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Guantánamo four facing curbs in Britain

Met police chief justifies arrests of freed Camp Delta detainees

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The four Britons released from Guantánamo Bay this week could face new government control orders restricting their movements, the home secretary said yesterday.

Charles Clarke's plans would see an end to foreign men, who are allegedly threatening national security, being held without charge or trial in top-security prisons. But there could be a system of control orders which could see foreign nationals and British citizens subjected to a variety of restrictions up to house arrest.

Asked on BBC Radio if the proposals would be used against the Guantánamo Britons, Mr Clarke said the control orders were not yet in place. "The precise assessments haven't been carried through because we don't have a legal regime which allows that at the moment."

The four British Muslim men - Moazzam Begg, Feroz Abbasi, Martin Mubanga and Richard Belmar - who spent up to three years imprisoned without charge or trial accused of being terrorists, enjoyed their first full day of freedom yesterday since captivity. On Wednesday night they were released by anti-terrorism officers who had arrested them on their return to Britain.

Mr Clarke denied that the plans which he unveiled on Wednesday were part of the deal with the US that secured the detained Britons' release.

The Pentagon repeated its claims that the four men posed a threat, but it is believed that the security services and the police have concluded that the men pose at most a minimal threat to British security.

Azmat Begg, the father of Moazzam, reacted to the Pentagon's claims by saying: "The US government is the threat itself to every person in the world, as seen in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib [prison in Iraq]."

Yesterday, Sir John Stevens, the Metropolitan police commissioner, defended his decision to arrest the men. Sir John, in his final week as Britain's top officer, said the intelligence he saw had justified arresting and questioning them.

British Muslims condemned the arrests, saying they exacerbated the men's ordeal after the alleged torture at Guantánamo.

Azad Ali, the chairman of the Muslim Safety Forum, which aims to build community relationships, said: "I think there was political pressure on the Metropolitan police from the government [to make the arrests]. It must have been part of the deal with the US [to release the men] that they would be arrested and questioned.

"It's unfair because of where they are coming from - they are coming out of Guantánamo Bay where they have been held without trial and tortured. To put them back in a cell, to ask them a few questions to which the police already know the answers, does nothing more than add more pain to the detainees and their families. If the police say they had to do this they could have let them recover and asked them these questions later."

Yesterday further details emerged of the US interrogators' techniques used against the Muslim detainees and designed to undermine their faith. The Associated Press agency obtained a document by a former Guantánamo translator which alleges that female interrogators tried to break Muslim men by touching them sexually, wearing miniskirts and thongs, and in one instance pretending to smear menstrual blood on their face.

Erik Saar, formerly an army sergeant, who worked as an Arabic translator, said: "I have really struggled with this because the detainees, their families and much of the world will think this is a religious war, based on some of the techniques used, even though it is not the case."

Mr Saar said he witnessed about 20 interrogations and saw "disturbing" practices, including a scantily dressed female civilian present during late-night interrogations.