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Human Rights and Fighting Terrorism

Letter to the Editor
The Guardian
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Jonathan Freedland (Comment, December 21) speculates that Tony Blair may not be privy to the truth in the apparent Northern Ireland spy saga. In a parallel situation, Tony Blair and Jack Straw assert they are not "aware" of CIA extraordinary rendition flights. But parliamentarians in Westminster and Strasbourg must probe what that actually means in terms of official responsibility. We must encompass the possibilities not only of sheer economy with the truth, but also of imperfect control over secret services or a deliberate ministerial "blind eye".

The UK government's denials of knowledge about extraordinary rendition have in any case been shot to pieces in the case of two of my constituents, Bisher al-Rawi and Jamil al-Banna. Former Foreign Office minister Chris Mullin MP has confirmed (Report, December 19) that British agents in 2002 did indeed help the Americans kidnap and "render" them to Guantanamo Bay via Bagram airbase in Afghanistan.

I vividly recall meetings and correspondence with successive Foreign Office ministers, including Chris Mullin, in which they repeated the claim that the government could do nothing to help these men or the half-dozen other legal British residents illegally imprisoned by the US - including mistaken-identity victim Omar Deghayes - as they do not hold British passports. I'm glad Mr Mullin, now free of office, acknowledges at least the moral responsibility to rescue them. Legal responsibility for this scandal cannot be far behind.

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