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The European powers and CIA torture

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Innumerable redactions in the 525-page US Senate Intelligence Committee’s executive summary of its report into torture by the CIA cannot conceal the complicity of the major European powers in the horrific crimes perpetrated by US imperialism.

Last week it was revealed that Britain had requested that its role be excised from the document, itself only a summary of a 6,700-page still-classified report. Indeed, all references to the participation of other governments in acts of unspeakable brutality were omitted at the insistence of the CIA and the Obama administration.

The CIA requested that the names of countries hosting detention sites “or with which the CIA negotiated the hosting of sites, as well as information directly or indirectly identifying such countries, be redacted from the classified version provided to [Senate Intelligence] Committee members.”

However, the amount of black ink throughout the document indicates how extensively other countries are implicated—with Europe playing a lead role.

The eleven countries operating what were effectively proxy CIA facilities included Syria and Libya—both of which subsequently fell foul of US regime-change operations. But the smaller

list of six countries with secret prisons (black sites) directly controlled by the CIA included Poland, Lithuania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Romania.

This latter list says a great deal about the “democratic” credentials of the regimes that emerged from the Western-backed “democratic revolutions” that toppled the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the US- and German-stoked civil war and dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

The CIA sites in foreign countries are identified only by a colour code, such as Detention Site Black, Blue, etc. Poland, one of the most important, was Blue.

Getting people to these sites to be tortured via the “extraordinary rendition” programme directly involved 54 governments (a quarter of the world’s states, with over 20 in Europe) in a vast criminal enterprise.

As part of ensuring this collusion, involving at least 1,000 CIA flights, millions of dollars were distributed as blood money. “CIA headquarters encouraged CIA stations to construct ‘wish lists’ of proposed financial assistance to *redacted* [entities of foreign governments], and to ‘think big’ in terms of assistance,” the report states. Washington paid Lithuania \$1 million for establishing the Violet detention centre.

A central role was played by the UK, Italy, Germany, Portugal and Spain, including rendition of their citizens and, in the case of the UK, direct collusion in torture.

The Social Democratic government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was implicated in the rendition of Khalid El-Masri, a German-Lebanese citizen wrongly held by the CIA.

Italy participated in the abduction of cleric Abu Omar from Milan in 2003, to be tortured in his native Egypt. Twenty three US personnel (but no Italians) were later found guilty and given sentences of seven to nine years in a trial lasting three-and-a-half years. But none were ever remanded in custody, let alone imprisoned.

The UK was involved in rendition flights and interrogated suspects it knew had been tortured. Binyam Mohamed, a British citizen, was tortured and then sent to Guantanamo Bay. In 2010, the British Court of Appeal released an earlier ruling that MI5 had colluded in Mohamed’s torture.

Sami-al-Saadi and Abdel Hakim Belhaj were abducted from Hong Kong in 2004 in a joint UK/US operation and sent to be tortured by former Libyan secret police. Saadi’s children, aged 6, 9 and 11, and his expectant wife were abducted in Bangkok and rendered by the CIA. Belhaj says he was interrogated by MI6 officers in Tripoli.

Demands for an investigation of these crimes were blocked in the European Parliament in 2007 and stonewalled wherever they emerged elsewhere.

The European powers have issued only pro-forma and self-serving statements on the Senate report’s findings. European Union spokeswoman Catherine Ray said that while the report “raises important questions about the violation of human rights by the US authorities and persons at the

service of the agencies,” EU states “recognize President Obama's commitment to use his authority to ensure that these methods are never used again.”

These are naked lies. They are made by Europe’s political elite in the knowledge that Obama did everything in his power to stop the report ever seeing the light of day. They are issued amid a counter-offensive in the US involving the CIA and leading Bush-era officials insisting that torture was justified, and with US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia proclaiming it to be in accordance with the US Constitution.

Experience testifies that the European powers, Canada, Australia and the rest will continue to collude with the US in perpetrating whatever crimes it sees fit to carry out, and they will commit their own share whenever necessary. Revealed by the report on CIA torture are not merely the crimes of a former US administration, or even of the CIA as an institution. The document points to a descent into criminality by all the world’s major powers.

The real concerns of European state leaders regarding the report’s findings are two-fold.

First, there is the personal fate of individuals, such as Britain’s Tony Blair. Manfred Nowak, a former UN special rapporteur who helped draft the 1984 UN Convention against Torture, told *Bloomberg News* that the report could lead to “a flood of litigation.”

Second, the political elite is worried that even the limited exposure of the crimes perpetrated will arouse resistance domestically and internationally to future predatory actions by the major powers.

“Those of us who want to see a safer, more secure world, who want to see this extremism defeated, we won't succeed if we lose our moral authority,” UK Prime Minister David Cameron pontificated.

“The upholding of legal and democratic values must be the foundation of our joint fight against terrorism,” Chancellor Angela Merkel's government said. “Only in this way can we gain credibility for our actions in this fight.”

This hollow and hypocritical rhetoric will not wash. Those who have long hid behind the façade of “humanitarian intervention” and condemned every state targeted for regime-change for flouting the norms of “civilisation” and “democracy” stand exposed.

Their resort to torture is not an aberration, any more than the gutting of democratic freedoms carried out in every country in the name of the “war on terror.” It flows inexorably from the drive of the imperialist powers to subjugate the world and divide its resources and markets between them. Their system must be overthrown and the entire criminal gang placed on trial for war crimes.