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Fifty-four foreign governments partnered with CIA torture

By: Nat Hentoff – February 27, 2013

Many reporters and I have written extensively about the CIA's "extraordinary renditions" that were approved by George W. Bush after Sept. 11, 2001, as he heeded Dick Cheney's advice to move into "the dark side" of our war on terror.

CIA agents kidnapped alleged terrorist leaders from the streets of various nations and sent them to other countries known for torturing their prisoners. This was a classified operation, but some survivors eventually revealed the horrors of their interrogations. Others were tortured in CIA secret prisons — "dark sites."

Soon after taking office, President Barack Obama appeared to end the renditions, yet some remain in secret. I'll have more on that later.

What my fellow journalists and I didn't know — until a startling Feb. 5 report, "Globalizing Torture," by the Open Society Justice Initiative — was the extent of the other countries complicit with the CIA in its torture programs.

Written by Amrit Singh, senior legal officer of the National Security and Counterterrorism program at the Open Society Justice Initiative, the report is "the most comprehensive account yet assembled of the human rights abuses associated with CIA secret detention and extraordinary rendition operations" (opensocietyfoundations.org).

The report "details for the first time what was done to the 136 known victims and lists the 54 (yes, 54!) foreign governments that participated in these operations" ("Secret CIA black sites and globalizing torture," opensocietyfoundations.org).

According to the report, these governments' involvement included "hosting CIA prisons on their territories; detaining, interrogating, torturing and abusing individuals; assisting the CIA in the capture and transportation of detainees; permitting the use of their airspace and airports for secret CIA flights transporting detainees; providing intelligence leading to the CIA's secret detention and extraordinary rendition of individuals; and interrogating individuals who were being secretly held in the custody of other governments."

As I have been reporting, some of these nations joining in torture are deeply ashamed and are sharply punishing those of their intelligence officers and others who were so unstintingly helpful to the CIA.

The countries whose governments have been permanently stained by our CIA's limitless masters of torture include: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran,

Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Countries such as Belgium, Canada and Ireland “permitted the use of (their) airspace and airports for flights associated with CIA extraordinary rendition operations.”

In addition, the report says: “Canada (also) provided information leading to the capture of a Canadian national who was extraordinarily rendered to Syria. ... He was imprisoned in Syria for nearly a year and tortured before being released and returned to Canada.”

The “Globalizing Torture” report also identifies Iran and Syria as having participated in the rendition program.

The report says, “Iran was involved in the capture and transfer of individuals subjected to CIA secret detention.”

And citing a 2005 New Yorker article by Jane Mayer, whom I’ve written about previously, the report says Syria “was one of the ‘most common destinations for rendered suspects.’”

As the report concludes, “Despite the efforts of the United States and its partner governments to withhold information relating to secret detention and extraordinary rendition, further public revelations on this subject ... are likely to continue.

“At the same time, although U.S. courts have largely closed their doors to victims of secret detention and extraordinary rendition, legal challenges to these practices are filtering through courts around the world.”

The report states that “only four countries (Canada, Sweden, Australia and the United Kingdom) have issued compensation to extraordinary rendition victims, the latter two in the context of confidential settlements that sought to avoid litigation concerning the associated human rights violations.”

The Canadian national who was rendered to Syria was one of the individuals compensated. Canada also “issued an apology,” according to the report.

It’s also important to be aware of which nations refused to be torture partners. Writing for The Guardian in the U.K., Ian Cobain points out that, “while many Middle Eastern countries did become involved in the rendition programme, Israel did not” (“CIA rendition: more than a quarter of countries ‘offered covert support,’” Ian Cobain, The Guardian, Feb. 5).

Among the European countries that participated, he writes, are “Germany, Spain, Portugal and Austria,” but not “France, the Netherlands and Hungary.”

“Georgia stands accused of involvement in rendition,” Cobain writes, “but Russia does not. Some countries, such as Poland, Lithuania and Romania, hosted secret prisons on their territory.”

He highlights his country's involvement: "The U.K. supported CIA rendition operations, interrogated people being secretly detained, allowed the use of British airports and airspace, arranged for one man, Sami al-Saadi, to be rendered to Libya with his entire family, where he was subsequently tortured, and provided intelligence that allowed a second similar operation to take place."

Aren't you proud of having the CIA so relentlessly representative of "the new normal" American values?

How will those participating countries address their children, who will hear about this permanent disgrace to their values? What will those countries' religious and secular leaders say?

Furthermore, what will our future presidents do as al-Qaida keeps birthing counterparts in Africa and other parts of the world? Will they rule by executive order, like Obama, to keep us safe from suspected terrorists and our Constitution?