

BBC accused of being too 'soft' on ex-terror suspect

By Cyril Dixon

BBC chiefs were attacked last night for giving former Al Qaeda suspect Binyam Mohamed a public platform without demanding answers about his alleged terror links.

The freed Guantanamo Bay detainee was allowed to brush aside questions during a radio interview about the time he spent in Afghanistan.

He refused to explain his movements at the time of his arrest seven years ago or who told him to go to the region.

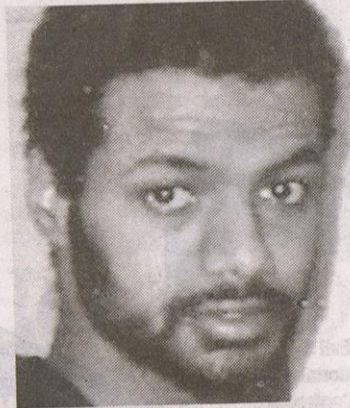
Instead, Ethiopian-born Mohamed, 30, repeated claims he had been tortured by agents acting for British intelligence.

Last night, ministers were said to be privately furious at the "soft" interview broadcast yesterday morning on Radio 4's Today programme.

The corporation also came under fire from the father of a July 7 terror victim.

John Taylor, whose daughter Carrie, 24, died in the Tube bombings in 2005, said: "It is a disgrace. It's ridiculous.

"How can they interview him and let him talk freely about his claims of torture but not answer



Mohamed says he was tortured

questions about why he was in Pakistan and then Afghanistan, straight after September 11?

"Why was he trying to cross borders on at least two occasions with a false passport? Why was he in Afghanistan in the first place? Why does he think a country like that is 'a good country' compared to ours?"

Mr Taylor, 59, added: "What I do not understand is that on the one hand he complains about Britain and its treatment of him and on the other he says he wants to stay here. If his

treatment was so unfair, so cruel, why would you want to stay in the country that colluded in that alleged torture?"

Al Qaeda expert Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, a senior researcher at the Centre for Social Cohesion think-tank, said: "The BBC's responsibility is to licence-payers. Really, they didn't press him hard enough on the issue of whether he had been to a training camp.

"They asked him but when he didn't give a straight answer, they didn't give him the kind of interview Jeremy Paxman would give a politician.

"He didn't give a straight answer. He even denied knowing what an Al Qaeda operation was. These are tactics straight out of an Al Qaeda manual.

"What concerns me is how they put the emphasis on his torture allegations and ignore allegations that he trained in an Al Qaeda terror camp.

"What we are doing is putting the word of someone who has admitted being in a suspicious environment above that of the US government.

"It just seems to be an orchestrated move to show that the UK and the US government are

as bad or worse than Saddam Hussein's government."

Gordon Brown's official spokesman refused to be drawn into the row, saying: "I think it's for the BBC to account for and justify the approach it takes for any interview."

But one angry listener said: "Torture is justified when the person you are torturing is hell-bent on killing you and your family.

"I wish we in this country were not dictated to by a bunch of yellow-bellied, liberal do-gooders."

In the interview, Mohamed, who arrived in Britain as a 16-year-old and was granted leave to stay, said he travelled East to study Islam.

"There was just a word out there that Afghanistan was the real Islamic state at that time and I should make my way over there," he said.

His lawyer stopped him answering questions about whether his travel documents were genuine because his immigration status is under review.

Mohamed, who claims his torturers used a razor to slash his genitals, denied being involved in plots or training for terror.