

Council of Europe says 14 governments complicit in CIA renditions

Chris Marsden, Julie Hyland
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Europe's governments and Washington have disparaged a report accusing them of collaborating in the illegal kidnapping and torture of terrorist suspects by the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

Washington dismissed the report as a "rehash," adding that the Bush administration was "disappointed" by its "tone." The response in Europe's capitals to Council of Europe's findings was to denigrate the report as offering little substantive evidence and to continue their denial of any knowledge of CIA extraordinary renditions.

The Council of Europe monitors human rights in Europe's 46 nations. The report, prepared by Dick Marty, a rapporteur for the council, was commissioned after press accounts of European collusion with America's rendition (transfer) of detainees and the kidnapping (extraordinary rendition) of terrorist suspects to be sent to countries where they could be tortured. Reports by the media and human rights groups also alleged the presence of secret CIA detention facilities, so-called "black sites," in Poland and Romania.

Marty's report insists that the allegations made against the US and a total of 14 European governments are substantially true. Some had let the CIA abduct their citizens, while others allowed the agency to use their airspace. "European governments simply agreed not to want to see," he said.

The report details what it describes as a "global spider's web" of detention facilities run by US government agencies, stretching from official facilities such as Guantánamo Bay to those "that remain shrouded in secrecy." These include "black sites" in Eastern Europe and those of other allied foreign powers that permit torture.

The ex-Stalinist countries—Poland, Romania, and the former Yugoslav republics of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina—have played a particularly important role for the CIA. Regarding Macedonia, Marty states that its intelligence service, the UBK, "is well practiced in the conduct of clandestine surveillance and detention operations, having exploited its own network of 'secret apartments' for decades. Information obtained from our internal sources indicates that the UBK is equally skilled in working on behalf of the CIA."

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair said of the report, "The Council of Europe report has absolutely nothing new in it." Renditions were a longstanding practice that was perfectly legal, he continued, insisting that he would say nothing more on the issue.

The *Times* of London said that the report was "inconclusive" and "lacks the hard evidence to clinch its case." Germany's *Frankfurter Rundschau* described evidence of German collusion as "a bit thin" and the report as merely a "detailed press review."

For their part, Poland and Romania denounced as "slander" Marty's findings that evidence strongly indicated the presence of black sites on their territory.

The Council of Europe's report is attacked for containing "nothing new" by the very governments who have refused to make any accounting for their actions and which have blocked any investigation or public inquiry into the renditions scandal. One after another, they have insisted that they have not and will not even ask for what purpose CIA flights have utilized their airspace or landed on their soil. Alternatively they have taken the line of the British government that they are prepared to accept Washington's reassurances that it does not allow torture to take place.

The Council of Europe has no powers to gather evidence or to subpoena witnesses, forcing Marty to rely largely on existing evidence. Marty notes that in gathering information for the report he encountered "a lack of willingness and commitment on the part of national institutions that could, and should, have completely clarified these allegations," but which have instead responded with "silence and obvious reluctance." This also means it is "legitimate to assume that there are more such cases than can be proven at present," he concludes.

However, it is not true that Marty's report contains nothing new. He managed to collect the flight logs of planes run by CIA-front organizations and match them against reports of known abductions. By doing so he provides strong circumstantial evidence of collusion with extraordinary renditions and the existence of black sites in Poland and Romania.

More importantly, the evidence gathered together by Marty, based on eyewitness statements including those of the CIA's victims, proves that Europe's governments are complicit in human rights abuses of a kind normally associated with fascist dictatorships. These include governments that, in the case of Germany and Sweden, claimed to be opposed in principle to the war against Iraq, or, like Britain and Italy, hailed it and the accompanying "war on terror" as a struggle for democracy.

Behind the scenes they all complied with appalling crimes.

Marty focuses his report on extraordinary renditions because there is no denying that these are illegal in international law. He provides detailed accounts of the fate of 17 people who say they were unlawfully taken into detention by US authorities and matches the testimony of those who have since been released to paint a picture of grotesque treatment during abductions and subsequently in captivity.

These well-documented cases of abductions, some of which are the subject of legal actions in the courts, are used by Marty to establish a pattern of how the CIA snatch squads operate on European soil against European citizens.

The kidnap victim is taken to a small room (described as "a locker room, a police reception area") where he is searched and blindfolded

by upwards of four CIA agents dressed in black with their faces covered. The victim is shackled and his clothes cut from his body. Some are beaten during this operation. The naked man is then subject to a full-body cavity search, and photographed.

Several accounts “speak of a foreign object being forcibly inserted into the man’s anus; some accounts speak more specifically of a tranquiliser or suppository being administered per rectum.”

Afterwards, the victim is dressed in a nappy or incontinence pad and a jumpsuit, shackled hand and foot, his ears muffled and a cloth bag placed over his head. Bundled onto a plane, he is strapped to a mattress or seat: “in some cases the man is drugged and experiences little or nothing of the actual rendition flight; in other cases, factors such as the pain of the shackles or the refusal to drink water or use the toilet make the flight unbearable.”

The experience of two detainees described in the report is typical. Khaled El-Masri is a German citizen of Lebanese descent. After he was seized in Macedonia he eventually arrived in Kabul, Afghanistan where he was kicked and beaten during four months of detention.

While held captive, El-Masri was visited by a man he has since identified in a police line-up as Gerhard Lehmann, a German intelligence officer. His case is currently under investigation, but there is substantial evidence of German collusion in his extraordinary rendition by the CIA.

Binyam Mohamed al Habashi is an Ethiopian citizen with residence status in the UK who was seized in Pakistan and is now held in Guantánamo Bay. According to his diary, letters and first-hand accounts from family members and his legal representative, Binyam was subject to the most brutal forms of torture whilst held in Morocco.

“At its worst, the torture involved stripping Binyam naked and using a doctor’s scalpel to make incisions all over his chest and other parts of his body: ‘One of them took my penis in his hand and began to make cuts. He did it once and they stood for a minute, watching my reaction. I was in agony, crying, trying desperately to suppress myself, but I was screaming. They must have done this 20 to 30 times, in maybe two hours. There was blood all over. They cut all over my private parts. One of them said it would be better just to cut it off, as I would only breed terrorists.’”

Later Binyam describes being taken to another location 30 minutes away during which he explained how his clothes were cut off his body in front of English-speaking witnesses. “There was a white female with glasses—she took the pictures. One of them held my penis and she took digital pictures. When she saw the injuries I had, she gasped. She said: ‘Oh my God, look at that.’”

Blair makes much of the supposed distinction between renditions and extraordinary renditions, acknowledging that Britain accepted two rendition requests from the US. But Binyam has been selected as one of a group of ten prisoners who is due to appear before a special US military commission next year. As such he is an example of how detainees that have been supposedly subjected to legitimate detention are routinely treated by the US and its allies.

Marty states that much of the personal information used against Binyam during his torture could only have originated from the UK intelligence services. “Since the purposes to which this information would be put were reasonably foreseeable, the provision of this information by the British government amounts to complicity in Binyam’s detention and ill-treatment,” he states.

(It should be noted that according to Amnesty International, Binyam says that he was in fact interviewed by UK intelligence agents and that Moroccan interrogators had told him they were collaborating with the

UK intelligence services.)

The blanket dismissal of the report confirms that the CIA and other US government agencies will continue to abuse and torture detainees and that the European powers will maintain their collaboration with Washington. White House press secretary Tony Snow said, “International cooperation in the war on terror is essential for winning, and rendition is not something that began with this administration, and it’s certainly going to be practiced, I’m sure, in the future.”

The Blair government also made clear that it was business as usual as far as Britain was concerned. Armed Forces Minister Adam Ingram has said that Britain is under no obligation to ask the US about the purpose of its flights, and that the US does not have to reveal them.

Like other European governments, all that Britain requires from Washington is that it is able to deny culpability. As constitutional affairs minister, Harriet Harman, said to the BBC, “I think if we didn’t know about [renditions] we wouldn’t know whether we didn’t know about [them].”

Marty states that the US treatment of detainees “is utterly alien to the European tradition and sensibility, and is clearly contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” But his own report demonstrates that where Washington leads, Europe follows.

The drive to carve up the world’s markets and resources between the great powers and to secure the unrestrained exploitation of the working class by the major corporations is incompatible with the preservation of democratic rights. It necessitates the brutal suppression of all social and political resistance and opposition, both domestic and foreign. The “war against terror” is only the most grotesque and highly developed expression of this repression. That is why the Council of Europe acknowledges that, whereas the US “created this reprehensible network” of detention and torture, it could only do so “through the intentional or grossly negligent collusion of the European partners.”



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