

EXCLUSIVE: Sources Tell ABC News Top Al Qaeda Figures Held in Secret CIA Prisons
10 Out of 11 High-Value Terror Leaders Subjected to 'Enhanced Interrogation Techniques'

By BRIAN ROSS and RICHARD ESPOSITO

Dec. 5, 2005 ? - Two CIA secret prisons were operating in Eastern Europe until last month when they were shut down following Human Rights Watch reports of their existence in Poland and Romania.

Current and former CIA officers speaking to ABC News on the condition of confidentiality say the United States scrambled to get all the suspects off European soil before Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived there today.

The officers say 11 top al Qaeda suspects have now been moved to a new CIA facility in the North African desert.

CIA officials asked ABC News not to name the specific countries where the prisons were located, citing security concerns.

The CIA declines to comment, but current and former intelligence officials tell

ABC News that 11 top al Qaeda figures were all held at one point on a former Soviet air base in one Eastern European country. Several of them were later moved to a second Eastern European country.

All but one of these 11 high-value al Qaeda prisoners were subjected to the harshest interrogation techniques in the CIA's secret arsenal, the so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques" authorized for use by about 14 CIA officers and first reported by ABC News on Nov. 18.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice today avoided directly answering the question of secret prisons in remarks made on her departure for Europe, where the issue of secret prisons and secret flights has caused a furor.

Without mentioning any country by name, Rice acknowledged special handling for certain terrorists.

"The captured terrorists of the 21st century do not fit easily into traditional systems of criminal or military justice, which were designed for different needs. We have had to adapt," Rice said.

The CIA has used a small fleet of private jets to move top al Qaeda suspects from Afghanistan and the Middle East to Eastern Europe, where Human Rights Watch has identified Poland and Romania as the countries that housed secret sites.

But Polish Defense Minister Radoslaw Sikorski told ABC Chief Investigative Correspondent Brian Ross today: "My president has said there is no truth in these reports."

Ross asked: "Do you know otherwise, sir, are you aware of these sites being shut

down in the last few weeks, operating on a base under your direct control?"

Sikorski answered, "I think this is as much as I can tell you about this."

In Romania, where the secret prison was possibly at a military base visited last

year by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the new Romanian prime minister said

today there is no evidence of a CIA site but that he will investigate.

Sources tell ABC that the CIA's secret prisons have existed since March 2002

when one was established in Thailand to house the first important al Qaeda target captured. Sources tell ABC that the approval for another secret prison

was granted last year by a North African nation.

Sources tell ABC News that the CIA has a related system of secretly returning

other prisoners to their home country when they have outlived their usefulness

to the United States.

These same sources also tell ABC News that U.S. intelligence also ships some

"unlawful combatants" to countries that use interrogation techniques harsher

than any authorized for use by U.S. intelligence officers. They say that Jordan, Syria, Morocco and Egypt were among the nations used in order to extract confessions quickly using techniques harsher than those authorized for

use by U.S. intelligence officers. These prisoners were not necessarily citizens of those nations.

According to sources directly involved in setting up the CIA secret prison system, it began with the capture of Abu Zubayda in Pakistan. After treatment

there for gunshot wounds, he was whisked by the CIA to Thailand where he was

housed in a small disused warehouse on an active airbase. There, his cell was

kept under 24-hour closed circuit TV surveillance and his life-threatening wounds were tended to by a CIA doctor especially sent from Langley

headquarters

to assure Abu Zubaydah was given proper care, sources said. Once healthy, he was

slapped, grabbed, made to stand long hours in a cold cell and finally handcuffed

and strapped feet up to a water board until after .31 seconds he begged for mercy and began to cooperate.

While in the secret facilities in Eastern Europe, Abu Zubaydah and his fellow

captives were fed breakfasts that included yogurt and fruit, lunches that included steamed vegetables and beans, and dinners that included meat or chicken and more vegetables and rice, sources say. In exchange for cooperation,

prisoners were sometimes given hard candies, deserts and chocolates. Abu Zubaydah was partial to Kit Kats, the same treat Saddam Hussein fancied in his

captivity.

"One of the difficult issues in this new kind of conflict is what to do with captured individuals who we know or believe to be terrorists," Rice said. "The individuals come from many countries and are often captured far from their original homes. Among them are those who are effectively stateless, owing allegiance only to the extremist cause of transnational terrorism. Many are extremely dangerous. And some have information that may save lives, perhaps even thousands of lives."

Sources tell ABC News that Jordanians, Egyptians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Saudis, Pakistanis, Uzbekistanis and Chinese citizens have been returned to their nations' intelligence services after initial debriefing by U.S. intelligence officers. Rice said renditions such as these are vital to the war on terror. "Rendition is a vital tool in combating transnational terrorism," she said.

Of the 12 high value targets housed by the CIA, only one did not require water boarding before he talked. Ramzi bin al-Shibh broke down in tears after he was walked past the cell of Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the operational planner for Sept. 11. Visibly shaken, he started to cry and became as cooperative as if he had been tied down to a water board, sources said.

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Following is a list of 12 high-value targets housed by the CIA.

Abu Zubaydah: Held first in Thailand then Poland

Ibn Al-Shaykh al-Libi: Held in Poland. Previously held in Pakistan/Afghanistan

Abdul Rahim al-Sharqawi: Held in Poland

Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri: Held in Poland

Ramzi Binalshibh: Held in Poland

Mohammed Omar Abdel-Rahman: Held in Poland

Khalid Shaikh Mohammed: Held in Poland

Waleed Mohammed bin Attash: Held in Poland

Hambali: In U.S. custody. Kept isolated from other high-value targets.

Hassan Ghul: Held in Poland.

Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani: Held in Poland

Abu Faraj al-Libbi: Held in Poland