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JUSTICE AT LAST!

Only Briton left in Guantanamo to be freed in victory for Mail campaign to end scandal of his 14-year detention without trial

By **Ian Drury, David Jones** and **Jason Groves**

BRITAIN'S last detainee in Guantanamo Bay is finally coming home after a Daily Mail campaign for justice.

After a grotesque ordeal lasting 14 years, Shaker Aamer has been told he will be released

THE TORTURE FILES

from the notorious military prison within a month.

The US has bowed to mounting pressure to free the 48-year-old terror suspect, who has languished behind bars without charge or trial since February 2002. The surprise announcement yesterday represents a major victory for the Mail's tireless campaign for the married father-of-four's release.

Mr Aamer's jubilant family last night thanked the newspaper for its 'huge contribution' in securing his freedom. His father-in-law, Saeed Siddique, 72, said the paper's campaign had been an important factor in persuading the US authorities to release him.

Speaking from a joyful family gathering at his daughter Zineera's

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Topsy Posh and grim-faced Becks leave a party this week

Why are they spending more and more time apart?

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GREAT DAY FOR JUSTICE

NOW HE'LL HOLD SON HE'S NEVER SEEN

From Page One

because of the support of people so strongly devoted to the truth.

'I am overwhelmed by what people have done by their actions, their thoughts and their prayers, and without their devotion to justice I would not be here in Britain now.'

The Saudi-born father of four hugged his wife Zinnara at a private London clinic where he had been taken for extensive medical checks. She has bought him his first fresh clothes after years of prison uniforms – a jumper and shirt from Primark.

The man known as 'Prisoner 239' at the notorious US detention centre in Cuba touched down at Biggin Hill airport in Kent at around 1pm. He was flown in on a £23million Gulfstream IV chartered at a likely £50,000 cost that was split 50-50 by the Home Office and the Foreign Office.

As Mr Aamer made his dramatic home-coming, it emerged that:

- The Government is likely to offer him well over £1million to keep quiet about allegations of UK complicity in torture;
- Downing Street said Mr Aamer was 'free' and would not be detained;
- Intelligence agents are likely to want to interview him but he will not be placed under close surveillance.

In an emotional first phone call to his family, shortly after the plane landed, Mr Aamer wept for joy and repeatedly thanked everyone who had fought for his freedom – including the Mail, his family, his lawyers and campaigners.

'Shaker was really tearful but they were tears of pure happiness,' said his father-in-law Saeed Siddique, 73. 'He was so joyful and he just kept saying thanks to everyone. And he thanked God for hastening his release and sending him back to us. Right up until the last minute he didn't believe he would be released, and he still sounded surprised – as though it was a miracle.'

Before leaving Guantanamo, Mr Aamer told his lawyers he wanted to meet his wife alone, before being reunited with his four children because he wanted her to spend

'They were tears of pure happiness'

some time telling him about each of them. The reunion took place when she visited him in the clinic, Mr Siddique told the Mail. 'She took with her a few things she had bought for him, and she has decorated the house specially for his return.'

'She has bought a new carpet and units for the kitchen and the bedroom. We have also bought him a new outfit of clothes, including a jumper and shirt, from Primark. It may be a few days before he comes home. We know his health is not good so first he needs a full MOT.'

Mr Aamer's eldest child, Johina, 18, who last saw him when she was four, personally waged a campaign of letter writing to secure his release.

She wrote to David Cameron last year, and Jack Straw when she was seven, telling the then foreign secretary: 'He used to love me when he was with us.'

The couple also have sons Michael, born in 1999, Saif, born in 2000, and Faris, 13. Faris was born on Valentine's Day 2002, the day Mr Aamer arrived at the detention camp, and they have never met.

The family lives in a three-bedroom council house in Battersea, South London.

Tory MP David Davis, chairman of the Shaker Aamer all-party group in Parliament, said: 'I can only imagine the hardships that Shaker has undergone during his lengthy incarceration, and I wish him a rapid return to health in the bosom of his family.'

The Prime Minister's official spokesman confirmed there were no plans to detain Mr Aamer. 'He is free to be reunited with his family,' she said, but added: 'The Prime Minister has been clear that the public should be reassured that everything to ensure public safety is in place.'

The US released Mr Aamer on condition the British would guarantee he posed no threat.

Given British residency in 1996, Mr Aamer was described in US military files as a 'close associate of Osama Bin Laden' who fought in the battle

He's set for £1m damages payout

By Jack Doyle
Political Correspondent

SHAKER Aamer is in line for a taxpayer-funded payout of at least £1million.

A compensation deal was agreed in 2010 between the British Government and lawyers representing Guantanamo detainees following legal action.

The group, many of whom said they were victims of rendition and torture, sued the Government over its involvement.

Many alleged British secret service complicity in their mistreatment at the American base.

Ministers settled the case saying they could not defend it without damaging British security by revealing secret intelligence information.

Last night Mr Aamer's father-in-law Saeed Siddique said his son-in-law had the right to be compensated for the time he has spent in custody.

He said: 'He has the right to apply. He has been offered compensation when he was there.'

'The important thing is his freedom, and money doesn't matter.

'Of course we are thankful and grateful and appreciate everybody [who campaigned for his release].'

He added: 'Justice came but really late, too late.'

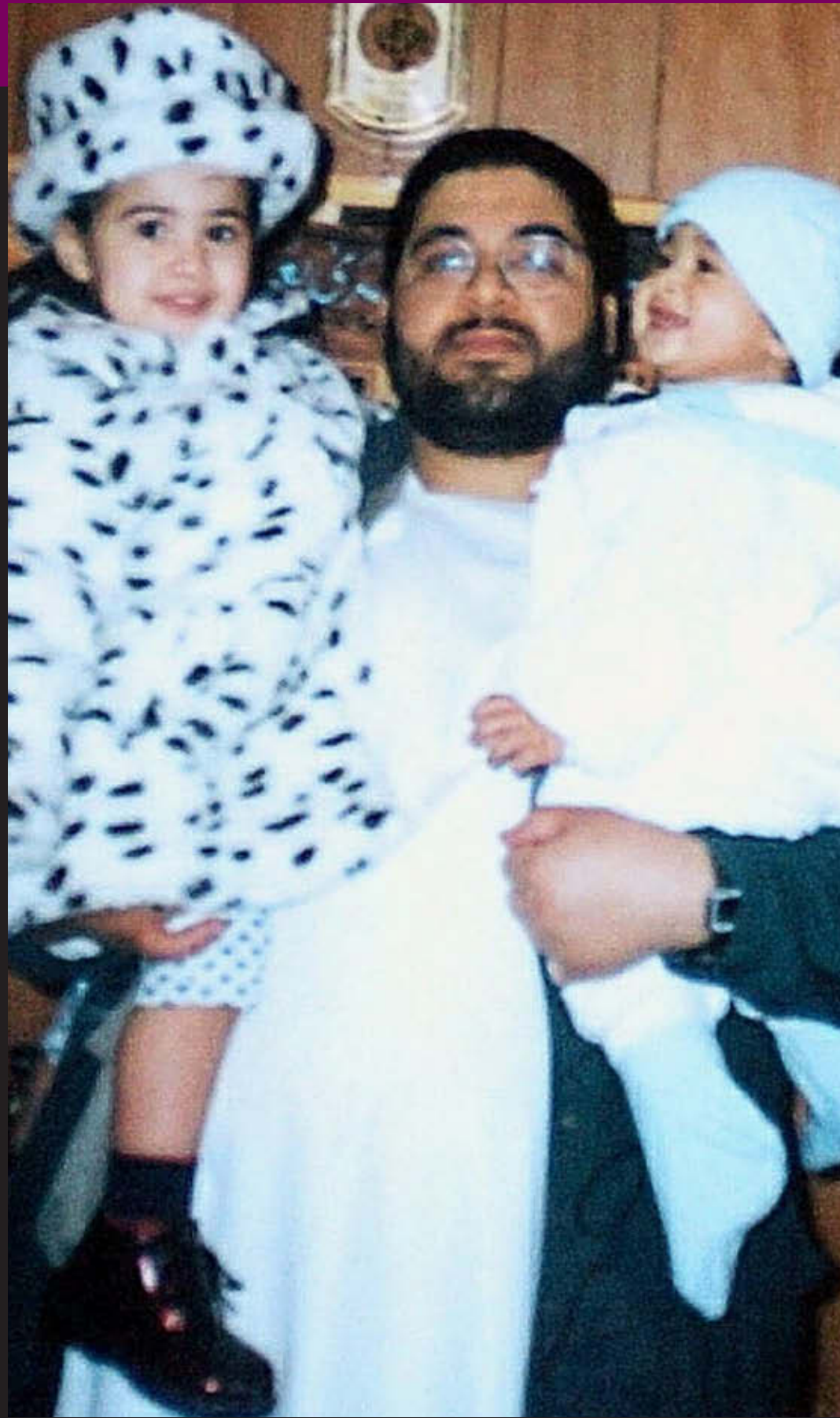
Mr Aamer's settlement could be among the largest because of the length of his detention.

Others given cash include Binyam Mohamed, a British resident who claims MI5 and MI6 fed questions to his CIA-backed torturers.

Details of the deals were shrouded in secrecy and all sides bound by confidentiality agreements.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman said yesterday: 'There was a settlement in relation to detainees in 2010.

'That was subject to a legally-binding confidentiality agreement. I cannot go into details of who was party to it.'



Family man: Shaker Aamer before his arrest with daughter Johina and son Michael

OUR FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

HELD IN A HELL HOLE FOR 13 YEARS WITHOUT TRIAL

Dec 11, 2014: The Mail launches its campaign to free Shaker Aamer

Guantanamo Briton must be set free now, MPs tell America

March 17, 2015: MPs from all main parties attack the US authorities

JUSTICE AT LAST!

Sept 26, 2015: News that he is to be freed at last. Family thanks the Mail.

All I want to know is: Have they forgotten me

Dec 16, 2014: Details emerge of a Skype call Mr Aamer made to his family

BETRAYAL OF PRISONER 239

May 30, 2015: Mr Aamer's family speak to the Mail about their agonising wait for the US to set him free

Torture and the man who could expose Britain's dirtiest secrets

Sept 29, 2015: Mail columnist Peter Osborne calls for inquiry into alleged UK role in torture

PM to plead Guantanamo Briton's case with Obama

Jan 10, 2015: The Prime Minister agrees to raise it with Barack Obama

MI5 AGENT'S WATCHED AS I WAS TORTURED

June 5, 2015: He tells his lawyers that British agents saw him tortured

Set me free so I won't miss my daughter's 18th birthday

Oct 17, 2015: A despairing – and ultimately futile – plea from Mr Aamer

Praise for Mail's campaign

THE role of the Daily Mail in securing Shaker Aamer's freedom won high praise last night.

Clive Stafford Smith, who is his lawyer, said: 'Both I and Shaker want to thank all of you at the Daily Mail and Paul Dacre personally for the really solid support they've shown not just for Shaker but for the notion of human rights and decency.'

Mr Aamer's family say this paper's relentless campaign was a major factor in persuading the US authorities to release him. His father-in-law

Saeed Siddique said he was 'thankful and grateful'. Andrew Mitchell, a Tory former cabinet minister, said: 'Enormous credit is due to the campaigners who have fought his corner, often standing for hours in the cold and rain to keep his case before the public gaze, and to the Daily Mail who alone amongst the British media raised serious questions.'

Joanne MacInnes, of the We Stand With Shaker campaign, said the Mail had been fantastic.

No plans to detain him here, says Cameron

DAVID Cameron last night welcomed Shaker Aamer's return to the UK and said there were 'no plans' to detain him.

The Prime Minister's spokesman said the former Guantanamo detainee would be 'free to be reunited with his family' in London. Downing Street also repeated assurances made by the

PM last month that 'everything necessary to ensure public safety has been put in place'.

However, it is thought highly unlikely Mr Aamer will be put under formal surveillance by police or the security agencies. To do so would require a current intelligence case against him.

The length of time he has been

in Guantanamo means there is no recent evidence against him.

The accusations of activities in Afghanistan, which pre-date his arrival in the camp, are in any case fiercely disputed by his lawyers. Similarly, there is no legal basis for putting him under a Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure which

could limit his movement and activities, or for confiscating his passport. He was never put on trial by the US, so in legal terms is an innocent man.

Previous Guantanamo detainees are thought to have been interviewed briefly by police on their return and it is likely officers will want speak to Mr Aamer.

Arrangements to bring him home were made by the Foreign Office, Home Office and Scotland Yard. These were similar to those for previous returning Guantanamo detainees.

The father of four was accompanied on the flight back to the UK by a Foreign Office representative and a police officer.

Manacled in a tiny cell for 22 hours a day



By David Jones

NOT until the wheels of his Gulfstream jet left the tarmac, and he gazed from the cabin window to see the lights of the Cuban coast disappearing in the darkness, will Shaker Aamer have allowed himself to believe he was finally free from the hell of Guantanamo Bay.

To understand his scepticism, you need to have been inside the US detention camp and witnessed its Kafkaesque regime. It is a place where the rules of justice, as we know them, do not apply.

A place where orders can be handed out and rescinded in an instant, as Washington commands – a fact that Aamer knew only too well after twice hearing that his release had been sanctioned, only to see his hopes dashed without so much as a word of explanation.

And only those who have visited 'Gitmo' – seen the desperation in the eyes of its wretched prisoners, and stood inside one of their spartan, white-walled little cells – will comprehend how Aamer must have felt yesterday, as he stepped off the plane and took his first gulp of autumnal Kent air.

Having been there on three occasions, including earlier this month, I can imagine the mixture of overwhelming joy and utter bewilderment he must have experienced.

In 'Gitmo', Aamer was not regarded as a person. Ever since Valentine's Day, 2002, when he was dumped at the prison – his hands and feet shackled, his senses blanked out by earmuffs and a blindfold – he has simply been a number.

His guards were under strict orders to address him always as Detainee 239, his identification serial code.

During one tour of the detention facility, I witnessed the despair of

his daily routine. Confined for up to 22 hours each day in a dank cell permanently lit by halogen lights, for long periods Aamer wasn't even allowed a pen, paper or books for stimulation. He was denied these basic items as a punishment for what his guards term 'non-compliance'. In other words, refusing to eat and otherwise protesting against the injustice of his plight.

His cell was so small that its white concrete walls were barely an arm-span apart. According to Aamer's testimony to police, the two ceiling lights were sometimes so dim that he could barely see his hand – then they were turned up so brightly that the cell rapidly transformed into a sauna.

HE said that underneath a window was a hole-in-the-ground toilet, and a metal sink. 'The guards could come along and flash lights into your eyes through the door, to make sleeping even less possible.'

'The MPs [military police] would put a bowl of Pinesol disinfectant by the vent, or spray it directly in, so that it would almost suffocate the men in the cells, particularly if you had an asthma problem.'

Other alleged techniques used on the prisoners were for staff to leave the water running all day, making a noise to prevent inmates from sleeping, and force-feeding.

Prisoners, it was claimed, would be strapped into the chairs and restrained at the legs, arms,

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