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UK claims freed Britons pose terror threat

Travel ban on four released from Guantanamo based on evidence alleged to be gathered under torture

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The government has decided that four Britons released from Guantánamo Bay pose a terrorist threat to the United Kingdom, on the basis of evidence alleged to have come from the men's torture and ill-treatment, the Guardian has learned.

The home secretary, Charles Clarke, ruled that there are "strong" grounds to believe the four are dangerous, according to a government letter to the men. He has decided to ban the Britons from travelling abroad and has written telling them they are being denied passports.

It is the first time the British government's view about whether the men are a danger has been clearly stated.

The four were arrested by anti-terrorism police on their return last month, only to be released without charge a day later.

The Home Office says the security assessment of the men was made on information from the US obtained during their time in Guantánamo, where it is alleged they were tortured and ill-treated.

The four spent up to three years in Guantánamo in conditions condemned by human rights groups. They were never tried by the US, who claimed they were "enemy combatants", and were denied access to a lawyer for most of their detention.

It is believed that some or all of the four made admissions of involvement or knowledge of terrorism. Their lawyers claim these admissions are false and were made under duress.

The four men are Moazzam Begg, Martin Mubanga, Richard Belmar and Feroz Abbasi. Three of the men's passports were kept by the US, while Mr Mubanga says his was in the possession of an MI6 officer who interviewed him in detention.

In the letter to the men, a Home Office official writes that the home secretary has the power to deny passports when "in very rare cases, persons whose past or proposed activities were so demonstrably undesirable that the grant or continued enjoyment of passport facilities would be contrary to the public interest".

The letter continues: "On the basis of the information which has come to light during your detention by the United States, the home secretary considered that there are strong grounds for believing that, on leaving the United Kingdom, you would take part in activities against the United Kingdom or allied targets."

Shortly after the announcement that the US would free the men, a US paper claimed a restriction on travel abroad was part of the deal between London and Washington that led to their release.

Mr Clarke has said that proposed control orders, dubbed by some as house arrest, could be used against the four.

The US alleges one of the Britons met and talked with the al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden while in Afghanistan, while others trained at terrorist camps.

Guantánamo Bay has been dogged by allegations of torture and ill-treatment. The Pentagon says that al-Qaida training manuals tell its fighters to claim they have been abused.

A lawyer for Mr Abbasi says he suffered a series of mental breakdowns after being kept in isolation for 18 months. Mr Begg is alleged to have been repeatedly beaten and to have heard screams from a next door room he was told was coming from the torture of his wife. Mr Mubanga has alleged he was beaten and humiliated by his US captors.

Louise Christian, solicitor for two of the released Britons, said: "When you rely on evidence from torture you are acquiescing with the torture.

"It is wholly unreliable. We know that people have made false confessions under torture at Guantánamo Bay."

A Home Office spokesman said they would not comment on individual cases and refused to confirm the decisions made by Mr Clarke to withdraw the passports: "We unreservedly condemn the use of torture. We will consider in each case whether torture is used."