

The CIA's international dirty war

US oversees abduction, torture, execution of alleged terrorists

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The US government is engaged in an illegal, covert drive to kidnap people it suspects of terrorist links and ship them to allied countries, where the targeted individuals are imprisoned, interrogated under torture and, in some cases, summarily executed.

Dozens of people of various nationalities, mainly from Islamic countries, have been seized in this manner from locations as far flung as Indonesia, Pakistan and the former Yugoslavia.

The *Washington Post* reported the operations of the US-led campaign in a March 11 article headlined "US Behind Secret Transfer of Terror Suspects." The article, by Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Peter Finn, cites unnamed American diplomats, a senior Indonesian official and Pakistani government sources who provide details of several recent cases of what is known in the trade as "rendition," i.e., the seizure of people and their transfer to other countries, bypassing extradition procedures and ignoring the legal rights of the targeted individuals.

As a rule, those caught up in the international dragnet are neither charged with a specific crime nor provided legal assistance. They are, in the manner made notorious by South American military dictatorships, "disappeared," without any notice to their families.

The *Post* article states that US participation in such actions is not new, but has been expanded since September 11. The authors write: "US involvement in seizing terrorism suspects in third countries and shipping them with few or no legal proceedings to the United States or other countries—known as 'rendition'—is not new. In recent years, US agents, working with Egyptian intelligence and local authorities in Africa, Central Asia and the Balkans, have sent dozens of suspected Islamic extremists to Cairo or taken them to the United States, according to US officials, Egyptian lawyers and human rights groups."

"Since Sept. 11," the article asserts, "the US government has secretly transported dozens of people suspected of links

to terrorists to countries other than the United States, bypassing extradition procedures and legal formalities, according to Western diplomats and intelligence sources."

The authors quote a US diplomat as saying, "After September 11, these sorts of movements have been occurring all the time. It allows us to get information from terrorists in a way we can't do on US soil."

The *Post* asserts that those seized are subject to torture at the hands of foreign authorities working in tandem with the CIA, and that American agents are often on hand for the interrogations. The article states: "The suspects have been taken to countries, including Egypt and Jordan, whose intelligence services have close ties to the CIA and where they can be subjected to interrogation tactics—including torture and threats to families—that are illegal in the United States, the sources said. In some cases, US intelligence agents remain closely involved in the interrogation, the sources said."

The article gives a number of examples, including the following post-September 11 abductions:

* Muhammad Saad Iqbal Madni, 24, a Pakistani, was seized in early January of this year by Indonesian intelligence agents while visiting a friend in Jakarta. Two days later, without a court hearing or a lawyer, Iqbal was put on an unmarked US-registered Gulfstream jet parked at a military airport in Jakarta and flown to Egypt. Iqbal remains in custody in Egypt, where he has been questioned by US agents. There is no word on his legal status.

Days before Iqbal's capture, the CIA informed Indonesia's State Intelligence Agency that the US had evidence linking him to Al Qaeda and Richard C. Reid, the Briton charged with trying to detonate explosives hidden in his shoes while on an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami last December 22. The CIA provided the Indonesian authorities with information about Iqbal's whereabouts and urged them to seize the Pakistani. A few days later, the Egyptian government formally asked Indonesia to extradite

Iqbal, who carried an Egyptian as well as a Pakistani passport, saying Iqbal was wanted in connection with terrorism, without specifying a particular crime.

Indonesian government officials told local media that Iqbal had been sent to Egypt because of visa violations. According to the *Post*, a senior Indonesian government official said disclosing the US role would have exposed President Megawati Sukarnoputri to political attack from Islamist parties in her governing coalition. “We can’t be seen to be cooperating too closely with the United States,” the official said.

The official admitted that the extradition request from Egypt and the charge of visa infractions were intended to provide political cover for Jakarta’s compliance with the CIA request. “This was a US deal all along,” he said. “Egypt just provided the formalities.”

* Jamil Qasim Aseed Mohammed, a Yemeni microbiology student, was flown from Pakistan to Jordan last October on a US-registered Gulfstream jet after Pakistan’s intelligence agency surrendered him to US authorities at the Karachi airport. US officials alleged that the Yemeni student was an Al Qaeda operative who played a role in the bombing of the USS Cole. The handover of the shackled and blindfolded Aseed Mohammed took place in the middle of the night in a remote corner of the airport, without the benefit of extradition or deportation procedures.

* US forces seized five Algerians and a Yemeni in Bosnia on January 19 and flew them to a detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Americans apprehended and transferred the six in defiance of a Bosnian Supreme Court ruling ordering their release for lack of evidence, and despite an injunction from the Bosnian Human Rights Chamber that four of them be allowed to remain in the country pending further proceedings. (The Human Rights Chamber was established as part of the US-brokered Dayton peace accords that ended the 1992-95 Bosnian civil war. Its stated purpose was to protect human rights and enforce due process.)

Similar instances pre-dating September 11 include:

* The transfer in 1998 of Talaat Fouad Qassem, 38, a reputed leader of the Islamic Group, an Egyptian extremist organization, from Croatia to Cairo. US agents seized Qassem while he was traveling to Bosnia from Denmark, where he had been granted political asylum. Egyptian lawyers said Qassem was questioned aboard a US ship off the Croatian coast before being taken to Cairo, where a military tribunal had already sentenced him to death in absentia.

* The 1998 seizure in Azerbaijan of three members of Egypt’s other main underground group, Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The men’s lawyers in Cairo claim US intelligence officers were involved in their abduction.

* The seizure in Albania of five members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, also in 1998, who were interrogated for three days and then flown to Egypt aboard a plane chartered by the CIA. The US alleged the five were planning to bomb the US embassy in Tirana, Albania’s capital. CIA officers working with Albanian police carried out the abduction. Two of the five were put to death.

The above cases are only a few examples of a widespread practice spanning nearly a decade, according to the *Post*. The authors of the March 11 article write: “Between 1993 and 1999, terrorism suspects also were rendered to the United States from Nigeria, the Philippines, Kenya and South Africa in operations acknowledged by US officials. Dozens of other covert renditions, often with Egyptian cooperation, were also conducted, US officials said. The details of most of these operations, which often ignored local and international extradition laws, remain closely guarded.”

The *Post*’s revelations are of a piece with the American government’s policy of flouting international law, including the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war, and its brutal actions in Afghanistan, where US forces have participated in the slaughter of captured Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, and massive firepower has been used to raze villages and inflict heavy civilian casualties.

In the name of defending civilization, the US government sets itself up as global judge, jury and executioner, refusing to be bound by the most elementary principles of democratic rights and due process, or internationally recognized codes of civilized conduct.

It is noteworthy, but not surprising, that the damning facts set forth in the March 11 *Washington Post* article have evoked no response in the American media as a whole. None of the network news programs have reported the US-led campaign of abduction and torture, and there has been virtually no response in the printed media. The *Washington Post*, for its part, has failed to follow up its own exposé, and has remained editorially silent on the issue.

In order to support the Bush administration’s war policy, the US media must become ever more complicit in the government’s attacks on democratic rights, both at home and abroad.



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