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Italy Judge Orders Arrest of 13 CIA Agents

By Aidan Lewis
The Associated Press

Friday 24 June 2005

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Rome - An Italian judge ordered the arrests of 13 people in the purported CIA abduction of an imam, who then was sent to Egypt, the Milan prosecutor's office said Friday. An Italian official said earlier the 13 were CIA officers involved in US anti-terrorism efforts.

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The 13 are suspected of seizing Osama Moustafa Hassan Nasr, known as Abu Omar, on the streets of Milan on Feb. 17, 2003, and sending him to Egypt, where he reportedly was tortured, Milan prosecutor Manlio Claudio Minale said in a statement.

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An Italian newspaper said all 13 were American agents.

The US Embassy in Rome and the CIA in Washington declined to comment.

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The prosecutor's statement did not name any of the suspects, give their nationalities or mention the CIA by name, but an Italian official familiar with the investigation confirmed newspaper reports Friday that the suspects were working for the CIA. The official requested anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information.

Minale said the suspects remained at large, and Italian authorities would ask the United States and Egypt for assistance in the case.

Prosecutors believe the officers seized Omar as part of the CIA's "extraordinary rendition" program, in which terror suspects are transferred to third countries without court approval, according to reports Friday in newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Giorno*.

The statement said Omar was attacked by two people while walking from home to a local mosque and hustled into a white van. He was taken to Aviano, a joint US-Italian base north of Venice; another American air base in Ramstein, Germany; and then Cairo.

Investigators confirmed the abduction through an eyewitness account and other, unidentified witnesses, the statement said.

The statement said Omar was abused by interrogators in Egypt, according to phone calls made by Omar from Egypt to his wife and another unnamed Egyptian citizen in April-May, 2004.

Italian papers have reported that Omar, 42, said in the calls he was tortured with electric shocks.

On Friday, *Corriere della Sera* cited another Milan-based imam as telling Italian authorities that Omar had been tortured in Egypt after refusing to work in Italy as an informer.

According to the testimony, Omar was hung upside down and subjected to extreme temperatures and loud noise that damaged his hearing, *Corriere* reported.

Minale said the judge rejected a request for arrest warrants for six more suspects believed to have helped prepare the operation.

Judge Chiara Nobile ordered the arrests after investigators traced the 13 through check-in details at Milan hotels and their use of Italian cell phones during the operation, the reports in *Corriere* and *Il Giorno* said.

Il Giorno said the 13 were American agents, and three of them were women.

Minale said a judge also issued a separate arrest warrant for Omar on terrorist charges. In that warrant, Judge Guido Salvini claimed the seizure of Omar represented a violation of Italian sovereignty, according to Italian news agency Apcom.

Omar was believed to have fought alongside jihadists in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and prosecutors were seeking evidence against him before his disappearance, according to a report in *La Repubblica* newspaper last year, which cited intelligence officials.

The prosecutor's office said Omar was released by the Egyptians after his interrogation but later was arrested again.

Corriere said Italian police picked up details, including cover names, photos, credit card details, and US addresses that the 13 had given to a number of five-star hotels in Milan around the time of Omar's alleged abduction.

It said investigators also found the prepaid highway passes the 13 used for the journey from Milan to the air base.

The report said investigations showed the 13 ran up \$144,984 in hotel bills in Milan, and two couples took holidays in northern Italy after delivering Omar at the Aviano air base.

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Italy: Cia Agents Indicted for Imam Abduction AKI

Friday 24 June 2005

Milan - An Italian judge has ordered the arrest of 13 CIA agents for the abduction of an Egyptian cleric in the northern city of Milan and his transfer to Cairo, where he was then tortured until he partially lost the use of his legs. Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr, also known as Abu Omar, was seized near his home in Milan on 17 February 2003. His capture is part of a controversial practice "extraordinary rendition" stepped up after the September 11 2001 attacks. Terror suspects are picked up irrespective of national laws and sent to third countries in what rights groups denounce as 'outsourcing torture'.

Milan daily Corriere della Sera reports that among those issued with arrest warrants on Thursday was the former US diplomatic consul in Milan, Robert Seldon Lady, who was replaced unexpectedly several months ago. Warrants were issued for ten men and three women, whose nationalities were not specified.

Abu Omar, had already been under surveillance by Italian police, because of suspected links with terrorist groups. Foreign intelligence sources say he had fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, before his arrival in Italy in 1997.

Two years ago, he left the house, telling his wife he was going to the mosque nearby. But he never arrived, after being cornered in a side street and bundled into a van.

Nothing more was heard of him until April 20, 2004, when he called his wife - whose phone line was still tapped - to tell her he was still alive. Some days later, he called his friend, the Egyptian imam in Milan, Mohammed Ridha, and told him all that had happened since he disappeared.

He told Ridha he had been driven to an American airbase, questioned and beaten, and the following day flown to Egypt where

was handed over to the interior ministry. If he agreed to return to Italy and work as a secret agent, his interrogators told him, he would not be harmed.

Rejecting this offer he was sent to Tora high security prison camp in Egypt where he remained for more than a year. Omar told his friend he had been so badly beaten that he could hardly move his legs and had been tortured with electric cables.

On April 19, 2004, Omar was unexpectedly released, on the condition that he told no-one what had happened. However after the phone calls to his wife and Ridha, which were reported in the Italian newspapers, he was arrested and nothing more has been heard of him.

Fundamental in the investigation was the use by the CIA operatives of Italian cell phones. A total of 17 mobile phones were identified operating in the street where Omar was seized between 12.28 and 12.33 of 17 February 2003. Some of these were found to have placed calls to the US consulate in Milan and to a number in Virginia (where the CIA headquarters are based, at Langley). One mobile phone was traced as being located in Cairo the next day, the others led investigators to the luxury hotel where the group stayed and, consequently, to the identities - or false identities - of the agents.

Serving the arrest warrants may prove near impossible and the prospect of extraditing CIA agents to Italy seems even more remote.

The episode will however put the spotlight again on the controversial 'extraordinary rendition' practice. Human rights groups have strongly criticised the sending of terror suspects to third countries where they are tortured.

In Italy opposition politicians are demanding explanations from the government of prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, a close ally of President Bush as to whether Italian authorities were aware of what was going on.

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Rumsfeld Sued over Torture

By Daniel Pulliam

GovExec.com

Friday 24 June 2005

A lawsuit alleging that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is

responsible for the prison torture scandal in Afghanistan and Iraq moved to federal court Wednesday against the wishes of government lawyers representing the Pentagon chief.

The lawsuit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights First on behalf of eight Afghani and Iraqi men who say they were tortured while held in US prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A panel of seven judges - the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation - moved the lawsuit to the US District Court for the District of Columbia, consolidating pretrial proceedings of four lawsuits filed by the ACLU. The other lawsuits were filed against Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, who commanded US forces in Iraq when the alleged abuse occurred, Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinsky, who commanded US military police forces in Iraq at the time and Col. Thomas Pappas, who commanded US military intelligence and military police forces in Iraq at the time.

According to the ACLU, lawyers representing the military commanders wanted the case tried in the Eastern District of Virginia, rather than elevating the case to the federal level.

"This brings us one step closer to proving in court that the legal responsibility for the systemic abuse and torture of detainees in US custody in Iraq and Afghanistan lies at the top of the chain of command and not at the bottom," said a statement from Lucas Guttentag, the lawsuit's lead counsel and director of the ACLU's Immigrant's Rights Project.

Chief Judge Thomas F. Hogan will hear the case.

"We welcome this decision and hope that we are closer to having a federal court reverse policy decisions that have led to torture and abuse," said Michael Posner, executive director of Human Rights First in the statement.



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