

US intelligence agency uses Jordan for torture of prisoners

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8 December 2007

The revelation that the CIA organized the destruction of videotapes documenting the interrogation of prisoners at secret CIA detention facilities abroad has focused attention on one aspect of the US torture program. Another important component is the policy of “extraordinary rendition”—the transfer of prisoners to the control of other countries that specialize in torture.

One of the countries that has been most frequently used by the CIA in this way is Jordan, a key US ally in the Middle East. An article in the *Washington Post* published on Saturday (“Jordan’s Spy Agency: Holding Cell for the CIA” by Craig Whitlock) documents the close relationship that has developed over the past seven years.

According to the *Post*, “The General Intelligence Department, or GID, is perhaps the CIA’s most trusted partner in the Arab world. The Jordanian agency has received money, training and equipment from the CIA for decades and even has a public English-language web site,” the newspaper reports. “The relationship has deepened in recent years, with US officials praising their Jordanian counterparts for the depth of their knowledge regarding al-Qaeda and other Islamic networks.”

Despite official denials, however, the main benefit of the Jordan state is that it tortures—and with abandon. The *Post* notes in characteristically understated language that the GID was “attractive for another reason”: “Its interrogators had a reputation for persuading tight-lipped suspects to talk, even if that meant using abusive tactics that could violate US or international law.”

One of the prisoners who has been subject to this fate is Al-Haj Addu Ali Sharqawi, a prisoner originally from Yemen. Sharqawi was captured in Pakistan in February 2002, transferred to Jordan, transferred to an

undisclosed CIA-run prison 19 months later, and eventually transferred to Guantánamo in February 2004.

Throughout this period, he has never been charged with a crime, and there is little prospect that he will any time soon. The US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case earlier this week that will determine whether prisoners at Guantánamo Bay have the right to challenge their detention in US courts.

Sharqawi describes his ordeal in a written document that was obtained by the *Post*: “I was kidnapped, not knowing anything of my fate, with continuous torture and interrogation for the whole of two years. When I told them the truth, I was tortured and beaten.”

The *Post* does not indicate why Sharqawi was originally arrested. The newspaper writes, however, “He was threatened with sexual abuse and electrocution while in Jordan. He also said he was hidden from officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross during their visits to inspect Jordanian prisons.”

Jordan has become notorious for torturing prisoners captured by the government that represent a threat to its interests. “Former prisoners have reported that their captors were expert in two practices in particular: *falaqa*, or beating suspects on the soles of their feet with a truncheon and then, often forcing them to walk barefoot and bloodied across a salt-covered floor; and *farruj*, or the ‘grilled chicken,’ in which prisoners are handcuffed behind their legs, hung upside down by a rod placed between their knees, and beaten.”

In July 2006, Amnesty International issued a report noting the “systematic torture of political suspects” in Jordan. The report documented the cases of dozens of individuals tortured in Jordan, among whom were 10 believed to have been sent to Jordan by the United States.

Malcolm Smart, director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme, described the cooperation of the US and Jordan as follows: "Jordan appears to be a central hub in a global complex of secret detention centers operated by the US in coordination with foreign intelligence agencies. It is into this complex that suspects 'disappear'—and are held for interrogation indefinitely, outside any legal or administrative process."

The tapes destroyed by the CIA documented only a small component of a network of prisons and interrogations facilities set up by the US government and its allies. Most of the abuse is never recorded in the first place.

The full Washington Post article can be found here

The Amnesty International report can be found here



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