answers." Karma, and the cycle of life, good deeds and bad deeds and stories.

Q: What were some of the answers that Zen Buddhism seemed to offer?

Abbasi: It was all about what is the purpose of life. Why do you die? What happens after you die? Zen Buddhism gave an answer to what happens to you after you die. There has to be something that happens. It cannot just be a cruel world full of injustices and then that is it. Then the second thing was Zen Buddhism gave an answer to why it is that bad things happen to good people. That is an important question. I think a lot of atheists have trouble with that. Then Zen Buddhism proposed that you should do good deeds and the reason why you should do good deeds. I guess that those were the answers, in a way, I was looking for.

I liked the story of the Buddha. Buddha is a title, it is not an actual name. But according to the story, the first Buddha gave up princely riches in order to go to live a hard life, in order to find the truth and to relieve all creation of suffering. That resonated with my interest in welfare. There was this shift. I became disillusioned with the idea of machines bringing happiness to mankind and providing welfare. Then you start looking elsewhere. Religion was the thing that filled that void.

Q: What was the follow-up to that?

Abbasi: I am in Croydon, and I have got a book on Zen Buddhism from the book shop. So I consider myself a Zen Buddhist. I have to meditate. I am trying to meditate, and I am trying to sit in half-lotus position. It is hurting. Then when you meditate, you are not supposed to think good or bad. You are not supposed to have any thoughts. It is not really working out because my legs

are hurting. The meditation is not going the way I thought it would. To cut it short, basically I came to the conclusion Zen Buddhism was not a religion for practical life. That was my conclusion. You had to be in a monastery, and you had to be away from real life to practice it. I put it aside, in terms of the meditation.

But the aspect of welfare — for instance, if you walk, you should not step on the ants and things like that. You should show compassion to the creation. Those remained with me. I started working in Oxfam, in a charity shop. Originally it was because I thought my store of bad deeds was more than my store of good deeds, so I should do some charity and even it up. I started working at Oxfam, and doing some charity there voluntarily. But obviously then, that question was still there. What is the purpose of life? Zen Buddhism did not answer those questions.

In secondary school, if I just jump back slightly, we had assemblies when the class just sits and then someone comes and talks to you. One time, there were some Christians that came to talk to us. They gave us a copy of the New Testament. Unfortunately, some of the other students did not really show much respect for it. They spat on it, jumped on it, and kicked it, and so forth. I took mine back. I put it on a shelf. I do not know why, but I had this sense that if I am not going to read it, at least I should just show some respect to it. It stayed there at least two years. This must have been fourteen when they came. So, more than two years later, when I was seventeen, I got the inclination to read the Bible. Because it was the New Testament, I got myself a copy of the full Bible. Old and New Testament. I decided to try to read it from page to page, from cover to cover. I did not get far. I got to the Ark of the Covenant and its dimensions. Then I decided to

read the New Testament, which is a bit easier to read, because the Old Testament has a lot of detail. It is very grinding.

Then Kosovo was happening at that time, and I am reading *Revelations* as well. So obviously, I am putting two and two together and getting two million. I thought to myself, “Oh, this is World War Three!” But Christianity, it did not make sense to me. I was thinking about it, and there were things that I did not agree with. That did not last long. It did not last long with the Christianity. I got myself a cross, but it was not so much the image of Christ as my savior. It was more back to that suffering thing again and the welfare. That it was an image of someone suffering, and for a good cause, in a way. But I guess the Christianity did not last long.

Then things got harder for me, really. To cut a long story short —

Q: Don't

Q: We don't do that in oral history. We want the long version.

Abbasi: Alright. So basically atheism right now is winning, and I am seventeen years old.

Q: What do you mean by atheism?

Abbasi: You just do not believe in God. Finished. You do not believe there is a higher power. You believe humanity is the highest power there is, or something like that. I do not know. You do not believe in God, or anything supernatural in a way. That is atheism.

Q: When you say “winning,” there is a battle for your soul?

Abbasi: I knew there was the truth out there. I was searching for the truth. But Zen Buddhism was not it. Christianity was not it. I could not find it. It is not like I read it in a book somewhere, and then I forgot where the book was. I have got to search for another book. There is just something innate in yourself, that you know that the truth is out there. But sometimes you maybe become disillusioned. Maybe you think to yourself that you are fooling yourself. That was the kind of battle that I was in. I think I knew the truth was out there. But it was only more of a hope. Hope can rise and fall. But it was just hope. I did not have anything definite. I had not seen it. It was not a flicker. Someone had not told me about it, that it is approximately over there, and I had to go search for it. It was just something within myself. It came from within me, telling me that there is the truth out there.

But when you become disillusioned, and you start losing hope, then it is the atheism. With atheism, the world just becomes a very harsh place. At seventeen I became suicidal. I did try to kill myself because I thought to myself, “There is no point in life.” To my thinking, the pain of living was more than if you ended your life. Because if there is nothing, then it is just zero, is it not? You can get away from the pain, but you do not experience the pleasure of life.

Q: Did you friends that you shared these thoughts with?

Abbasi: It was strange. During secondary school, I don't know what happened. I had colleagues, but no real friends. There was always a disjuncture. I don't know why, but I do not relate to people in a very close way. But once you leave secondary school — that is the life you have known for five years. You grew from child to an adult. Young adult then to an adult. Then you come to college, and you have got to make those friends all over again. But if you are questioning your purpose in life, your interests and who you are, and what you are about, if you are not settled within yourself, how can you find friends who have similar values and similar outlook? When you do not know your own values or your outlook?

Atheism was winning. But it was necessary that I was broken down. Things had to become hard until I cracked. I just remember being in my room, and then saying, "Oh, God, help me." Now this is very strange, because before I did not believe in God. With Zen Buddhism you do not believe in God. You do not believe in God. But I asked God to help me. But then I got angry because the help did not come immediately. I got angry and then I cannot remember whether I smashed something, or something like that. I was a young teenager, so whatever. There were two suicide attempts. One was aspirin. One was paracetamol. But obviously I did not kill myself, because I am here.

Then my third suicide attempt was silly, but I was not thinking straight. I spoke to someone, and they said, "Go travel." So it was not a suicide attempt. The first time I tried it, I went to Scotland, as far north as I could. I said, "I'm just going to make my way down south again. If I have to

walk it, I have to walk it.” It was one of those things that I guess I had to get away and just walk to actually try to find meaning in my life.

I managed to make it because there was a lorry driver who gave me a lift. He liked my sign, “Due south,” because there was a program called *Due South* with a Canadian on a horse. I copied the name and put it on the side of my backpack. He liked my sign, so he took me half of the way and then he dropped me at a park. Then there was some other guy who did something with horses. He took me part of the way, and then he paid for my train ticket home. I sent him a check to cover the cost afterwards. I managed to do that.

But my third suicide attempt was, I said to myself, “I’m going to just go. I’m going to travel east to Europe, and then just go across. I’m aiming for Japan, but I don’t think I’m going to make it. I am probably going to die on the way.” That was what I did. I just went to Europe, to France.

Q: Moazzam [Begg] mentions that in his book. You have read it, obviously.

Abbasi: Yes. I do not remember.

Q: What do you think of the way in which he presented you at that point in time?

Abbasi: I cannot remember what he mentioned, actually. I read the book, but it was a long time ago.

Q: He mentions that you were going to walk to Japan, but you met someone in Switzerland.

Abbasi: Yes, so that was it. I went to France. I remember going through Lyon. I was not thinking straight at that time. I was just walking.

Q: How old were you at this point?

Abbasi: I must have been eighteen.

Q: Eighteen.

Abbasi: Eighteen. Yes, so I am just walking. I am sleeping rough, on park benches and under trees and just going. All I remember is that one time I decided that I was going to walk more of the day, walk a greater distance. I was just walking to one town, then staying there, and then sleeping over, then walking to another town. So I thought, "Let me just walk further, because there is no point me just sitting and just staring at whatever in a town, not doing anything."

Then the back of my heels got cut, because they blistered at one time. So I decided to catch trains. I ended up in Kreuzlingen on the German-Swiss border. I was crossing one border or another. I was just crossing over. I crossed over so many times, they got used to me. They just waved me past. They would not look at my passport. But I ended up in Kreuzlingen. Some guy spoke English and he said, "If you're looking for the refugee camp, it's over there." I said, "Oh,

thank you.” But I was making my way to Italy. I did not say to him that that was what I was doing.

At that time I decided to walk again because the wounds on the back of my heels were getting better. I rested them a bit. I made my way. I followed the path. Then what happens is you have pavement, sidewalk, and then it just becomes grass again. I looked at it, and I started walking, and then a lorry went past. It just reminded me of that journey that I did before, because, it is just loud hot air and turbulence, unpleasant things like that. I thought to myself, “I don't really want to go through this again.” It was hard enough doing it once. But I was going to have to go back to this again.

I turned around, and I thought I would try the refugee camp. I just remember walking up the hill and it was a sunny day. All during this time, it had been hard. It had not been easy sleeping rough. It had been really hard. This must have been a week of this. I had been praying to God, “Oh God help me, God help me. God help me.”

A voice within me said, “Do you really believe in God?”

So I thought to myself, “This is strange. Why am I asking myself this?”

Then the voice said again, “Do you really believe in God?”

I said, “Yes, of course.”

I felt it then and a few months after —it is mentioned in the Koran — that some people are stranded on a ship. The waves are battering the ship, and it is likely that they are going to die, they ask God for help. But once they are on shore, then they forget that they asked God for help, and they forget God. I felt at that time that I was affirming to myself that I am not going to go back. I am not going to deny what I have affirmed at that point in time.

I go to the refugee camp. It was open. I gave them my British passport. I am expecting them to slam the door on my face. The guy calls me in, and then I am thinking, “Well this is strange. They're letting me in.” I am in the refugee camp. I think I was there for a week. They gave medical attention to the back of my heel. I got food while they were checking my papers, checking the passport was genuine.

There I met a Kashmiri. He was trying out his English. So he told me about Allah, and he told me about saying “Basmala,” “In the name of Allah,” before you eat. He told me about Pakistan and Kashmir and the jihad over there. He told me about saying, “La ḥawla wa la quwwata illa billah” — “There is no strength and power, except for the strength and power of Allah” — if you are in trouble, and things like that. He taught me that. Before then, I had affirmed that I believe in God. Then he confirmed to me, informed me of who my God was. That is Allah and my religion is Islam.

The refugee camp turned around and told me I have to leave. If I do not, they are going to imprison me. I have to sign this paper if I want to go. I signed the paper. I took my passport. I

left. I made my way to Zurich, where I called my mum. I asked her to transfer some money over. I caught a Eurostar, and I was back at home.

Q: You were not mugged?

Abbasi: What?

Q: Wikipedia says you were mugged.

Abbasi: I had to account for certain things going missing, because I had this notion that I was not going to turn back. I got rid of some stuff in the garbage. I think it was my debit card. In order to account for it to the bank, I told them that I got mugged. But I was not mugged.

Q: You came back. Now you are a Muslim, or were going to be a Muslim. So what was the next step?

Abbasi: So coming back, I was praying to Allah, saying, "Allah, get me back home and I'll read the Koran. If you get me back home, I'll read the Koran." Obviously I came home, and my mother is there. She asked me what I was doing, where I had gone, because I had not told her what I was up to. I answered evasively. I said, "Oh mum, can I read your Koran?" My aunt had given her a copy because her background is Muslim. It was a translation, meaning the Koran as translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. It used to be in the living room. It was just there. It was not really read. She was surprised, but she said, "Yes."

I started reading the Koran. Then I considered myself Muslim. I had to learn how to pray.

Because my aunt's background is Muslim, I went to her. Then there was a family friend. He was Sunni. My aunt said, "You should learn Arabic as well. So go to this guy who is Shia." So I am a new Muslim, and I am going to the Sunni, and he was telling me one thing. I am going to the Arabic lessons with the Shia, and he was telling me another thing. Now I am getting a bit confused.

Q: This is all in London?

Abbasi: This is all in London. I am becoming confused because they are saying different things. As a new Muslim, I believed that all Muslims thought as one. We prayed as one. We acted as one. We are all the same. I did not know these differences. I am coming across this divide — Shia and Sunni. I asked the Sunni and I asked the Shia about a certain something. Then the Shia guy gave me an answer. He said, "Abbasi, you live in a modern world, and so forth." I did not feel comfortable with that answer. I thought to myself, "I didn't become Muslim in order to just go back to the way I was before. You're telling me that we live in a modern world, and that is what I have to do." That was one thing that I thought was a bit iffy with the Shia's interpretation of things.

The second thing was that I was going to an Islamic bookshop in the mosque. I picked up a book on death and the hereafter. I was reading that. There was one part that said, "Anyone who curses the companions of the prophet Mohammed, may Allah mention him amongst the angels and

grant him peace, and anyone who listens to them, would be cursed,” or something bad will happen to them. The Shia cursed the companions of the prophet Muhammad, ‘ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam [“May Allah honor him and grant him peace”]. I read it, and I was dubious because I did not know what to think.

For some reason, the book would not get out of my mind because I did not buy it at that time. Then a week later, or something like that, I went and bought it. On the bus I was flicking through, and it came to the same page. It came to the same part. Anyone who curses the companions of the prophet Muhammad, ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, something is going to be bad, even if you do not curse, but you are listening to it. I thought to myself, “I am not going to take the risk. I’m not going to that Shia again.” That is how I became Sunni.

Q: But then how did you learn Arabic?

Abbasi: I didn’t. Arabic has been a struggle for me for a long time. The Shia, when I went to him, he was teaching a high level. He was not starting from the basics. Because I was an adult, he did not put me in with the kids' class. He said, “If you just hang around and stay, maybe you’ll pick up something on the way. And then we’ll start the lessons again, and then you can pick up from there,” because they were advanced. The best I could do was just copy what he was writing on the board, and hope that later on I would understand it, which gave me practice with my writing of the Arabic script but nothing else. I did not understand any of it. I guess he saw it as an opportunity to indoctrinate me and turn me into a Shia.

Q: So you had chosen the Sunni path. What next?

Abbasi: Then I learned how to pray. When you become Muslim, the first six months is the honeymoon period. You feel your faith is very high. Your chest has expanded. You are easily touched by certain things. I remember reading the book of the narrations of the prophet Muhammad, ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, when there was a battle called Uhud. The prophet Muhammad, ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, was struck in the face. He lost a tooth. The thing is that the prophet Muhammad, ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, any pain we feel, he would feel double. He got a double reward, so he would feel double any pain you felt. If he had a fever, he would have double the fever of a normal person, being in that state in those six months. Reading that, it will bring you to tears because you are thinking, what are these people doing? This is the prophet Muhammad, ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, he is being struck in the face like this, and he lost a tooth. He was bleeding. You are touched by those things.

When you become Muslim, when you say “I believe,” you are going to be tested. It is not just about affirming it, and that is it. You have to show that you were true to your word. After the six months, the test came. I decided to set my life straight again. I had got a job at Makro part-time, which is a wholesaler's, just stacking shelves and so forth. I was still in Croydon. My life was still going. I was still walking the same streets. I would walk the same streets, and I would think to myself, “They haven't changed. The streets are the same. The people haven't changed, but it's me that's changed.”

I found it very hard to live my life. I felt my faith was new, and it was very tender. It could easily be washed away, if I just carried on walking the same streets and living the same kind of life in the same place, as I was doing. I came to learn of Finsbury Park Mosque, and Sheikh Abu Hamza [al-Masri]. I decided to attend some of those Friday sermons. Because I was in the south, Croydon, it was very hard to go to Finsbury Park. It is a long distance. You go from southeast, then you go all the way through central London, and then you go up north. I started attending some sermons there.

It was Ramadan. The mosque was generally run by volunteers. There was some issue about security, there was no security at night, and they were worried because the mosque, allegedly, was taken over by force. There was a worry that the people they had taken over from would come back and take it over by force. There was some nonsense politics happening before I came. There had to be security. But the person doing security was alleged not to be doing security in the way they should do. They were upset by it.

I said to myself, "Let me help out. I'm not really doing anything with myself." I thought I was going to help out for the end of Ramadan until everything got back to normal. I ended up staying there for a year. I lived in the Finsbury Park Mosque. Part of it was because before I was staying with my family at home and my change was not really accepted. You find this a lot with someone becoming Muslim, that they are not really accepted by their own family members. This goes way back to day one of our history. Your family will disown you. I am not saying my family disowned me, but I thought they did not accept me. I went somewhere where I felt some kind of acceptance, and that was Finsbury Park Mosque.

I was living in the mosque. I was security. I was making sure no one came and raided the mosque, protecting it from the people that it was taken over from.

Q: Did anybody try to raid the mosque?

Abbasi: No. We just had some people who were not straight in the head jumping the wall and running through the back door. They lived there. They stayed there. But we had this policy that after a certain hour, you cannot be coming in and expect the door to open. for security reasons. And then they would jump. I would corner them and give them a hard talking to, but let them go. You know they are going to do it again. That kind of thing. But nothing much happened. So it was good. I did not have to get involved in any altercations or anything like that.

At the Finsbury Park Mosque there was this whole thing about Afghanistan being the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. I think this is poorly understood. A country is not an Islamic country unless Sharia is applied across it. It does not matter how many Muslims there are in that country. It could be majority non-Muslim. It is a matter of which law is applied across it. The only country in the world at that time that was an Islamic state was Afghanistan because it applied Sharia law.

Q: Iran was not considered a Muslim country?

Abbasi: No, they do not apply Sharia. They are Shia. They have a very different interpretation. They do not accept a lot of narrations from the prophet Mohammed, ﷺ, because of their animosity to certain companions around the prophet Mohammed, ﷺ. Therefore their law is skewed in a very different way, so the only place was the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. There was this whole thing about Hijra. Hijra is to emigrate for the sake of your religion. In Finsbury Park, this was the big thing, to move to Afghanistan, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

At that time, I had been living in the mosque as a recluse because I found it very hard to go out into that society. My faith was new. It felt that if I got back into society, I got a job, I would slowly lose it. I was worried that that would happen. I tried to get a job, but I said to myself there are very few options in terms of jobs for someone who wants to practice their religion. I will become a road-sweeper. There is no point in being arrogant about it. I will sweep the road. For instance, if you work with Makro, they were okay at the beginning. Then they started to ask me to work in the meat section. Then you have to deal with pork, and then alcohol. It just became silly. You end up getting into that.

I thought road-sweeper, sweeping the roads, you cannot get into much trouble doing that. I was silly because I was frank to the guy. I said, "I'll do the job. I am going to have to pray sometimes, but I'll pray on the streets. It won't take long. Five minutes." But he said, "No, if you're working for team then you're going to be delayed," and a load of nonsense. He did not take me as a road-sweeper. I could not get a job as a road sweeper. So what could I do? I said to myself, "I'm going

to have to get out. I'm going to have to bail out.” I jumped on to the Hijra project. This was November, 2000. I left for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Q: And at this point, you are nineteen, twenty?

Abbasi: I think I am twenty.

Q: You went to Afghanistan.

Abbasi: Yes.

Q: What were your first impressions of Afghanistan when you got there?

Abbasi: First impressions? For some reason, I am the type of person who, if I move from one kind of scenario to another, would accept it. I do not know whether it was from my childhood or when I was younger. It is just the way I am. It was not something big, but it was nice. I was not shocked by anything. It was just a different country, and then that was it. I do not remember any kind of special memories about my first going there.

Q: Not only the physical environment, but of the religious environment.

Abbasi: I think sometimes you do not appreciate something until you have seen the opposite. The only time I appreciated Afghanistan for what it was, was when I was taken to Guantánamo. I did

not know it but there was a sense of security and a sense of peace. There was a sense that my values were upheld. It was a place that I could live and be myself in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The stark contrast being Guantánamo was the only time I really felt the loss. Thereafter, coming back here, I still feel that loss. But when I was there, it was just normal. I was young, so I guess you do not really appreciate these things. You just go with the flow. You do not stop to actually smell the roses.

Q: Where were you in Afghanistan?

Abbasi: Kandahar.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Do you mind beginning with that thought? It is a great thought.

Abbasi: If all you have known is security in a way, you do not appreciate it until it is gone. With the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, I did not realize how much security and peace I had, my values and the person I am and where I want to be and what I want to be doing, until I was taken to Guantánamo. The stark contrast really showed me what I had lost. It is something that pains me today because regret is the worst thing in life. I really regret not actually appreciating what I had then because I do not have it now, and it burns me.

Q: You were in Kandahar?

Abbasi: Yes. I spent most of my time in Kandahar. With Afghanistan, I expected — and I was not wrong in my expectation that my values would be upheld, it was a Muslim country, I was happy in that regard — but I expected that the people would accept us. I thought it was going to be like a homecoming, that we are the brothers, the unknown brothers. We will come in, we will be appreciated by the society, and we will be accepted within the society. We will get jobs. We will marry. We will live as Muslims in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. But unfortunately, that was not the way.

The Afghans considered us foreigners, but it was more the middle-aged ones. The older ones, the ones that had seen the Russian jihad, the ones that had seen the Arabs come and fight and die and bleed and lose limbs, sacrifice alongside them, when they saw you, they appreciated you. They came, and they greeted you warmly. They referred to you as a traveler and said to you, “Pray for me.” They saw something from the experience in their past. But unfortunately, the younger generations in their late twenties and early thirties, they just saw you as a foreigner, and “What are you doing in this country?”

Q: Can you remember an episode of that kind of interaction?

Abbasi: Yes. We went to the mosque, the local mosque, and some of my brothers and I prayed there. Then one of the Afghans who spoke some English came, and he said, “What are you doing here?”

I said, "We came to pray at the mosque. What's the issue?"

He said, "What are you doing here? You came to kill Afghans. That's what you came for. To kill Afghans!"

I said, "No, what are you talking about?"

"You came to kill Afghans!"

It was like that. One of the other brothers, he said, "If you carry on like that, keep on saying that, we'll take you to the Taliban, and they'll interrogate you."

Then he said, "No, no, no, no. Forgive. Allah forgives. Forgive!"

I said, "Well, you're forgiven brother, but where did you get that idea from?"

Unfortunately, that is the mentality. They would raise prices on you in the shops. The taxi driver would raise prices on you. He would not charge you the Afghan rate. They thought you were rich. You were never part of the society. At one time, I wanted to get married. I asked someone, and he was blunt. He said, "We don't marry our women to people like you." That was it. There was no inquiry. There was nothing. He was just blunt.

It is troubling because here, in the UK, I can get a job. I can get by in society in that regard, in the everyday kind of way, but the law of this country and upholding my values and accepting me as an equal citizen in this country is not there. Over there, the Sharia, my values are upheld, the law is upheld. I feel secure. If there is any wrong, I will be judged by a law that I agree with. I will accept the result and whatever the judgment is because I feel that it is in accordance with the Koran and Sunnah to the best of their ability. When it came to the people, to get a job and get married, it was no way. It is strange, very strange.

Q: You said, "we" and "us" a number of times. Who are the "we" and the "us?"

Abbasi: In Afghanistan? We are the foreigners. We are the foreigners. Anyone who was foreign.

Q: Just a generic "we?"

Abbasi: Yes, it is just generic "we," anyone who was foreign. If you are not Afghan, then you are automatically Arab no matter where you came from. You are just Arab. They thought I was Chinese because all they knew is Afghanistan, Pakistan, and then anything further was China. I was black so they assumed I must be Chinese. They did not know beyond. They were not very versed in geography and stuff like that.

The best approximation they had was "habesha." There was a companion of the Prophet, ﷺ Allāhu 'alay-hi wa-sallam, his name was, Bilal, and he was Ethiopian. The term in Arabic is habesha. Because they know the narration, they have read the stories, and they knew he was

black, they say, "Oh, you must be habesha," meaning I am from the same tribe as this companion Bilal. It was close enough, Ethiopia, East Africa, Uganda. That was the best, but some of them would think, "China."

What can you do? I was not accepted in the society. I tried to get by.

Q: How did you communicate with people, with Afghans?

Abbasi: You did not. You just learned. You just learned. You tried to learn the language to the best of your ability. There were some English speakers there in that regard. You did your best. The next significant thing must be Massoud, Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Q: The commander of the Northern Alliance.

Abbasi: Yes. Taliban had 90 percent of the country, 10 percent was held by Massoud. Taliban had the numbers but Massoud was tactical, a very good strategist. He was holding the north, something about ten lines. In the mountains in the north, even the Russians had trouble breaking that stronghold. It was formerly held by the mujahideen during the Russian-Afghan jihad. He was holding that area. Then, he gets killed. We hear about it. I thought to myself, "That is it, that is it. 10 percent. The Taliban are going to take the whole country. The whole country is going to be unified. This is great news." A day later, September 11 happens.

Q: Did that have any meaning for you at that time there?

Abbasi: At that time, we did not have any news. Because of the Taliban, there was no television. The news that you got was from the BBC World Service, through hand-held radios. I did not know what the World Trade Center was. I did not see any images of it. I only heard it from word of mouth because I could not afford one of those radios. A lot of my money was spent on footwear because Afghan terrain would just kill your footwear. You spend a lot of money on footwear. I did not have that much money.

What September 11 meant was a lot of uncertainty. I did not know the scope or the gravity of the whole thing. All I am hearing is news from a few people you meet on the street. It was either going to be that America was going to send some cruise missiles — a few cruise missiles hit some houses, supposedly of Osama bin Laden's — and that would be it, or it could be more than that. For a whole month, there was this whole build-up that it is going to be a war. You are hearing certain things, and you do not know whether to leave or whether to stay. Then, unfortunately, the people that you are familiar with, they are all disappearing. It was every man for himself. People were saving themselves.

[INTERRUPTION]

Abbasi: You have the people that you are familiar with and then all of a sudden, they are going and finding their own way out and saving themselves. Then you are just left to hang. I really did not know what to do. When I went to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, I meant to go and stay.

I had not made any exit plans. I did not have that much money. My money was depleted because the only money I had, I was using it the whole time. I had to remain.

Then there was this whole buildup that there is possibly going to be an attack. You do not know how long the attack is going to be, whether it is going to just be a few cruise missiles, or it is going to be a drawn-out war. You do not know. It was a whole uncertainty. We heard stories from Kabul. The Northern Alliance, some Afghans there were upset that Massoud was killed. I do not know whether they were upset, or it was an opportunity, so they were killing Arabs in the market. Obviously I am worried that I am considered Arab, I am going to be next.

I was in Kandahar living in the Arabic institution, where they taught Arabic, but they were not teaching at that time. I tried to enroll, but they did not have enough people. I was staying there, but there was nothing much going on in terms of education.

I remember one time leaving, just stepping out of the compound, and then hearing a bang. I look around to see where the bullet had hit because obviously they missed. They did not get me, but I was looking around to see where it hit because I was thinking, "What's going on? Is someone shooting at me?" Then I hear another bang. I am looking around frantic now because I do not know which way to run. Is someone shooting at me? I hear a bang. I look over across the other side of the road — it was something to scare the birds. I think there was an Afghan there who laughed because he saw me looking like I was crazy. But obviously, you do not know what is going to happen. You do not know whether you are just going to step out, and someone is going to kill you.

I decided I am going to have to not stay in Kandahar. I am just going to have to go out. With a group of other foreigners, we went out to the outskirts. We stayed on the outskirts of Kandahar hiding because we were afraid that the Afghans would come for us. We were hearing news that one city after another is falling. The last news I heard was that Mullah [Mohammed] Omar said that the Taliban are going to pull back to Kandahar. They are going to fight from Kandahar and then reclaim the country. They are not going to give up Kandahar. Then the next thing I know is that I am on the outskirts. I am going to have to go through that story as well.

I am on the outskirts of Kandahar with some foreigners. We are sleeping rough. Where I was sleeping, there were ticks one time, and then there was a snake. There was some bombing around the area, and then there was a bomb that hit pretty close. There was an Afghan, I remember, on a bike who was just riding out in the area. It was the outskirts, so I am wondering whether he is doing recon for someone — he spotted us, the foreigners, and that is why the bombs are hitting so close.

I thought to myself, “I’m not going to sleep here with the snakes and the ticks or whatever, et cetera. I’m going to sleep in one of the bomb craters.” I thought it was safer to sleep in one of the bomb craters. I told my friend, “I’m going to sleep over there,” just in case, so he knows where I’m sleeping. I slept in the bomb crater.

I just remember voices at night calling. I just remember seeing a silhouette of someone at the edge of the bomb crater, but I did not wake up. I wake up in the morning, and everyone had

gone. I was on my own on the outskirts of Kandahar. So I thought, “What's going on? Where has everyone gone?”

They had left in a rush because things were left. The sleeping bags were left. They were just there, just like they had just picked up and went like that. I prayed my morning prayer. Then I scavenged and I found one of those hand-held radios with BBC World Service. I turned it on, and the aerial was broken, so I shake it about a bit. I hear, outside of the white noise, that Kandahar had fallen. There is me. There is Mullah Omar who said that we were going to come back to Kandahar, and we were going to fight from Kandahar and reclaim Afghanistan. Then there is this news that Kandahar had fallen. Basically, I was in Northern Alliance territory.

Q: What were you thinking at the time?

Abbasi: Run. That is what I did. I had to get out, away from that place. There are sleeping bags all over the place. I do not know whether Northern Alliance was around. I did not know what to do, so I just ran.

Q: With any kind of aim in mind?

Abbasi: There were some dates left, so I packed some dates in a bag. I was going to rush just away from that area because we were in a dry river bed. I was going to run across the dry river bed. I heard voices. I heard voices. I climbed the side, the bank. I climbed the bank, and all I saw

is a yellow turban, a yellow turban. I climbed a bit more, and then I saw this Afghan approaching.

I did not wait to see whether he had a gun or not or whatever. I just turned and ran. I ran down the riverbed. As I was running, the thought in my head was, "He's going to shoot me in my back, he's going to shoot me in my back, he's going to shoot me in my back." I just kept on running. I was thinking, "He's going to shoot me in my back, he's going to shoot me in my back, he's going to shoot me in my back." That was the only thought I had. I am not breathing. The dry river bed went straight and then turned around a corner. I am just thinking, "He's going to shoot me in my back." I had to make that corner. I am thinking, "He's going to shoot me in the back, he's going to shoot me in the back, he's going to shoot me in the back."

I was surprised I made it around the corner, but because I was not breathing it did not help. I am thin, so long distance running should be my thing. But when you are not breathing you are not going to get far. I made it around the corner, and obviously I am clamoring. I just tried to get away from that place as quickly as possible. I got down the dry river bed. I got over the top and went on the bank of the other side. Then I just hid in a depression. I remained there. It was daylight. Afghanistan is open plain. You can see someone for a very long time, very far. I am not really going to get away. If they decided to shoot me, I am sure they could shoot me from a distance because there are not many places you can hide. There are no trees and things like that. I hid in the depression. I stayed there the whole day, the whole night.

Then the morning came. I awake, and then I look. In the distance, standing on a big rock, there is a group of Afghans, and they have got a weapon. They are shooting at a set of houses. I am thinking to myself, “This is getting serious now.” These Afghans shooting at this set of houses — I am not going into too much detail? I can go into a lot of detail.

Q: No, this is great.

Abbasi: I had to get away from that depression, down in the dry river bed and make my way the other way again. I hid out in some set of derelict houses, mud houses, on the side. I found something to eat. I had a can of tuna on me, and then there, there were two jam jars, small jam jars. One was broken. I knew there was a river in the distance away from Kandahar, so my priority was water. I made my way there. You are making your way across open plain.

I remember passing one Afghan. I saw him at a distance, and he saw me. The Afghans do not walk on paths. They just walk everywhere. There is no way you can walk in the open, in the wilderness and not come across an Afghan. They are always there. This guy had one of those big machine guns, belt machine gun. He looked at me. He was in the distance. I looked at him. I was just hoping he would not approach me. For some reason, he decided just to walk away. He looked and maybe could not see me from that distance. He decided to walk. I walked away.

I managed to get to the actual river. It was the Red Sands. I had seen it on Google Earth. The Red Sands, very, very beautiful. There was a river that runs along them. I climbed up. You have to climb up in order to get to the top. I climbed up. I come across Jaan Mohammed. I tried to talk to

him, he tries to talk to me. He tells me that if I follow this river, I will go to Pakistan. I thought, “That's good to know.” I think there was someone else. My memories are kind of broken.

I remember going across the Red Sands, walking across the Red Sands. I think I went in a big circle because I walked the Red Sands, and I came to the edge of a mountain. There was a town there. I asked them for food. They gave me some raisins, but they said that it was Ramadan and I should be fasting. But I am a traveler, one, and in a bad situation right now, two. I managed to come around, and I think I ended up in the same spot. On the Red Sands I found some kind of brush and I hid there. I was there for three days, three days. I got sick because I was drinking the water. I was confused. Should I follow the river? I did not know what to do.

Q: Did they find you?

Abbasi: Yes. I guess Jaan Mohammed went around talking — maybe it was the same person with the yellow turban. After all, I do not know. But a family of the Afghans found me. He sent his son. He was searching, and then he found me in that area. He took me to a town, to a small town on the edge. They looked after me. They hid me because they said Jaan Mohammed was very interested in me. He wanted to relocate me again. Then they told me that there was a bounty on my head, \$30,000, that Jaan Mohammed was very interested in this money, and he was looking for me. He is going to be around that town, that village, looking to see where I am, so they hid me in some derelict building, and gave me some medicine because the water had affected me. They gave me food.

They said that after Ramadan they have three days of celebration. After those, we will leave, and then we will go on a smugglers' route and go to Pakistan. That is what happened. I left with the old man, but did not get far. A four-by-four pulled up, and it was full of Afghans with weapons. One of them exits, and he walks up.

The Afghan old man walks up to him and starts berating him, calling him *mukhalif*, the opposition, and giving him a good telling off. I could not understand what he was saying, but he was really giving him a good telling off. The Afghan walks up to me, and then he says, "Musulman, musulman?" Are you Muslim?

I said, "Yes, I am Muslim. "I said to him, "Musulman, musulman?"

He said that, "Yes, he is Muslim." Then he frisks me and takes my passport and my money.

He indicates to me, I thought he indicated to go out to the open wilderness. I was happy. I think to myself, "This is good." When he was talking to the old man, I was looking at the four by four. I was looking in the distance, and I thought to myself — because in primary school and secondary school, at least the early part of secondary school, I was a sprinter — I could run that, just peg it and run. But then it is open area. I could run for as long as I like, and then they would just shoot you down. That would be it. He indicated, "Go."

So I thought, "Excellent. He's telling me just to go." Without my passport, my money, I was happy to just leave.

But he said, "No, no, no, come, you're going to the four-by-four." They put me in the four by four. I am in amongst them, and they are sitting there with their guns. This was their interrogation, I guess that this was the best they could do. They said, "Zindabad Osama bin Laden." "Zindabad" means "long live."

I said, "Zindabad Taliban. Zindabad Mullah Omar." That means, "Long live Taliban. Long live Mullah Omar." They were mukhalif, but one of them was former Taliban. They indicated that he was former Taliban, but he had switched sides. He was a turncoat. In the car, the four-by-four, the old man is in the back. We drive. They put me in the back, and I think the old man went in the front. They took me to Spin Boldak, which is on the border with Pakistan.

At Spin Boldak, the old man left, and then he left me with them. They took me into a house, and I see a picture. They had given me back my passport, at this time and my money. I see a picture, and then they took it again. I think it was [Hamid] Karzai. I do not know. I had not seen houses with those pictures. There was just a picture in the center of the living room. They are like Hosni Mubarak-type pictures of presidents in Arab countries, like [Muammar] Gaddafi, you see his picture everywhere, or you did then. So I saw this picture.

Q: It was a picture of Karzai?

Abbasi: I believe it was Karzai. They take the passport. They come back. In order to get into the car, I had to wear the blue woman thing, which amused the kids because they were not fooled. I got into the car. They took me to the border.

They are watching the border. Sometimes, the Pakistani soldiers are not there, they do not scrutinize, so you can just drive across. But they were there, and they were checking every vehicle. They pulled up the side, and they were looking. I am thinking, "They're not going to get me across." They are thinking the same thing. I believe we changed cars. We changed cars. I was put into another car. Things got distinctively threatening. The people that changed over, some of the old ones stayed, the ones that had got me in the first place, but some of the new ones, seemed a bit colder. One of them was in the back, and he cocked his Kalashnikov near my head. I am thinking to myself, "It doesn't look like this is going my way." I thought they were going to help me, my Muslim brothers. Then we drove back to Kandahar.

As we were driving, they said, "We're going to Herat. Herat is on the border with Iran, and Iran will take you. Pakistan doesn't want to take you." Morning became night, and we are driving through Kandahar. I am thinking they are going to fulfill their word. I start seeing that we are pulling up to roads where I am seeing tanks. I am seeing a lot of armed men.

This looks like their area, their compound, their stronghold. So they take me there, and then the car just remains there. They exit. An Afghan that speaks English comes into the car. Now he was really aggressive. He spoke English with an accent. I would say maybe he spent some time in America, or he had watched a lot of American movies or something. But he said to me

something like, “We're going to hand you over to the British guys.” He just seemed angry. He got out of the car, slammed the door, and that was that. “They’re going to hand me over to the British.”

I think at that time they drove me back to Kandahar city. It was a familiar site because there is an arch in Kandahar. When we used to catch the rickshaw. It used to go under the arch when you are going to the market. But now, there are no rickshaws, and there is not that bustle of a bazaar. It is just night, and it is quiet. Underneath the arch, there are two Afghans, and they have their weapons. I am sitting in the car.

The original Afghan that frisked me and took my passport is sitting there. He is nervous about my hands. I do not know why. We are waiting. I think we are waiting outside. This area used to be Mullah Omar's offices at that time.

Am I going into too much detail?

Q: A little bit.

Abbasi: A little bit? Yes. I will speed it up a bit. I said to the Afghan — I tried my best in Pashto — “If the Americans enter Afghanistan, Islam will leave Afghanistan. So just be careful.” He indicated to go into the building. I enter the building. I am tied up by those Afghans. Now the building is crawling with people with weapons. I am taken into a room.

Then is the first time I see American soldiers, Marines. They walk in with their M16s hanging off their necks. They speak to me in the American accent. I am looking at them. They are blond-haired, blue-eyed. I had not seen that for a long time. They look at my papers, and they tell the Afghans to put me in the Afghan prison. I am held in the Afghan prison for two days, three nights. From there, the Afghans take me out. I am taken to a house. There was no furniture in the house. Then I am handed over to the American Marines. They swap cars. I am taken in the back of a van. I am driven to Kandahar Airfield. Kandahar Airfield at that time was made into a detention center.

Q: How were they taking care of you at all? It was four days?

Abbasi: No, it was just a short ride. It is not far from Kandahar to Kandahar airport, and part of the road is tarmacked. I knew I was going to Kandahar Airfield because of that. Because once you hit the tarmac in Kandahar, having driven such a small distance, then it must be going to Kandahar airport. So I was hooded and grip-tied and told to scoot back into a van.

I was taken to Kandahar airport, which has become the detention center. They threw me on the ground, frisked my sides. I was taken in. I am blindfolded at this point in time, so I am going by hearing. I am taken into whatever facility they have for processing. I am stripped naked, anal searched. Pictures are taken. Fully nude pictures, I will add, because later on, a detainee in Guantánamo Bay was shown those pictures of me. He told me it was fully nude. They were on the laptop of a military commission's lawyer that was defending him. That is how I know these pictures were taken.

I was taken into interrogation by the Marines. The Marines were only concerned with military intelligence information. I did not have any to give them. Then the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] interrogated me once. I was isolated, put in what is called the Barn because they thought I was British Special Air Services, SAS, special military forces. I do not know why they thought that, but they really believed it. I stayed in Kandahar for about three weeks.

Q: What kinds of things did the FBI want to know?

Abbasi: Just general stuff, like background, the same things I am telling you. Background, schools, jobs, how you got to Afghanistan, why you were there, what did you do when you were there. That is what they wanted to know. After three weeks they told me that I am going to go before a military commissions or civilian court for conspiracy. Conspiracy to do what? They never said. I think it was a Marine or one of these soldiers that said, "You're going to be shitting in a bucket on an island for the rest of your life. You're going to get life without parole." I thought, "Okay, whatever."

That is the prelude to Guantánamo. We get processed in Kandahar and then taken to Guantánamo Bay.

Q: We have all seen the pictures of the arrival of the prisoners to Guantánamo. I wonder if you can go through that, but observe for us to describe, in your own words, that episode.

Abbasi: The arriving in Guantánamo?

Q: No, I mean the whole trip over.

Abbasi: The trip over from Kandahar? The three weeks I spent in Kandahar was in what was termed the Barn. I was considered some special detainee. I don't know why. After the three weeks, I was taken out and then taken for processing. Except for the brief period when I was taken into the Barn, saw no other detainees. I saw some detainees during the processing. There was someone before me. They were wearing the orange, tight suit and other paraphernalia. Then it was my time for processing.

In Kandahar, they did not give us a shower, nothing. No hygiene. To go into graphic detail, what they do is they shave your head. I only had six hairs on my chin. I thought, "Well, he's not going to shave my beard, because there's nothing there." But he gave it one swipe. For some reason, they dribble some liquid on your private parts. Don't know what it is. Then you are put in that suit, and then these muffs that restrict thumb movement. Handcuffs. Eye goggles. Ear muffs. I was taken out. I was put in front to lead one line of a set of detainees. I remember it was lunch time, because they gave us the half Afghan bread that the Red Cross had sorted out for us. Before, we were only getting two meals a day of MREs — that is Meal, Ready to Eat. Military kind of rations. We ate that. And then we were taken out to the runway.

Q: But your hands were tied. Did someone feed you?

Abbasi: No. You hold it. You just hold it. You are sitting down. You move from the waist down, and eat it. You are wearing muffs, so you can kind of hold some things. But I mean, it is a big bread. It is a huge Afghan bread. We managed. We were taken out the runway, and then the military have this thing. They get ready for nothing. They took us out in the day. The sun had gone down, and then we were put on the planes. Before they put us on the planes they would test the handcuffs. They would squeeze them, because there is a way of locking them so that they just do not keep on squeezing your wrists. Some people got it worse than others. They did it on purpose to cause pain, basically. They squeezed mine, but hamdullah, all praises due to Allah, it was not as tough as some other people's. We were put on the plane. We were strapped in and then the plane took off.

As a Muslim you have to take care of you prayers, and in the detention, and being transferred, and so forth, it becomes a worry. I was worried about the prayer. That was my concern. At the same time, that is what I remember of the journey. I remember we stopped off somewhere hot. We changed planes briefly. The flight took off. I think we got one small peanut butter sandwich and an apple. The soldiers ate the rest. The flight must have been eighteen hours. I seem to recall eighteen hours. I remember the pilot saying that we are going over such and such American city. I remember the city, but I do not remember the name of it. I do not know whether he was fooling — just making a joke, or something like that.

I remember one of the soldiers decided to give a hard time to the British guy — myself. Then he started berating the guy next to me. I did not say anything. We landed in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. I did not know it was Guantánamo Bay. People would be taken out. This is by sound.

There are no images to these memories. This is by sound. But the soldiers would stand either side of you. Then it is your turn to go down to ramp. They are saying things like, "The Marines are really effing them up." You can hear the shackles moving faster than they should do, which means that they are cutting at the ankles. You can hear people screaming, saying "F this, F that. F this. F that," and the detainees screaming. You could just hear. All you were doing was hearing. I am getting tense now because it is my turn next, when I go down the ramp and then I am going to get effed up.

They put me in the hands of the Marines, and then they lift you up and check one side. Lift you on the other side. You are frog marched from one set of hands to another and end up in the stress position. They put us in the compound, and there is this famous Pentagon picture they released of us in stress positions. If that is the first picture, I am one of them. I was sitting in that stress position.

There is the hot sun. There is the surgical mask on your face. The sweat is going into the surgical mask. You cannot breathe. Dogs are barking. There is the soldier barking orders and then the bad translation of Arabic. I am just sitting there. You are in this stress position. You have to hold the position. Your hands have to be in a certain place. I cannot breathe.

There is another reason as well. I had not had a tooth brush for three weeks in Kandahar. My breath did not smell that good with the face mask. I was trying to remove it from my nose. You just move your mouth, like that. It would move it from my nose. I would try to breathe. Then the soldier would come back, shout at me, "Put it back." This was the whole thing, and it went on for

hours. We got there when it was probably midday. The sun had gone down, and I was still there. I am just hearing other detainees drop like flies. They get dragged away. You can hear the chains. I think I was the last one. They came. Before they did that, they took my sandal off my foot. I do not why they took the sandal off my foot. Then they took me out

They took me out into processing. Then you get a shower in front of full view of everyone. You are naked, and you have only got a few seconds. Then you go back, and they put you in the jump suits. There is an anal search again. With the goggles, you could see a little bit underneath. You could see your feet or you could see down. I just remember the light had changed. It was those flood lights that became very familiar. I remember the clanking of the gates that were new sounds to me, but they would become very familiar. I remember the grass. Because of the flood lights, it is a different color. It was not green. It was just a different hue.

I was put into my cage. They took off the goggles. My eyes took a while to readjust. I stood up and looked. The first image I saw was an Afghan in orange in a cage similar to mine, praying, which I later learned was in the wrong direction. I looked around, and then that was it. I was in a cage. My concern was to pray. I prayed as best as I could during that whole process. But I said, "Let me repeat the prayers again." I was praying in the same direction as the Afghan, so I was praying in the wrong direction as well, but I did not know which direction to pray.

I am in camp X-Ray.

Q: Before you got on the plane, had you been told you were being taken to Guantánamo Bay?

Abbasi: No. Not to Guantánamo Bay. I had been told I would be going before military commissions or civilian courts, but that I would be sitting in a bucket for the rest of my life for 100 years without parole. It was life without parole.

Q: Did you have any idea of what to expect before you arrived and walked down that plank?

Abbasi: No, not at all. I did not even know Guantánamo Bay when it existed. I did not know. There is some reggae, or something like that, though. Maybe I listened to it, or it mentions it in some of the lyrics. I did not know what Guantánamo Bay was, or that it even existed, or was a detention center, or anything like that.

I am put in an animal cage. My first impressions were that this was quarantine. What I expected was to go to America. They starved me in Kandahar. I had spoken to Americans before, before the whole Afghanistan thing. I heard that inmates in America get swollen. You get big. They do weights to get big. They must have food. I thought to myself, in Kandahar my only concern was food. They were starving me, to the point that I became very thin. If I go to America they might put me before military commissions or civilian court, but I will get food. I am there in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and then that did not transpire. We did not get swollen.

I am in Camp X-Ray. I remember it as the first three days. Not talking. Others remember it as two weeks. To me, the not talking thing — you just sit in the middle of your cell. Whether you were in the sun or not did not matter. You had two places to look. You had to look up to the sky,

or the ground. The soldier's job was to see whether you were looking in any other direction other than these, and then come to shout at you. That was it. But for me, those three days — to me, I remember them as three days — it was like I could catch up. All of this had happened, and my mind was not keeping up with it. It was not keeping up with it. There was a kind of moment where I could stop, and then start to take it in. It was during those three days that we were allowed to talk to the guy next to you.

Q: What were you thinking in those three days?

Abbasi: Quarantine. That I was in quarantine like animals they will not allow them into the country. They need to put them in quarantine to check whether they have got diseases. Then we were going to go to America. That was what I thought. You had these Iso Mats, they called them, these camping mats. I would not sit on the Iso Mat. This is after they allow you slight freedom in your cage, to sit on the rough floor. The Marines give you a beating. They make you sit cross-legged in the truck. Then they tie you down, bolt you down. If you move from that position, then they give you a kicking. I said, “I'm going to toughen up my legs. I'm going to sit on the rough floor, the concrete floor, and toughen up my legs. When the Marines come, then I'll be able take their beating. Because we were going to go to America.”

It never happened. But it was a good thing it did not happen.

Q: When you first were allowed to talk to each other, what are the kinds of things you said to one another?

Abbasi: My Arabic is not that good. It is very rudimentary. I am there and trying to understand what they are talking about. Most of it goes over my head. So they were talking about Zul-Qa'dah, the Islamic month. I thought they were talking about Al-Qaeda. I said, "Don't talk about that. Do you all know where you are? Don't talk about that! What are you talking about?"

They said, "No, no. It's only the month – Zul-Qa'dah." Because they were talking about it.

One time they were talking about — they said "Faraghkee"[phonetic]. This is the first time I am hearing it. Later I heard it all the time. For some reason, I thought that the word "farar" was to flee. I thought they were talking about escape. I shuffle over to the guy next to me and said, "So what's the plan?" But no. He said, "No, no. It means that you will be released soon." It was a hope that you would be released soon, through the proper administration of the U.S. government, that they would release you soon. I thought they were talking about escape.

Anyway, that was at day one. The topic of the day was what was happening in the camps, the latest news, what so-and-so was told in interrogation, what hopes people had to be released.

Q: They were mostly Afghans?

Abbasi: Arabs, and then a mix of Afghans.

Q: When did the interrogations begin?

Abbasi: The interrogations began one month later. We were taken in January 11, and in February, they began. They were going to start a whole clean slate. Everything you said beforehand is not going to be taken into consideration. They start your story again. We have to go through this whole thing again. It is either military that is interrogating you, or the FBI. They saw which one you did not like. I did not like the Marines because of the way they treated us. I hated them, so when I was in the military interrogations. I clammed up. I am more conducive with the FBI. They have more rapport with the civilians. They dominated the interrogations, but there was some military in general.

Q: And what kind of questions did they ask you?

Abbasi: "Start from the beginning." Everything.

Q: Everything again.

Abbasi: Yes. Everything. The same thing I'm telling you guys. Well, that was it. They go through all of that. That was it.

Q: Did you feel that they were searching for particular kinds of information?

Abbasi: No. They did not. They did not know who we are. Coming from the West, I knew you call them Miranda Rights. Here in London, you have to be read your rights. They do not know

where I came from. The Afghans just gave me for money. In fact, the Afghans who handed me over lied. They said I was found loitering after curfew in Kandahar city. That is not reality. They found me on the outskirts of Kandahar in the morning. After curfew? They lied. They lied to them.

The U.S. administration did not know who they had. They did not know our names. They did not know anything about us. They had my passport. They knew that, but they did not know anything. Starting from that, how can you build up a case against someone if you do not know where they have come from, who they are, what they were doing? They just got handed over for money. The Afghans, or the Pakistanis, can say whatever they like about them. I really learned. I thought to myself from the beginning, “They're going to frame me. They're going to make up something, and then I'm going to be in prison for the rest of my life. They don't know. They haven't read me my rights, and they don't where I've been, or what I've been doing. How can they know?”

I really believed they were going to frame me. I awoke towards it. I said, “I'm going to be there for the rest of my life. I'm just going to have to make do with what I can there and just live my life.” I really believed that. Up until the end, I really believed it.

Q: What kinds of things did you decide to do, to make do?

Abbasi: You had two types of detainees in Guantánamo Bay. I know it is clichéd. You had the ones that hoped for release, and you had the ones that did not hope for release and got on with

their lives. I just tried to read what I could. I had the Koran. I tried to improve myself in that way. You do your best. It is mainly reading. You are trying to improve yourself with whatever books in that way. There is always the whole survival aspect. As a Muslim, you try to better yourself in terms of your worship and things like that. That was what I tried to do, but I did not have any hope that I would be released. They were going to frame me and going to make up lies about me. This and that, and the other, and then I was going to remain there forever.

Q: When was the first time that you had some kind of interaction, or message, or attempted engagement with a lawyer? Or even a military representative?

Abbasi: That is a long time. That is skipping far ahead. I think it was March, 2002, that they move us to Camp Delta. The Arabs believed that, "Oh, this is it. They'd made a mistake, and now they were going to take us home!" One of the detainees there, he had been talking to interrogators. The interrogators had told him there is a new permanent prison, Camp Delta. "That's where you're going." I believed that was more likely than the hopes of the Arabs. I tried to tell them. They did not want to hear it. We got transferred. It was the same. The Marines, they came. You get the battering and kicked and punched as you are being taken on the bus to Camp Delta. There I was. I see Camp Delta. Charlie Block. I was Charlie One.

Q: The kicking and the punching was a regular part of the imprisonment?

Abbasi: It was part of the transfer. When you are being transferred, you are being transferred by Marines. At that time the Marines did not actually deal with you on a day to day basis. It was the

military. Some of them were Reserve. Some of them were National Guard. Some of them were full-time military. They dealt with you on the day-to-day basis. The Marines were there, I think, for security. They would deal with the transfer. Obviously, they would give you a kicking and a punching. Then there is the IRF [Initial Reaction Force] team. When they say that you are contravening some rule or other, they will come in in riot gear. Then they will knock you down, and beat you up sometimes, and then take you out into isolation.

Q: Did that happen to you?

Abbasi: No. I was not IRFed.

Q: Did you have any concerns that anyone would know where you were? Anybody in the whole of the world would ever know?

Abbasi In Kandahar, the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] came, and then they asked me whether I wanted to send a message to my family. I said, "Yes." I wrote a message. They asked whether the consulate wanted to be informed. I thought the Afghans had told the consulate already, because that was what the Afghans said. I said, "Yes, inform the British consulate."

In Camp X-Ray, after a month, people visited claiming to be consular officials. They came and they talked to me. It was obvious that some people knew I was there. During Camp X-Ray, I got

a message from my mother through the Red Cross, or maybe the U.S. mailing system. I was aware that people knew that I was there.

Q: What was Camp Delta like?

Abbasi: I was detained in Camp X-Ray, Camp Delta, Camp Echo. The trend is that I preferred Camp X-Ray. It just got worse as you went by. The thing about Camp X-Ray was it was more informal. The soldiers could be mean to you. I remember one soldier called Phillips. He took a dislike to me. In Camp X-Ray he told me one time that he and I are going to go round and round one day, or something like that. I think he was from the South. One time he took the keys, and was rushing to my door because he was going to open it, and have a fight with me.

That was more informal, but you get some of the guards who are better, who are nicer because they did not really know what to do in that situation. But as you go over time, and you go through the camps, they became colder, more systematic in their ways. The cells in Camp X-Ray, the mesh that they were using was the same that you find in parks. The green kind of fencing. In Camp Delta, there was more metal, and less to see through. In Camp Echo, it even got worse. Things just became more isolated, more alienating from camp to camp.

Camp Echo, the only problem was the soldiers bothering you. If they harassed you, then you had a problem. Other than that, it would be sunny. You would feel the wind, because you were near the ocean. You would hear the chime of the razor wire. I would just get on with my reading, and

maybe some note taking. I liked hearing the Arab brothers in the background speaking. I did not understand what they were saying, but just hearing them in the background was nice.

I would keep to myself, and keep quiet, but I liked the actual connection. I do not know if it was just a feeling, that maybe you have tentacles that reach out. You can feel the energy of the block. You can hear those words. It was nice, apart from being taken into interrogation, but the interrogators thought interrogation was a bonus. As they put it, you get to leave that “shit hole.” But I would prefer the — excuse me — “shit hole”, rather than the interrogation itself. I had freedom to walk around in my cell rather than being bolted to the ground. They tell me that interrogation was better, but I dare say it was okay. Then they took me to Camp Echo.

Q: They kept interrogating you again and again? What more could you tell them, after you told the story?

Abbasi: I got the impression that there was a disjuncture between what was happening in Guantánamo Bay, and what Washington was being told, because the interrogators were not concerned about your story anymore. You told your story. They have it on record. Finished. They were not concerned about the story anymore. What they were concerned about is you talking. If you talk about cricket, or football, whatever, that was the only concern. That you talk. My feeling was they can say that this guy is talking, so they can send a report to Washington, and say, “Oh, so many people are talking.”

If you did not talk, they got nasty. They got nasty. If you said, “I have the right to remain silent. I’ve told you my story. You guys are a bunch of jokers. I have nothing more to say. I want my lawyer,” they got nasty. They start really messing you up. There was a period of time when power was given to the interrogators. Before, your “comfort items,” they called them, such as medical treatment and letters home, were given to interrogators. If you wanted to write a letter home, you had to go to the interrogator. They said that you are going to have to talk to them. You cannot just clam up and say you do not want to talk. You have to talk. It did not matter what you were talking about. You had to talk. For medical treatment, you had to go through the interrogators and that was where it got really harsh. They were really handling people severely.

Q: Did they try to talk to you about football and cricket?

Abbasi: Yes. The thing was that every time I opened my mouth to say something, they would use it against you. For instance, they asked me about, “What was your last job?” I said, “Makro. I was at a wholesaler.” I have watched enough American movies. I said I was a general assistant. I stacked shelves. I have watched enough American movies to use the terminology.

Thinking back, I think to myself, did they ask me in interrogation, “Are you Al-Qaeda?” I cannot remember them asking. It was always by implication. That they would take what you said, and then it indicates that you are Al-Qaeda. But they would never ask you directly.

I said to them I was a general assistant. I stacked shelves. Later, because on the blocks, there was a green book, where they kept daily log of what happened — whether there was a riot, who got

food. In there, there are the allegations, so I learned. This soldier comes and tells me the allegation is I am an assistant general. I am not lying. I am assistant general. I was assistant general in Afghanistan. I said, "Where did this come from?" It came from the interrogations because I said I was a general assistant, I stacked shelves, they twisted it around, and said, "He's assistant general!"

Another time, they said, "What did you do at home?" I said, "I got into some baking. I liked bread. I decided to do my own bread. In my mom's kitchen." There was a period of time when I decided to go do baking. The allegation is that I am an explosives expert like Steven Seagal. I am not lying. This is what the soldier comes and tells me on the block — an explosives expert like Steven Seagal. I like my martial arts movies, and in one of them Steven Seagal is a cook. He was demoted, and he is on a ship. I think he blows up the microwave. I do not know whether the ship is attacked or something. He is the only one who can save it. Whatever. Steven Seagal? This is the allegation?

Another time, in Camp Echo, just out of the blue, this soldier has been watching CSI [Crime Scene Investigation]. He said, "If the blood goes on the wall, and you wash it off, they can shine a light on it, and it will show up. So you've now got to watch out. Because all those massacres you did in Afghanistan, you're going to get your day." I am thinking, where did this come from? This "massacres in Afghanistan?" Where did this come from? These are the things. The problem was I really believe that they went beyond the interrogations. You are telling the story, but they did not care. Their job was not to find out whether you were a terrorist or not. Their job was to prove you were a terrorist, whether you were or not.

[END OF SESSION]

3PM

Session Two

Interviewee: Feroz Ali Abbasi

Location: London, United Kingdom

Interviewers: Ronald J. Grele and Kanishk Tharoor

Date: May 31, 2011

Q: Back up to the interrogators.

Abbasi: The interrogators' job was not to work out whether you were a terrorist or not. It was to prove that you were a terrorist, whether you were a terrorist or not. That was it. Whatever you said, they will twist it. It only proves to me that they are going to frame me. What I did not understand was, why did they not just lie? It seemed like they were covering their own backside. They did not want to lie but at the same time they wanted you to implicate yourself from your words.

They would do silly things, for instance, I remember one time I said — because they always thought the blocks where you camped out is a shit hole. One interrogator kept on referring to it as a shit hole. He thought it was really bad, though he did not understand that the interrogation was worse than the shit hole. It came around to the conversation and I said to him, “This is not the worst I have had in life. The worst was when I was a teenager. This is not the worst time in my life.” I still believe that because in my teenage years I attempted suicide. At Guantánamo Bay that was not the case. It was a hard time, a difficult time, but you persevere. So my teenage years were worse than Guantánamo. The interrogator was obviously shocked, so he asked, “Why?” I said, “Well, maybe the testosterone or something like that.” I did not want to go into too much detail, but I really believe they used that against me. They really used that against me.

They took me to Camp Echo, and I stopped talking to the interrogators —

Q: How long had you been in Guantanamo at this point?

Abbasi: A year anniversary, I remember having my year anniversary in isolation. I was put in the MSU, the maximum security unit. It is for punishment.

Q: What had you done?

Abbasi: They knew they were not supposed to touch the Koran. They did. I called them Nazis.

Q: You called them Nazis? Say the episode about the Koran again.

Abbasi: They knew they were not supposed to touch the Koran. They took someone to recreation. A senior soldier came and started frisking through the Koran with a towel. I was in the same block and when they got to me they were doing that. I started shouting in English. Then the riot happened. The detainees started kicking and throwing stuff and making a big fuss about it. I was calling them Nazis and then basically we were taken for punishment in the MSU. I was taken there.

I spent my one year anniversary in isolation, which was okay. March, 2003. One interrogator said his name was Highlander and that he was Scottish. He was American of Scottish origin. He

said that I was going up before the military commission. I had stopped talking to interrogators. I was not saying anything to them. I clammed up. I was not saying anything at all. He asked if I had any questions. I did not, and they took me back to the block.

Then a few days later, I am taken out of the block and I am taken in a medical vehicle. The strange thing is I am taken out of Guantánamo, and I am driven to the town in Guantánamo. I am taken to a hospital. I am seeing proper streets. There was a cabin near the hospital, and there they gave me a CT scan. Then I am taken back to Guantánamo to the same block.

A few days after that they come and they have the same kind of vehicle. I thought, "Well, maybe in Camp X-Ray, TB [tuberculosis] had registered positive." The reason why is because we have an immunization injection in the UK called BCG [Bacillus Calmette-Guérin]. You have them when you are a teenager and even if you register positive, it does not mean you have it. You have been immunized against it, so it registers. I thought maybe that was it. I was always worried about the TB, that maybe the latent TB has become active in my lungs. They take me into that vehicle and I am thinking, "This is a medical trip." Then they take me to Camp Echo.

Camp Echo was a very strange situation. When they took me, it was strange, but I think it was the same night Iraq was bombed, the beginning of the Iraq War. I do not understand why, but that was what they did. They took me to Camp Echo. It was a normal cell for one in an extended building without windows. There is a section for the detainee and a section for the soldiers. They stay there 24/7, watching. Literally, before they stand they will just sit near occasionally, just watching. In the green book, they will write everything you did, minute by minute. I notice

because the soldiers later, when they change shifts, the soldiers read those books, and they told me that everything from “detainee stands up,” “detainee sits down,” “detainee sleeps,” “detainee gets up,” “detainee picks up pen,” or things like that was recorded. They are just scrutinizing.

Within two weeks of getting there they gave me an immunization shot. Within two weeks of that there was a growth on my right testicle. I started getting worried. This is very strange. I got an inkling from the interrogation, that they will use what you said in interrogation against you. I think that when I said, “Oh, yes, it was because of the testosterone,” they decided this is going to crack this guy. I really believe that they were giving me injections. People do not really believe it, but new information is coming out every so often. They gave me injections. During that period of time, they were taking my blood pressure and my heart rate every day and sometimes twice a day. I thought to myself, “What's going on?”

In Camp Delta, I had made an effort to stay away from medical treatment, because I knew that once they get you there, then they have leverage over you if you need medical treatment. But in Camp Echo I was just getting medical attention every day, and it was unwanted. I was worried that they were spiking my milk or something like that, or my food, because they have control of my environment. On the block, it was mass. They could not really control your environment. Here I am just a single detainee in a single cage.

After a month or so I started getting panic attacks. I would just feel that someone was attacking me and I would wake up screaming. I would fight something off. It was a disjuncture. For instance, I am thinking to myself, “What am I doing?” There are thoughts in my head that are not

my own. There are emotions that I am feeling that are not my own. I can just feel a separation in everything. I am defending myself from an assailant that I cannot see. I am thinking to myself, "What am I doing?," but at the same time, physically I am defending myself against an assailant. There is a whole disjuncture with my whole being, whether mental, whether physical, whether emotional. There is me, and then there is other than me. It is all one. This is happening.

I crack. I was not speaking to interrogators. The strange thing with the doctor was she came every day and then she got disillusioned. I tried to play it down. Nothing is happening with me. I think they are going to finish me off. It looks like they are not going to frame me. They are just going to give me another injection, send me crazy, and say, "He went crazy, couldn't take it, couldn't handle it. He cracked." What can you do? That was what they were going to do because they have no way out from the situation. They were not going to say, "Sorry." I was keeping it toned down with the doctor.

But one of the soldiers went and blabbed. The doctor comes running back saying, "You're having immunization shots." This is a month later. Immunization shots you have every six months or so. I was thinking it was strange that she came. She did not say anything. When the soldier told her about the panic attacks, then she comes running back. This is it. They are going to finish me off. She comes with an immunization shot, not the next day like she said, but she comes the same night. She tells me that, "This is Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, or whatever."

I say, "No."

Then a male doctor comes in the next day. He tells me another thing, not Hepatitis A or Hepatitis B, but it is something else. I am thinking, "Why can't they keep their story straight with these immunization shots?" I refused, and they were going to IRF me. I cracked. I called in the interrogators. That was my only way out. That is the only time I ever really cracked, as it were. That was what they did to me, so I said, "I want to go home." That is the only time I asked them to let me go home.

Before that, I would say to them, "Put me before a trial. Give me my day in court. If you say I'm this and that and the other, give me my day in court." That was the only time I cracked, and I called in the interrogators. The interrogator arranged the immunization shots. Then I am okay. After the shots I am fine. I mean there are still some residual issues, but I was okay.

I was there because one interrogator said he promised me a year ago that I would be out of Guantánamo, a promise come true. I did not remember the promise. I did not care for the promise anyway. They lie to you anyway. He said that I was there for the military commissions and that I was going to be the first to go up for military commissions, and that was what I was there for.

Q: How far along in the process toward the military commission did you get?

Abbasi: I don't know. They just threatened me with military commissions. I was in Camp Echo for about two years, in solitary. The threat of military commission was there for the whole time.

Q: Did it ever happen?

Abbasi: No, it never happened. At the end of the end of it, they just dropped the thing. I had spent two years in solitary.

Q: What was that like?

[PAUSE]

Abbasi: It was hell.

Q: We can move on to something else.

Abbasi: Yes. So in 2004, I think the summer — I cannot remember the month — and surprise, surprise, I get a lawyer.

Q: They told you that you were going to get a lawyer?

Abbasi: I got a letter from Gita [S. Gutierrez]. I think I got a letter first. I cannot remember the process, but I did not believe it because they are always pretending. You hear stories of them pretending to be whatever, that they were pretending to be ICRC, or stories of some military interrogators who pretend to be the FBI, which the FBI did not like at all. The military would do

bad things, and then the FBI said that they know they would end up holding the bag. They were not happy. There was friction between the FBI and the other interrogators as well.

You did not believe anything they said. I did not believe it until I saw Gita. Then she came and she was my lawyer. She came to visit me at Camp Echo.

Q: What was your first impression of Gita?

Abbasi: I was not going to get excited because I said to myself, "Is it real or not?" I thought you just play it cool. But it worked out. It opened the door for me. At that time there was a CSRT, Combatant Status Review Tribunals, which I was preparing for, and also the habeas corpus. That was the first time I had ever heard of habeas corpus, and Gita explained it to me. That was what was happening there. I could write letters, confidential attorney-client letters. I felt that was a real opening, but I thought to myself, "It's not going to last long." But it was progress where for years you just did not see any change.

Q: I have interviewed a number of lawyers who talk about their feeling that they were a window on the rest of the world. I wonder if we could get that from your place, the way you saw them?

Abbasi: To me, yes, Gita was an opening. I could write what has happened to me and send it as an attorney-client account. I could have my story out before they closed that door. I really believed they would close that door. I wrote a big document of abuse detailing what happened to me. I sent it to her, because I thought, "Let me do this now, because they're just going to change

the rules. And then she wouldn't be allowed, no lawyer was going to be allowed in Guantanamo. So this is an opportunity.”

It did make a difference to know that everyone you meet, other than another detainee, is not against you. It made a lot of difference. In Guantánamo, especially in Camp Echo, I felt that we were forgotten. No one cares about us. That was the impression they wanted you to have. It was good that Gita would bring some news in a way. She was not allowed to bring too much, but you got some inklings, some suggestion that you were not forgotten.

Q: And then what happened after these meetings with Gita?

Abbasi: Gita left and then I had to prepare for the CSRT.

Q: What did they tell you the CSRT was going to be?

Abbasi: They said, “You're an enemy combatant, and you have to prove you're not.” That was it. You have someone to represent you, but they are not really on your side. So if you tell them anything, then it is going to be used against you, because they have to reveal it. I prepared. I was getting legal briefs from Gita. She left some. I decided to use that as the template.

I was walking my cell memorizing, because I knew they were going to take my papers away from me. They are going to do something like that. I tried to memorize it, so if they did I could speak off rote. That gave me something to do, defending myself legally. I was mounting my own

case and strategizing. From there, they took me back to population, Camp Delta. Then, we were not wearing the orange. We were wearing the beige. I was amongst the few detainees that were going up for military commissions.

Q: What if we stick for a few moments on the testimony for the CSRT, because it is all over the web. It has been reproduced a number of times. You begin with Malcolm X.

Abbasi: It was both an admonition to whoever was going to give me the CSRT, because I knew there was a tribunal or something. The thing is, you have to present Islam to people for two reasons. One, maybe they will see the light, and then become Muslim, and another, because Allah will not punish anyone until they receive the message. I thought that if this guy is going to do me over, which I expect, let me present Islam to him. He will do me over now, but later on, he will get done over by Allah. Then there was obviously the stuff about international law, and the arguments that my lawyers were putting forward in the habeas corpus, which I incorporated into there.

Q: What was their response to your testimony?

Abbasi: Well, whatever rank he was, he did not want to hear about international law. That threw me because I thought they were going to take my papers, but they didn't. All I could do is just keep on going with my narrative, which I had before me. It kept on mentioning international law. They said, "If you mention international law again, you're going to get thrown out." I got thrown out.

Q: Did you have conversations with some of the other detainees about the CSRTs?

Abbasi: The CSRT happened when I was in Camp Echo. We could not even see another detainee. When we were taken back to the population, Camp Delta, that was the first time I saw Moazzam Begg. He had been my companion in Camp Echo the whole time, but I had not seen him, only heard of him. Sometimes we swapped letters. If the soldiers were being nice, we would swap letters, but I had never seen him. We had some conversations in Camp Delta. We must have broached the subject. Yes, because he was telling me he did not get involved so I told him I did. We went through all of it.

Q: We are running a bit short of time right now, so perhaps we should take a break. Or we could maybe be take another five minutes and maybe get to your release from Guantánamo?

Q: About the conversations that you all had. And the arguments, and the disputation back and forth.

Abbasi: And his chess.

Q: There is a lot of richness in there, especially about how it deepened his faith and your faith. It is a really meaty part of that book.

Abbasi: Yes. It is good. It talks about his chess. He had some book about two inmates and then they were playing chess, but one of them kept on cheating. The other guy would say, "Knight takes rook," or something like that, and then he says, "What do you mean, rook?" He moved it, because you have two chess boards. But you cannot see the other guy's. He found that funny, and he tried it on me which was interesting. Yes, but that was good conversation. We had far-flung conversations.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So, we are at the CSRT. We have moved now up into Camp Delta. The next step, I guess, is finding out you will be released.

Abbasi: Up to the flight?

Q: What happened after the CSRT.

Q: Who told you what was going to happen next?

Abbasi: I am in Camp Delta. I am wearing beige now because for the military commissions you wear a different color. For two years now, I have been threatened with military commissions. I am going to be going before military commissions. There were suggestions of the death penalty. The first person that told me that I might be going home was funny enough, another detainee. Ali

al-Bahlul. He was a Yemeni detainee. He got life in the military commissions. He was supposedly Al-Qaeda's main media guy.

It was because we got measured up. They took us out of our cells, and strangely enough, they did not take us out with our shackles. They just took you out in front of the cell. Then they measure you up with a tape measure, Moazzam Begg and me. I thought, "Oh, this is for a suit," because I heard one of the other detainees was wearing a suit to his military commission. You have to wear a suit. I guess this is for the suit. Ali al-Bahlul had seen the other British detainees and how they did the process. He said, "No, you're going home."

I said, "Come on man, I'm not going home."

Then I think some time goes by. I cannot remember how much time. We were just taken out. We were taken out of there, as they normally do, because sometimes they just move you for the sake of moving you. They took my stuff, and then Moazzam and I were taken out. I thought this is being taken to another block, or something like that, but Ali al-Bahlul and the others were saying goodbye, "Remember us, write to us." I am thinking, "You guys are joking. We're not going home. I doubt it."

They take us to Camp Echo. I am put in one of the same blocks that I was put in before. I remember it. This soldier comes, and he reads out the statement: "You're going home. Whatever allegations are against you, whether there were any allegations, they are dropped." Then he goes off. I do not believe him.

Then, I am waiting for a lawyer's visit. But for some reason, I am taken out of my cage, and I am bolted down like normal before a lawyer's visit in a similar block.

Clive Stafford Smith would pretend that he did not know which block to go to. He has come to visit a client, and then he would go into the wrong room. He ends up in my room, and he walks in. He is very tall and then he looks at me. He does not register who I am. Then he sits down and tries to talk to me. I talk to him back in English. Then he realized, "Oh, it's you, Abbasi."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "The news is true. You're going home."

I thought, "Now this is getting interesting," because it is coming from someone other than the administration.

Q: And this was the first time you had met Clive .

Abbasi: Yes, this was the first time. He was pretending he went into the wrong room. Then he said, "I've got to go." He ducked out. I thought, "That's great." I think Gita told me. I cannot remember whether Gita — maybe I was waiting for Gita.

That was it. You are thinking to yourself that you are going home. But I am thinking to myself, “Is it true or not?” Our thing was, they will tell you, “You are going home, you are going home, you are going home,” which is a bad sign, because it means they are going to screw you over. Until I have my foot on UK jurisdiction, I am not going to believe it. They came and then the FBI took fingerprints. Then they changed our clothes.

I had always had this image that — you daydream — when I come off the plane, I am going to come off in orange, and my hair is going to be disheveled, and my eyes are going to be wild. I am just going to look really, really messed up. That is going to be the iconic image. But they would not let me keep the orange suit. I had to wear the jeans-type of stuff that they sent us. Then we were taken out from there on to a bus. This time it is not the Marines. It had seats, which was strange, and then we were bolted. Then there we were. We were taken out of Guantánamo Bay. We crossed the river. We were taken to the runway.

Q: And there was a plane?

Abbasi: Yes, there was a plane. The strange thing was the British Metropolitan Police came on board the bus. It was a familiar sight, but very strange in Guantánamo Bay. It was a whole mix. There were the Guantánamo Bay detainees. There were the soldiers. There was British Metropolitan Police there, and it was weird.

Q: And the Tipton Three had already been released.

Abbasi: They had been released.

Q: And you had known about their release?

Abbasi: Yes, because I was told about it. The consular officials came with the news, hoping that I would break down and cry again in front of him. He said it with some kind of stifled glee. He asked me what do I think about that? He put it to me as, "Some people are going to be released, UK nationals, but not you. What do you think about that?" I was happy, because it was good news that at least some movement was happening. Although it was not me, it cracked Guantánamo Bay as a place that you cannot leave, especially for the UK nationals. It was good news for me. But yes, I knew they had left.

Q: And David Hicks?

Abbasi: No, he was still there.

Q: Was Moazzam with you on the bus? Who was on the bus?

Abbasi: It was Moazamm Begg. Martin Mubanga. Jamal Harith. Jamal Kiyemba.

Q: And what were you saying to each other at the time?

Abbasi: You are cracking jokes. Moazzam Begg and Martin started talking in a Jamaican dialect because they had a translator there, who was listening. First of all, we switched into Arabic to talk to each other. Then we clocked on one of them was a translator who picked up Arabic. Martin and Moazzam Begg switched into a Jamaican English dialect. He tried to speak to me, but I do not understand it. I could not get into a conversation. He was just cracking jokes. It was weird. At the same time, you are reserved. You've got the Metropolitan Police there. You do not know what is going to happen. Are they going to arrest you when you land? What are they doing there? You are reserved. Anxious.

Q: I wonder if we could talk about the homecoming, getting off the plane to coming home. Was it coming home?

Abbasi: Well, we are still on the plane and the plane lands in the UK. I had not been arrested before in the UK or anywhere, unless you called Guantanamo Bay being arrested. I am arrested, as the plane lands. I could hardly hear what the woman was saying over the roar of the engine. I am arrested for some terrorism charge. It was obviously my worst fear because I did not want to come back here and then face prison here as well.

Then we were taken to Paddington Green police station. The questioning was stupid. The best questioning they had was they said, "Such and such newspaper said that you did such and such, you were involved in such and such, is that true, Mr. Abbasi?" I had to answer, "No comment." That was what my lawyer said. That was it. The three newspapers and that was it. It was just

routine. Then we were put in the back of the police van, and then we were taken out. I think we ended up in another car with my lawyer.

It was not a homecoming. I looked out of the window and it was night and I could see those amber lights, and then the black taxis that I am used to, and the concrete and the many familiar images that I had not seen for years. It was raining. I was depressed, really depressed. I daydreamed sometimes in Guantanamo that they would just dump me in my orange suit in Afghanistan, somewhere out in the wilderness, and I would just run. It was a hope. Not realistic, but that was what I hoped. They brought me back here.

Q: To your family?

Abbasi: Yes, I saw my family. It was good to see my family, but twice I have left this place. I thought I had made sure that I would not come back. I am still back here.

Q: What did you do in the weeks, the months after you came back?

Abbasi: Well, the thing was I had to hit the ground running because I did not want to reflect on what was happening.

In Guantánamo Bay you were in survival mode, you are going day by day surviving and looking for any which way to survive, and better your chances of doing so. Coming here, all of that could threaten to take you over if you get engulfed in the whole “what's happened to you?” In

Guantánamo you did not have time to process it. You were in it and you had to deal with it there and then. But to look back was something that is not, would not have been good for me. I knew from the past that if you have to deal with something emotionally you have to deal with it. You have to deal with it, but you can choose when.

I packaged it. I just decided to get on with my life. I enrolled in college again. I did an Access Course for access to university. I was successful in the Access Course, and I got into university. There were some funding issues along the way, but they were sorted out, *hamdullah*. I went to university for three years. College was one year and university was three years. During that period of time I got married.

Q: Where did you go to university?

Abbasi: It is a London university. I will not say which one specifically. I would rather avoid saying which one. I took off from where I left off before I became Muslim and then went on my trip. During university I got married. At the end of university I became a father.

Q: What kind of degree did you get?

Abbasi: It was a Bachelor's of Science in social policy. It was a change for me because college was the first time that I actually wrote an essay. Most of my subjects before that were electronics, physics, science-based. This was a switch to writing, which was strange but I guess it was that whole trend. I went back into welfare again, social policy. When I came out of

Guantánamo I had this notion that I wanted to understand how governments affect people, their people. I came across social policy. It is a relatively new subject. In America you call it public policy, but they overlap. They are not quite the same thing in totality.

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

Abbasi: Well, Islamically, it is not by chance. You arrange to meet. My aunt said she knows someone who is looking to get married. We met in the mosque with the imam there. The imam said to talk for two weeks and then come back. We talked for two weeks over the phone, came back, and he said, "Any issues, everything going all right? Talk for another two weeks." We talked for another two weeks and we come back. "What's the decision?" Then we decided to get married. I am a father of a baby boy.

Q: How old?

Abbasi: He is going to be two, soon, one month away from two. Terrible twos, I have heard, terrible twos. They get naughty when they are two.

Q: In Moazzam's book, he says that you went for counseling.

Abbasi: Counseling?

Q: Psychological counseling?

Abbasi: No, not really. I went to Helen Bamber for a number of things but no, no extensive counseling. It is a long time since I read the book, but I do not remember that part.

But yes, so after I finished university, then I was looking for work and I came to Cageprisoners.

Q: How did you come to Cageprisoners? How did you find them?

Abbasi: Until February 2009, things were going rosy. Then the credit crunch happened. People were leaving jobs left, front and center. I thought to myself, “I’m set. I’m going to be leaving university and then I’m going to get a good job and get on with my life.”

That did not happen. I wanted to prove to myself that I am more than Guantánamo, that Guantánamo is just a part of my life. It is not the totality of who I am and what I am about. I have not been able to get away from Guantánamo and no matter where I go it follows me. Trying to find a job with this big hole — if you explain, they do not want to know, and if you try to massage it, it does not work.

With Cageprisoners, I decided to approach them to see whether I could use my degree and utilize an opportunity to come aboard and do some good work. Before then I steered away from anything to do with Guantánamo in the news. I just shut myself off, but it had come to about five years. I decided that after five years I am going to have to open that package. This is one good way of doing that. After five years I joined Cageprisoners and opened that package.

Q: Had you heard about them before?

Abbasi: Yes, when I came out and I heard about them, and I had come across them a few times. They tried to keep in touch. I was doing something else. I was busy with my studies, and trying to work. I did not really keep close touch. Through the other detainees, there was some contact and some mention of it.

Q: Do you remember one of the early projects you might have worked on when you first joined?

Abbasi: Yes, it was the Horn of Africa report. Asim Qureshi had started it and I had to finish it. It was interesting how in a different context you saw similar things. I could relate my experiences, giving me an insight in a way I could see. You are not just reading about it on a theoretical level. I understand what it is for someone to give their testimony and say they went through this. I have a deeper understanding than a normal person would, just reading at face value.

Q: What were some of the findings of the Horn of Africa report?

Abbasi: It is always the same — rendition torture, abuse, no due process. Our work is always the same, just maybe the distinction that the same dynamic as you have got in Afghanistan, you have got in Pakistan, and you have got in other areas like Guantánamo Bay. It is replicated in the Horn

of Africa. It is different countries but they play the same role. That was often the finding. I just had to complete the report.

Q: That was the first piece of research you completed?

Abbasi: Yes.

Q: Were you hired as a researcher?

Abbasi: I was hired as a researcher. Then it was changed to caseworker and volunteer coordinator, which is what I am now.

Q: What was involved in that change?

Abbasi: It was just a change in title, but it is more or less the same. Instead of dealing with writing reports, I started dealing with individual cases. Because Cageprisoners is expanding, we are getting interns to do report writing, so that it does not make sense that I do report writing as well, so I might as well do case work. Asim Qureshi got promoted to executive director, so he has to deal with the bureaucracy. He was the caseworker before, so someone had to fill that void.

Q: Can you give a couple of examples from that period, your earliest cases?

Abbasi: From that period, there were a lot of cases.

Q: Perhaps a case for you that was particularly striking?

Abbasi: I have dealt with so many cases that to just pick out one — I think you see the same thing. There is not any distinction between the cases, unfortunately.

Q: What is the same thing you see?

Abbasi: Torture, rendition, no due process, just detained without trial, same stupid questions, profiling. The names change.

Q: How are you helping people? What do you do actually, refer people to places or run the actual work?

Abbasi: No, we try to bring awareness to a case or a set of cases. That is one aspect of our work. We also have a consultancy role, so any lawyers or anyone working on the legal aspects of a case, they may come to us, because they may not understand Muslim issues, wider issues.

They may believe certain things. For instance, one Guantánamo Bay detainee is accused of being Shia and also accused of being Al-Qaeda, which is not going to happen. It is not going to happen. A lawyer would not know that dynamic until they come across Muslims or people like us at Cageprisoners who will tell them, “Look, this is not going to happen.” A Pakistani accused of being at a high level in Al-Qaeda, high-ranking in Al-Qaeda, would not happen. There is a

certain hierarchy amongst Muslims, unfortunately, but a Pakistani is not up there. He is not going to be over an Arab in that way.

We are working at consultancy. Then obviously some people will come to us who are having some issues, harassment by the security services. We refer them to appropriate lawyers. Not all lawyers are the same. They do not all have the same heart when it comes to this kind of work. We try to help them to clarify things for them as well. We try to clarify their misunderstandings in the War on Terror and the misinformation that is put out there as a counter.

Q: Your geographical focus? Is it the Horn of Africa, or is it across the board?

Abbasi: The whole world.

Q: You are handling cases everywhere?

Abbasi: Yes, I go everywhere. Sitting at my desk I could be anywhere.

Q: Are you able to travel or are there still restrictions in place?

Abbasi: Until recently I was not, but those restrictions have been lifted. I should be able to travel. I have not tried it, but there is nothing overt that would stop me from traveling.

Q: You talked earlier about the differences between Sunni and Shia, talked about diversity of the Muslim community. How do you deal with that diversity in your job today?

Abbasi: How do I deal with diversity? The War on Terror will not make any distinctions, so I do not have to. The War on Terror does not care if you are Sunni or Shia or whether you are from one school of thought or another, Sufi or Salafi or whatever, it does not care. The War on Terror has a very monolithic view of Muslims. If you are Muslim, you are Muslim, whether you are practicing or not. When it comes to me, a caseworker, I deal with the case when it comes to me, and that distinction does not have to be made.

Q: Did geographical distinctions present a problem?

Abbasi: No, not really. I would not say a convergence of policy, but policies are similar across the world. It makes my job easier, but it is troubling.

Q: I wonder if we could talk now about your reflections on Guantánamo in terms of where you are today and what has been the long term effect on your life of the whole of the experience?

Abbasi: I had this thinking that time heals, and after five to six years I am going to get over it. After five to six years I can open that package, and I can start dealing with the issue. This is not a situation I have been in before, but it has not been like that. I do not know, it just seems that as time goes by, maybe it affects me more. I perceive it is affecting me more. I have tried to get away from Guantánamo Bay and tried to move on with my life. Like I said it does not define me

but it is something I have not been able to do. The worst thing is that wrong has been done to me. They could have gone about it in a better way, with due process. If you think I have done anything wrong you treat it as a crime and you bring me before a court of law. I have to face up to whatever allegations you have based on evidence.

But that was not done. So a wrong has been done to me, and injustice. That skew in the scales always remains. Because of that I cannot move on. I do not see that. I thought I could move on but I cannot move on. I am seeing that the War on Terror and the U.S. administration, they are not anytime soon going to say, "Sorry," or change their ways. They are just going to carry on stubbornly what they are doing. I really do not know what to say about it.

Q: You have suffered because of the War on Terror, you are now working with people who have suffered, who are suffering. What does justice look like for you? What would be just?

Abbasi: What would be just? In Islam, the Sharia, the law we have is very close to the law of Moses, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. I do not really believe in anything like a superstructure, or when you say, "the state," or "the state did this," or "an administration." I believe in collectives of people, like a cooperative, collectives of people. There are collectives of people who decided to do what they did to me. Justice is that the same thing is done to them. That simple, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The only justice there is, is Sharia law.

Guantánamo Bay showed me I was not wrong in going to Afghanistan. I was not wrong to want to live under Sharia. I was not barbarized. I was not treated badly under Sharia. I was treated

badly under western law. Guantánamo Bay was where I was mistreated. Justice to me is Sharia. Those people should be brought to a Sharia court and then they can get their comeuppance. I hope that is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Q: What are the long-term effects of the War on Terror on the international Muslim community?

Abbasi: I will say two world views, but then someone will probably dispute me. But I will say there are two world views — the view that the 21st century is the American century, and then there is the view that the 21st century is the Islamic century.

We lost our Khilafat in 1924. I believe that by 2024 we will get it back. Then there is the War on Terror, and what it has done is unify the Muslims, because to me, Islam would not have unified the Muslims. As long as there is no one single authority, while the cat is away the mice will play. People will just say what they want, they will do what they want, and then they will say, “I’m a good Muslim.” The only thing that will unify the Muslims is the enmity of our enemies. That is the hate of our enemies is the only thing that is going to unify us.

Sometimes I have been surprised by the things that [George W.] Bush has done or [Barack H.] Obama has done, to the point I think to myself, “Are they secretly Muslim?” The policies that they are putting forth are unifying the Muslims. The result will be Khilafat. I really believe that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was a false dawn. The darkness after a false dawn is always darker than night itself. The result is it is going to be Khilafat. That is the future.

I may be wrong, maybe about 2024, but that is my hope — that this century is the Islamic century, and that Islam will come back as the political power in the world after nearly 100 years of not being a power.

Other people have a different viewpoint. They think America is going to be the predominant power, and American hegemony or American empire is predominant in the future. I do not believe that.

Q: Can you read that in the events Tunisia and Egypt, the events going on now?

Abbasi: Yes, the thing is that the prophet Muhammad, ‘ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam, has prophesized for the future. Obviously no one can pinpoint the date. I say 2024, but that is just me. It is just my opinion, it does not mean anything. I cannot remember the narration, but he said that you have the righteous Khilafat and then after that, there will be kings, and then there will be dictators, and after dictators there will be the righteous Khilafat again. The period we are in is dictators. Then it does not say that it will go to anything else except the righteous Khilafat.

The dictators in the Middle East have not been removed, because it is not Sharia law being applied there. It is a good sign that in the 1990s all we had was dictators but we never saw any end to it. We know that the righteous Khilafat will come but it may not be in our lifetime.

Now what we are seeing is the unification of Muslims. Maybe the call is not towards Sharia and Islam, but it was a step in that direction.

Q: Thank you.

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