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US torture report exposes European powers' involvement in CIA crimes

By Alex Lantier

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The publication of the US Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture has exposed the European powers' complicity in ghastly crimes of US intelligence. Even though European states' complicity in CIA torture and rendition operations has been documented for nearly a decade, no European officials have been held accountable.

In 2005, the Council of Europe tasked former Swiss prosecutor Dick Marty with preparing a report on secret CIA prisons in Europe. He released two reports, in 2006 and 2007, documenting the complicity of dozens of European states in setting up facilities for illegal CIA rendition and torture. The states involved included Britain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Albania.

The existence of approximately 1,000 CIA flights and of secret prisons in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Bucharest (Romania), Antavilas (Lithuania), and Stare Kiejkuty (Poland) has since been confirmed.

Nonetheless, after the US Senate recognized CIA use of the grisliest forms of torture—including murder, sexual assault, sleep deprivation and forcing inmates to stand on broken limbs—officials across Europe reacted by insisting that they should enjoy immunity.

Top officials of the Polish government, which is appealing a July ruling against it over its role in CIA torture by the European Court on Human Rights, denounced the report. "Certain secrets should stay that way," said Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak.

Polish prosecutors have been investigating the case for six years, including a two-year investigation of former Polish intelligence chief Zbigniew Siemiatkowski, without bringing any charges. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the September 11 attacks, was waterboarded as soon as he arrived at Stare Kiejkuty. One medical officer there noted: "We are basically doing a series of near-drownings."

Other detainees at Stare Kiejkuty, which housed Saudi, Algerian and Yemeni detainees, were subjected to mock executions with a power drill while standing hooded and naked.

Former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski lamely claimed that CIA officials did not explain how they planned to use their secret prisons in Poland. "It was a question as we saw it only of creating secret sites," he said, adding that he closed down the facility in 2003 because "the Americans' secret activities began to worry" Polish authorities.

Lithuanian officials confirmed that the black site named "detention center Violet" by the US Senate report appears to be the Lithuanian detention center near the capital, Vilnius, identified in a 2009-2010 parliamentary investigation. Lawmaker Arvydas Anusauskas told Reuters, "The US Senate report, to me, makes a convincing case that prisoners were indeed held at the Lithuanian site."

Abu Zubaydah, a Saudi detainee now kept at Guantanamo Bay, has stated that he was kept and tortured at the site. Washington paid the Lithuanian government \$1 million to "show appreciation" for operating the prison, according to the US Senate report, though the funds were reportedly paid out through "complex mechanisms."

Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius has asked Washington to confirm whether or not the CIA tortured prisoners at its secret prisons in Lithuania.

British Prime Minister David Cameron dismissed the issue of torture and Britain's role in rendition flights to countries including Libya, saying that it had been "dealt with from a British perspective." He told the public to trust British intelligence to police itself, as official investigations had "produced a series of questions that the intelligence and security community will look at ... I'm satisfied that our system is dealing with all of these issues."

In fact, the CIA torture report has revealed the advanced state of collapse of democratic forms of rule not only in the United States, but also in Europe. What has emerged across Europe since the September 11 attacks is the framework of a police state far more technically powerful than even the most ruthless dictatorships of twentieth-century Europe. The methods deployed as part of the "war on terror" will also be used against opposition in the working class to unpopular policies of austerity and war.

European governments participate in the digital spying on telecommunications and Internet activities of the European population, carried out by the US National Security Agency and its local counterparts, as revealed by Edward Snowden. They also are planning joint repression of social protests, based on talks between German federal police, France's Gendarmerie, and other security forces with the European Commission.

“During my investigation, people called me a traitor and said I was making things up,” Marty told the *Tribune de Genève*. “The Europeans disappointed me. Germany, the United Kingdom, and many others blocked the establishment of the truth. In fact, most European countries actively participated in a system that legitimated large-scale state crimes.”

“I think we must recall, and it is very important, that this operation, this anti-terrorist policy, was decided and carried out under the aegis of NATO,” Marty told Swiss television channel RTS.

“The United States invoked Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which says that if one member of the alliance is attacked militarily [e.g., as Washington claimed, on September 11], all NATO members are required to come to its aid,” Marty said. Once this was accepted, he added, “there were a whole series of secret accords between the United States and European powers. And all the European countries pledged to grant total immunity to CIA agents, which is manifestly illegal.”

The European powers’ participation in the CIA torture program underscores the utter hypocrisy of the humanitarian pretensions used to justify operations ranging from NATO wars in Syria and Libya to this February's NATO-backed, fascist-led putsch in Ukraine.

The ferocious opposition of the European ruling elites to attempts to bring this criminality to light is the clearest indication that the democratic rights of the population cannot be secured by appeals to any section of the state. The defense of the population's democratic and social rights is a question of the revolutionary mobilization of the working class in an international struggle against European capitalism.