

US government covered up 14,000 photos documenting CIA secret prisons

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29 June 2015

The US government has concealed the existence of some 14,000 images documenting the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) network of secret "black site" torture and interrogation centers established after September 11, according to unnamed US officials who spoke to the *Washington Post*.

The existence of the photographs was known to the US military prosecutors involved in ongoing military commission cases against four alleged terrorists for at least several months prior to the publication of the media reports on Saturday, according to the *Post*.

The photos had never been brought forward during more than three years of hearings in the cases of Khalid Sheik Mohammed and three other alleged participants in the September 11 attacks.

After a brief attempt to conduct their trials in a New York federal court, the accused are again standing before military-run commissions established to deny basic democratic rights to "enemy combatants" captured by the US government as part of the so-called global war on terror.

Images from black sites in Thailand, Afghanistan, Poland, Lithuania, Romania and possibly others are included in the photo cache, which the Obama administration still refuses to release.

The photos, now under review by US officials, include images of naked prisoners taken during transportation to the torture sites. There are also reportedly photos of a wooden board used for waterboarding detainees at a black site in Afghanistan as well as photos of the small confinement boxes which a number of detainees were forced into for hours on end.

The concealment of the photos has prompted calls for the suspension of the commissions, pending an official investigation into the images.

In spite of ferocious efforts waged continuously by both the Bush and Obama administrations to suppress investigation of the torture programs, the basic facts are more or less known. More than 100 individuals are confirmed to have been "rendered" to secret prisons between 2002 and 2006. Individuals without any remote connection to Jihadist organizations were detained and tortured for years as a result of mistaken identity.

Khalid El-Masri, a German citizen, underwent prolonged torture and confinement in Afghanistan before being dumped by CIA officers in rural Albania after proving to his captors that his name was very similar to, but not the same as, that of the man they had intended to interrogate.

At least five of the detainees disappeared to black sites by the CIA have been confirmed to have been killed as a result of being subjected to the "enhanced interrogation techniques."

The total number of victims may be much higher. The CIA organized more than 1,200 flights to and from locations on the European continent between 2002 and 2006, as part of its rendition and torture operations, according to a 2007 report approved by the European Union's main legislature.

A slow trickle of detainees have been quietly released or transferred without explanation. Two Tunisians held at a CIA black site in Afghanistan for over a decade were flown back to Tunisia for release on June 15, traveling on board a US military plane. An unknown number of other detainees held by US forces at black sites were handed over to the Afghan government last December.

The refusal of the US government to release the photos, along with their secrecy in the first place, are serious crimes in themselves. As part of the cover up,

the Obama administration continues to hold dozens of "enemy combatants" who have been cleared for release as early as 2009.

The collaboration of European governments in the operation of the secret torture network has also been covered up. Details of the European role in the torture network were subject to heavy redaction in the already heavily redacted Senate torture report.

Nonetheless, it is known that Poland, Lithuania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Romania all hosted secret prisons directly run by the CIA, while a broader circle of some 20 European states ran sites in close collaboration with the CIA.

Security personnel from the British government were directly involved in CIA torture sessions. Other collaborating governments received millions in US government money paid out by the CIA, including more than \$1 million paid to Lithuania for the right to set up a single detention center.

At least three of the agency's black sites, located in Poland, Romania and Morocco, were established from the CIA branch office in Frankfurt, Germany. The Frankfurt office, previously a "sleepy" logistics outpost for the agency, suddenly received millions of dollars' worth of budget increases under orders from the White House, beginning in 2002.

Instead of being punished, the bureaucrats who oversaw the programs, including current CIA Director John Brennan, are now ensconced in powerful offices at the highest levels of government.

Documentation proving that the Obama administration has dismantled the vast array of resources, camps and personnel networks involved has not been forthcoming.



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