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The fax that reveals the US is flying terror suspects to Europe's secret jails

SPECIAL REPORT: By [Neil Mackay](#), Investigations Editor

**THE intercepted** top-secret fax contained information that America never wanted the world to know – that the US was holding war-on-terror captives at clandestine “black site” prisons in eastern Europe.

The fax, datelined November 10, 2005, 8.24pm, was sent by the Egyptian foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, in Cairo, to his ambassador in London. It revealed that the US had detained at least 23 Iraqi and Afghani captives at a military base called Mihail Kogalniceanu in Romania, and added that similar secret prisons were also to be found in Poland, Ukraine, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bulgaria.

The discovery of the fax seriously undermines the US's denial that it has ever used secret detention facilities, breaching international law. It also adds to the pressure for the release of information on “extraordinary renditions”. These rendition flights see kidnapped terror suspects taken by the CIA to countries where torture is common, such as Uzbekistan. British intelligence has supported this practice and UK airports, particularly Prestwick, have given CIA jets logistical support.

The Council of Europe last week published the results of its long-running investigation into rendition and found that 14 European countries, including Britain, had colluded with the CIA. It also suggested that secret prisons were operating in eastern Europe, but did not have conclusive proof.

The fax, intercepted by Swiss intelligence, indicates that Egypt has such proof. It is headed: “The Egyptians have access to sources which confirm the existence of American secret prisons”.

Its shocking contents would never have been uncovered if it hadn't been for a conscientious surveillance officer with the Swiss secret service, stationed at an eavesdropping centre in Zimmerwald, south of Berne. On November 16, six days after the fax was first sent via satellite from Cairo to London, the officer intercepted it using the Onyx eavesdropping system. The officer marked their personal coded identifier, “wbm”, on the page and put the information down in a COMINT SAT report. The intercepted fax was given the reference number S160018TER00000115.

The report noted: “The [Egyptian] embassy got the information from its own sources that 23 Iraqi and American citizens have actually been interrogated at the military base Mihail Kogalniceanu close to the [Romanian] city of Constanza at the Black Sea. Similar interrogation centres exist in Ukraine, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bulgaria.”

The fax also referred to “prisoners being transported with American military planes from the base Salt Pit in Kabul to the Polish base Szymany and to the Romanian base on September 21 and 22, 2005.” It then went on to say: “In contradiction to all quoted facts, the Romanians deny the existence of the prisons that are used to interrogate members of al-Qaeda.”

The activities of one secret CIA rendition jet do indicate that captives have been dropped off in Romania. The plane, N313P, a Boeing 737, landed in Timisoara on January 25, 2004 just before midnight after flying from Kabul. It stayed on the runway for just over an hour and then flew on to Palma, Mallorca, where a CIA rendition team stayed in a hotel under fake identities.

Dick Marty, the Swiss senator who led the Council of Europe investigations into renditions, said in his report: “Having eliminated other explanations – including that of a simple logistics flight, as the trip is a part of a well-established renditions circuit – the most likely hypothesis is that the purpose of this flight was to transport one or several detainees from Kabul to Romania.”

Rendition jet N313P also travelled from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to Kabul on September 21, 2003. On September 22, it flew from Kabul to Szymany, a Polish defence ministry airfield. Close by is the Stare Kiejkuty base used by Polish intelligence. CIA jet N313P stayed only 64 minutes before flying to Romania.

“It is possible,” says Marty, “that several detainees may have been transported together on the flight out of Kabul, with some being left in Poland and some being left in Romania.” After leaving Romania, the plane landed in Morocco, where “rendered” captives have been

tortured with the knowledge of both British and American intelligence.

Both Poland and Romania deny allowing CIA “black site” prisons to operate on their territory. EU justice commissioner Franco Frattini has warned that any member states caught operating secret jails on behalf of the Americans could have their voting rights suspended.

Russian TV has also accused Ukraine of running a secret CIA prison near Kiev, claiming that an old Soviet site used to store nuclear weapons has been turned into a holding facility where trucks have been seen delivering shipments of people to Ukrainian soldiers.

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