# Labour accused of rubber-stamping outdated torture policies amid human rights concerns



Labour is facing serious accusations of endorsing a torture policy it once condemned, raising alarming concerns about the UK’s complicity in human rights abuses abroad. Critics argue that the government’s review of security and intelligence collaboration with foreign entities appears more like a rubber stamp on outdated policies rather than a sincere attempt at reform.

At the centre of this uproar are the principles of the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) framework. This policy enables UK cooperation with other nations in security initiatives, yet organizations such as Reprieve, Amnesty International, and various human rights advocates assert that it fundamentally fails to protect against human rights violations, particularly concerning torture and capital punishment. The current Labour government is under fire for what many perceive as scrutinizing these policies just to affirm their existing defects without meaningful change.

Key figures, including Conservative MP David Davis, have stressed the pressing necessity for robust safeguards. He stated, “Ministers should never be able to sign off on intelligence being shared… where there is a risk of torture.” Such concerns are particularly pertinent considering the historical misuse of intelligence that has surfaced from these collaborations, with the UK’s past actions in Iraq serving as a cautionary tale. Davis warned against any hint of a “Whitehall stitch-up” that could further damage the UK's global reputation.

Specific cases, such as those of Jagtar Singh Johal and Ali Kololo, underscore the urgent need for real reform. Johal, a British human rights activist, has reportedly endured torture in India following what is believed to be a tip-off from UK intelligence. His ongoing imprisonment since 2017 and allegations of mistreatment serve as alarming reminders of potential complicity in human rights abuses stemming from inadequate intelligence-sharing policies. Similarly, Kololo’s wrongful conviction and death sentence in Kenya were heavily influenced by assistance provided by UK authorities.

Alistair Carmichael, a Liberal Democrat MP, expressed his shock at Labour’s current position, declaring, “I would never have expected a Labour government to rubber-stamp Boris Johnson’s torture policy… but that appears to be what is happening here.” He highlighted the critical necessity of a sweeping policy overhaul, rather than mere token consultations, especially considering the far-reaching implications for victims affected by past failures.

NGOs have come together to voice their objections in a joint letter to Foreign Secretary David Lammy. They emphasize the need for authentic consultations with the families of victims, such as Johal’s relatives, advocating for clearly defined terms of reference for policy reviews. This collective plea for a comprehensive approach stems from the belief that superficial reviews could perpetuate the very same dangerous flaws plaguing existing policies.

Reprieve has documented in its submissions to Parliament that the OSJA policy has long been insufficient, allowing the UK to assist in numerous human rights abuses in countries such as Libya, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. The persistent reliance on policies deemed “fatally flawed” raises urgent questions about the UK’s commitment to upholding international human rights standards.

In response to this mounting criticism, a Foreign Office spokesperson claimed the government is actively engaging with relevant stakeholders to ensure compliance with human rights obligations through these revisions. However, widespread skepticism persists regarding the potential for transformative change, as many fear that these reviews may ultimately amount to little more than a façade of reform.

The pressing demand for accountability and genuine engagement cannot be ignored as the UK attempts to recalibrate its global human rights stance while grappling with the repercussions of its past policies. As the Labour government continues on this path, it remains imperative to hold those in power accountable to ensure that the rights of individuals are adequately protected, and not merely discussed in hollow terms.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/18/labour-must-not-rubber-stamp-torture-policy-say-campaigners> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://reprieve.org/uk/2024/12/04/reprieve-warns-osja-review-rubber-stamps-flawed-human-rights-policy/> - In December 2024, Reprieve, along with other NGOs, warned that the UK government's review of the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) guidance might merely 'rubber stamp' the previous government's flawed human rights policies. They criticized the review for being conducted hastily with insufficient consultation, potentially perpetuating the UK's complicity in human rights abuses overseas. The coalition urged the government to conduct a thorough review addressing the existing policy's loopholes and to engage in a public consultation process to restore the UK's reputation as a global leader in human rights and international development.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-62639233> - In August 2022, the BBC reported that UK intelligence agencies were accused of tipping off Indian authorities about Jagtar Singh Johal, a British national, leading to his abduction and alleged torture by Punjab police. Johal, an active blogger and campaigner for Sikh human rights, was arrested in 2017 and faced charges related to Sikh nationalism. His family and human rights groups alleged that his arrest followed a tip-off from British intelligence, a claim the UK government declined to comment on due to the ongoing legal case.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-human-rights-abuses-osja-b2657361.html> - In May 2025, The Independent reported that campaign groups warned the UK Labour government against 'rubber-stamping' the previous government's flawed human rights policies. They criticized the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) guidance for not explicitly prohibiting UK involvement in countries accused of human rights abuses, including torture and the death penalty. The coalition of NGOs urged the government to conduct a proper review addressing the policy's loopholes and to engage in a public consultation process to restore the UK's global reputation on human rights.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/apr/11/uk-torture-policy-labelled-fatally-flawed-watchdog-report> - In April 2023, The Guardian reported that the UK's torture policy was labeled 'fatally flawed' by a watchdog report. The Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation (IPTL) found significant deficiencies in the policy, including failures by intelligence agencies to remind ministers of the 'presumption not to proceed' in cases where there is a real risk of torture. The report highlighted that the policy's ambiguity created serious dangers and called for a clear prohibition on torture tip-offs to prevent the UK's unlawful involvement in torture and rendition.
6. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/77838/html/> - In a 2024 submission to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Reprieve highlighted that the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) policy failed to prevent UK assistance to human rights abusers in countries like Libya, Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Saudi Arabia. The submission criticized the policy for not effectively mitigating risks of complicity in human rights abuses, including torture and the death penalty, and called for a comprehensive overhaul to address these serious flaws.
7. <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/jagtar-singh-johal> - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) documented the case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British national detained in India since 2017. Johal was allegedly tortured by Indian authorities, including the use of electric shocks and sleep deprivation. Despite his allegations, authorities reportedly failed to investigate his claims of torture. The USCIRF highlighted concerns about the UK's involvement in Johal's case, including potential complicity in his detention and treatment.