

CIA planned rendition of Edward Snowden

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According to an article published by the *Register*, an aircraft belonging to the United States Central Intelligence Agency was sent to Europe last June as the US government was preparing to seize whistle-blower Edward Snowden.

On June 23, 2013, Snowden arrived in Moscow on a flight from Hong Kong. From there, he had planned to fly on to Cuba and then to Latin America. He was unable to do so, as the Obama administration cancelled his passport. Earlier that month, Snowden had made public, via the *Guardian* and other newspapers, revelations that the US, British and other governments were carrying out programmes of mass surveillance of the world's population.

The *Register* article, "CIA rendition jet was waiting in Europe to snatch Snowden," states that on June 24, 2013, the day after Snowden arrived in Moscow, "an unmarked Gulfstream V business jet—tail number N977GA—took off from a quiet commercial airport 30 miles from Washington DC."

The article notes that N977GA flew from the small Manassas Regional Airport. It continues, "Early next morning, N977GA was detected heading east over Scotland at the unusually high altitude of 45,000 feet. It had not filed a flight plan, and was flying above the level at which air traffic control reporting is mandatory."

The article explains, "But, even if pilots have turned off automated location data feeds, ordinary enthusiasts equipped with nothing more than suitable radio receivers connected to the Internet can measure differences in the time at which an aircraft's radar transponder signal reaches locations on the ground.... 'The plane showed up on our system at 5:20 on 25 June,' according to our source, a member of an Internet aircraft-tracking network run by enthusiasts in the UK. 'We knew the reputation of this aircraft and what it had done in the past.'"

Register gives some details of the history of the plane known as N977GA, which played a vital role in the illegal extraordinary rendition system run by the US government. It notes that N977GA "was originally ordered by the US Air Force for use as a general's flying gin-palace. But then, shortly after 9/11, it lost its military livery and acquired civilian registration as N596GA. Under that designation it was employed in CIA 'renditions'—or kidnappings. In 2011, the 'black' jet's role was switched again, having been transferred from the CIA's contractor to use by the US Department of Justice (DoJ).

"With its new tail number N977GA the plane became part of the Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation Systems (JPATS), operated by US Marshals. On perhaps its best-known mission, the jet flew a team of marshals into the UK on 5 October 2012 to collect radical cleric Abu Hamza after the USA won an extradition order against him."

The information provided to the *Register* includes a graphic showing that that N977GA "did not make it all the way to Moscow, but set down and waited at Copenhagen Airport."

The fact that the plane is understood to have landed in Copenhagen backs up the claim that N977GA was there in order to carry out a rendition.

It has been public knowledge since 2007 that the Danish government gave permission for a CIA rendition flight to cross Danish airspace on October 25, 2003. Last year, the Open Society Foundation released a report, "Globalising Torture—CIA Secret Detention and Extraordinary Rendition," documenting that Denmark was one of 53 nations whose government assisted the US in its "rendition" operations. The 216-page report documents what happened to the 136 known victims of these terrible human rights abuses.

The important information made public by the *Register* has been stonewalled by the mass media, with

the sole exception of the Russian TV news broadcaster RT.

In the UK, where the source of the *Register*'s information comes from, none of the media, including the *Guardian*, have even reported this development, let alone subjected it to further investigation. The British media have refused to challenge the censorship over reporting Snowden's revelations, put into place last year by the British government under its "D-Notice" system.

There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the information provided in the *Register* article, and no attempt has been made to rebut it by the US or Danish governments. The *Register* states, "US Department of Justice did not respond to our requests for information regarding N977GA and its purpose in heading to Europe on 24 June last year."

Immediately following the first of Snowden's revelations, breaking on June 5 of last year, the Obama administration rapidly moved to detain him at all costs, launching a massive international manhunt. This included the forcing down on July 2, 2013, of the jet carrying Bolivian president Evo Morales on suspicion that it was carrying Snowden to asylum in Bolivia.

Mobilising a plane previously involved in acts of rendition in order to seize Snowden would be of a piece with this act of state terrorism and air piracy. It renders null and void the official position of the US government that Snowden should return to the US and where he would face a "fair trial".

The *Register*'s article was published just one day prior to a *Washington Post* piece providing a few more glimpses into the extraordinary operation that was put into place to "Get Snowden". The *Post* explains, "For weeks, senior officials from the FBI, the CIA, the State Department and other agencies assembled nearly every day in a desperate search for a way to apprehend the former intelligence contractor who had exposed the inner workings of American espionage then fled to Hong Kong before ending up in Moscow."

It cites an official speaking anonymously who said the meetings were "Convened by White House homeland security adviser Lisa Monaco."

She told government and intelligence officials, "The best play for us is him landing in a third country." The official told the newspaper, "We were hoping he was going to be stupid enough to get on some kind of

airplane, and then have an ally say: 'You're in our airspace. Land.' "

The article notes that the "burst of activity" during an eight-week period, "including the White House meetings, a broad diplomatic scramble and the decision to force a foreign leader's plane to land—was far more extensive than U.S. officials acknowledged at the time."

The White House meetings were attended by the CIA's head of counterintelligence, FBI deputy director Sean Joyce and Michael McFaul, then the US ambassador to Russia. According to Joyce, the discussions "were not just about Edward Snowden the fugitive," but also dealt with the impact of Snowden's revelations. The *Post* states, "[T]here was a constant search for ideas to recover him". It said Joyce did not give any detail but that "There were several things that were sort of ongoing. None of them actually panned out."

The piece refers to Obama's comment during this period that "I'm not going to be scrambling jets to get a 29-year-old hacker." As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted at the time, Obama sought to downplay the issues in Snowden's revelations, as he was acutely aware of the worldwide support for his courageous stand and the alarm the NSA disclosures caused in foreign capitals.

It is now evident that nothing was off the table in the manhunt for Snowden, including his possible illegal seizure using methods that have resulted in the torture and imprisonment, without any trial, of many other innocent people.



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