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on the flights operated by the CIA in Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the *extraordinary renditions*, the CIA had often used private companies and charter services for aircraft rentals. Through the civil aviation it is possible to reach places where the military aircraft would be seen suspiciously. Thanks to the civil aviation, the CIA avoids the duty to provide the information required by States concerning government or military flights.

Most of these companies are the so-called *shell companies*: they only exist on papers (post offices boxes, for instance) or they have a sole employee (normally a lawyer). These shell companies appear the owners of some aircrafts which are systematically object of *buy-and-sell* operations. After each transaction, planes are re-registered in order to loose their tracks.

A good example of *shell game* operations is the **Premier Executive** history. Premier Executive is a company whose business address is a P.O. Box out of Washington. Premier had the ownership of two planes: Gulfstream V and Boeing 737, used by the CIA for extraordinary renditions. Both planes were belonging to **Steven Express**, another shell company. The Steven Express has a business address in Tennessee which is not correlated to any premises. Steven Express was taken over by a lawyer, on behalf of **Devon Holding**, once again a shell company. The lawyer was the sole representative/employee of Devon Holding. These kind of shell game enable the CIA planes to loose their paths, and thus deleting any track of illegal operation linked to the airplane.

That happened for instance in November 2004, when *The Sunday Times*¹ reported that the US leased the jet Gulfstream V for the transfer of detainees to Guantanamo and other US military bases. Two days later the Premier Executive got rid of the aircraft and sold it to **Bayard Foreign Marketing**, another shell company. The name of the administrator, Leonard Bayard, has never been found in any public register.

The other plane, the Boeing 737, was sold to **Keeler and Tate Management**, once again shell company without premises, without website, whose only property was the Boeing 737. On the other hand, Premier Executive got vanished since 2005.²

Sometimes shell companies used by CIA rely on other real companies endowed with premises and employees (so called: *operating companies*). These companies are entrusted to stand behind the shell companies; they provide the CIA aircrafts with all necessary logistics (pilots, catering, technical assistance). In some cases the operating companies are directly linked to the CIA. One example is **Aero Contractor**, a company described by the New York Times³ as the "major domestic hub of the Central Intelligence Agency's secret air service".

The system is well described by the New York Times:

"An analysis of thousands of flight records, aircraft registrations and corporate documents, as well as interviews with former C.I.A. officers and pilots, show that the agency owns at least 26 planes, 10 of them

¹ www.timesonline.co.uk/article

² 24 USA: Below the radar - Secret flights to torture and 'disappearance' Amnesty International 5 April 2006 AI Index: AMR 51/051/2006

³ Scott Shane, Stephen Grey and Margot Williams, *CIA Expanding Terror Battle Under Guise of Charter Flights*, New York Times, 31 May 2005.

purchased since 2001. The agency has concealed its ownership behind a web of seven shell corporations that appear to have no employees and no function apart from owning the aircraft.

*The planes, regularly supplemented by private charters, are operated by real companies controlled by or tied to the agency, including Aero Contractors and two Florida companies, Pegasus Technologies and Tepper Aviation."*⁴

Finally, in other cases, the CIA leases airplanes from normal charter agents, as it is the case for **Richmor Aviation**. Richmor Aviation is one of the oldest charter and flight management companies. The Gulfstream IV, N85VM belongs to Richmor Aviation (plane involved in the abduction of Abu Omar).

Ultimately, in this inextricable net, there is also the possibility that single aircrafts change their registration numbers (as for the Gulfstream V, from Richmor Aviation, registered as N379P, then, N8068V and then N44982).

There are indeed 51 airplanes alleged to be used in the extraordinary renditions, but, according to the Federal Aviation Administration⁵ records, there would be 57 registration numbers. It comes out that some of them are registered more than once.

Among the 51 airplanes alleged to be used by CIA:

- 26 planes are registered to shell companies and sometimes supported by operating companies.
- 10 are designed as "CIA frequent flyers", they belong to **Blackwater USA**, an important CIA and US Army "classified contractor". It provides staff, training and aviation logistic. In this case there is no intermediation of shell companies.
- The other 15 planes are from occasional rental from private companies working with CIA as well as with other customers.

2. COMPANIES INVOLVED

Shell Companies⁶,

- CROWELL AVIATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC
- PATH CORPORATION
- RAPID AIR TRANS, INC.
- STEVENS EXPRESS LEASING, INC
- AVIATION SPECIALTIES, INC
- DEVON HOLDING AND LEASING, INC
- BAYARD FOREIGN MARKETING, LLC.
- KEELER & TATE MANAGEMENT, LLC
 - The last two companies in the list have replaced the *Premier Executive*

⁴<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/31/national/31planes.html?pagewanted=1&ex=1275192000en=6007accb4801296cei=5088partner=rssnytmc=rss>

⁵ http://registry.faa.gov/aircraftinquiry/NNum_inquiry.asp

⁶ Below the radar - Secret flights to torture and 'disappearance' <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR510512006>

Transport Services, inc., once that Premier sold the planes Boeing 737 and Gulfstream V to *Bayard* and to *Keeler*. Afterwards Premier disappeared.

Operating Companies

○ AERO CONTRACTORS, LTD. (NORTH CAROLINA)

Aero Contractors was funded in 1979 by Jim Rhyne, ex pilot of the Air America, a company used by CIA during the Vietnam war. Aero Contractors' pilots, according to the New York Times "*are the discreet bus drivers of the battle against terrorism, routinely sent on secret missions to Baghdad, Cairo, Tashkent and Kabul*". The New York Times adds: "*Aero Contractors is in fact a major domestic hub of the Central Intelligence Agency's secret air service*".⁷ Indeed, according to FAA records, Aero Contractors leases its planes from Premier Executive Transport (*shell company*)⁸, namely Boeing 737 (N 4476S, ex N313P). Aero Contractor has no web site and does not advertise its activities. All the resources come from the CIA, from the US Army and other Government agencies. However, Aero Contractors remains a real company, with premises and eighty employees.

Aero Contractors is the operating company of the following shell companies:

- STEVENS EXPRESS LEASING, INC
- PREMIER EXECUTIVE TRANSPORT SERVICE
- AVIATION SPECIALTIES, INC
- DEVON HOLDING AND LEASING, INC

○ PEGASUS TECHNOLOGIES, INC

Pegasus Technologies works on the avionics (aviation electronics), on sensor, and electrical systems of the CIA planes. This presumably includes top-secret encrypted-communications systems and night-vision systems.⁹

○ TEPPER AVIATION

Tepper Aviation is a company controlled or somehow tied to the CIA.¹⁰

According to Amnesty International Report, Tepper Aviation is allegedly involved

⁷ *C.I.A. Expanding Terror Battle Under Guise of Charter Flights*

By SCOTT SHANE, STEPHEN GREY and MARGOT WILLIAMS, May 31, 2005

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/31/national/31planes.html?ei=5088&en=6007accb4801296c&ex=1275192000&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print>

⁸ "*Aero Contractors, which operates from a blue hangar at the Johnston airport, leased the jets for about a year, in about 2002 or 2003, from Massachusetts-based Premier Executive Transport Services, Blowers said. (...) Aero Contractors let its leases with Premier Executive expire about a year ago., Aero Contractors no longer offers jets for its clients and instead leases turboprop planes.*" <http://www.newsoobserver.com/news>

⁹ Pegasus Technologies, Inc. <http://sss-mag.com/rfss/intro.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/31/national/31planes.html?ex=1275192000en=6007accb4801296cei=5088partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

in rendition operations through one or more of their planes.¹¹

It operates from the Bob Sikes Airport, Florida. The European base is Rhein-Main, Germany.

Tepper uses three aircrafts belonging to the shell company **Rapid Air Trans**: the Lockheeds N2189M, the N4557C and N8183J.

○ RICHMOR AVIATION

Philip H. Morse, owner of the jet Gulfstream IV (and partner of the Boston Red Sox), confirmed to the newspaper *Globe and Tribune*¹² that his private jet was rented several times to the CIA¹³. According to the FAA records, the plane belongs to the Assembly Pointe Aviation Inc., whose Mr. Morse is the sole employee. The renting company is Richmor Aviation, in Hudson. The jet registration number is **N85VM**, then changed into **N227SV** (abduction of Abu Omar). Mr Morse deems that his plane was rented to the CIA by Richmor Aviation for about three years.¹⁴

○ SUBSIDIARIES OF BLACKWATER USA

This company is an important contractor for the CIA and the US military. It provides personnel and training as well as aviation services through its two subsidiaries:

- AVIATION WORLDWIDE SERVICES, INC. (FLORIDA)
- PRESIDENTIAL AIRWAYS (FLORIDA)

Both companies fly Spanish CASA C-212 wide-body passenger/cargo aircraft. These carry paratroops and oversized cargo and can operate from short and unimproved runways. In Europe, Malta is the base for these planes.

3. EUROPEAN STOP-OVERS FOR CIA FLIGHTS

Between the end of 2001 and the end of 2005, **flights involving aircraft directly or indirectly operated by the CIA stopped over at European airports more than one thousand times**. Apart from the proven cases of extraordinary rendition (Abu Omar, Maher Arar, Khaled el-Masri, Ahmed al-Giza and Mohamed al-Zari), there is no irrefutable evidence of these flights having carried prisoners. However, given the routes taken by many flights and some of the countries of destination (Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Guantanamo), it is only logical to assume that this happened on more than one occasion.

A. Research method used

¹¹ http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/pdf/below_the_radar_full_report.pdf

¹²US: CIA Uses Jet Owned by Red Sox Partner, by Gordon Edes, The Boston Globe: <http://www.boston.com/news/globe>.

¹³ "It's chartered a lot (...) It just so happens one of our customers is the CIA.(...) I was glad to have the business, actually. I hope it was all for a real good purpose." <http://www.boston.com/news/globe>

¹⁴ by Gordon Edes, The Boston Globe March 21st, 2005, <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=11988>

The findings were obtained by comparing **Eurocontrol** (the agency responsible for controlling European air space) data with those of the **FAA** (the Federal Aviation Administration, which keeps data on all aircraft flying out of or into the USA).

The research focused on aircraft that belong to or have been operated by airlines linked in some way to the CIA and which have flown frequently in Europe over recent years.

On the basis of **thirty-two registration codes**, the FAA data enabled us to trace the aircraft back to the owner airline and its head office. It emerged that many of the aircraft belonged to shell companies with no offices or staff and whose addresses turned out to be P.O. boxes, which in turn had links with other companies run by the CIA. Some of the aircraft belong to companies with direct links to the CIA or have been leased by the CIA from ordinary commercial companies.

The flight logs obtained from Eurocontrol confirm that since 11 September the aircraft monitored have made **1080 stop-overs in Europe**, very often flying between European airports and destinations in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

The routes taken and the countries flown to by the CIA aircraft (including Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan) confirm that the flights could *also* have been used for the transfer of prisoners.

Indirect confirmation is provided by the known cases of extraordinary rendition (Abu Omar, Maher Arar, Khaled el-Masri, Ahmed al-Giza and Mohamed al-Zari), given that aircraft on our list were used in each case.

B. A few examples

Gulfstream IV N85VM-N227SV

- Belongs to Richmor Aviation (the owners of Richmor have themselves admitted that they have leased the plane to the CIA on several occasions). This was the plane used to transport **Abu Omar** from Ramstein to Cairo in February 2003. Between 11 September 2001 and the end of 2005 it made approximately **80 stop-overs** at European airports.

Since early 2004, the Gulfstream IV has stopped off in Romania three times: on two occasions it had flown from Jordan; on the third, on 12 April 2004, it had flown from Guantanamo, and made a stop-over in Tenerife. After landing in Romania, it then flew to Casablanca, in Morocco, from where it returned to Washington on 13 April.

Boeing 737 N313P

- Initially registered by Stevens Express Leasing Inc and subsequently re-registered by Premier Executive Transport Services. Between 2003 and 2004 the aircraft landed once in Poland and twice in Romania, having flown from Afghanistan. There is no reason to believe that the purpose of the stop-overs was to refuel.
In particular, on 22 September 2003, N313P flew from Kabul to Szymany, an airport in

north-eastern Poland, close to the town of Szczytno. Having landed at Szymany, the aircraft flew south-west to Romania. According to the Eurocontrol data, shortly afterwards the Boeing left Bucharest for Rabat, in Morocco. The following evening (23 September), according to the records, it left Rabat at 8.10 p.m. and reached the Guantanamo naval base at dawn on 24 September.

Boeing 737 N368CE

- Frankfurt-Ashkhabad (in Turkmenistan) and Frankfurt-Baghdad were the daily routes of N368CE, owned by the shell company Premier Aircraft Management. Between June and November 2005, the aircraft, flying from Frankfurt, landed approximately **50 times** in Ashkhabad and 16 times in Baghdad. Over the same period, the aircraft made **112 stop-overs** at various European airports.

Lockheed N2189M

- The routes flown by N2189M, owned by Tepper Aviation, a shell company set up by a former CIA pilot and made available to the US secret services, also make interesting reading. Since 11 December 2001 the aircraft has made **70 landings** in Europe, 17 in Tashkent (in Uzbekistan) and 29 in Baku (in Azerbaijan). Destinations outside Europe include Egypt (3 times) and Jordan (8 times). Same airports used by another aircraft owned by Tepper Aviation, the Hercules-130 N8183J (16 flights from Frankfurt to Baku, 10 flight from Tashkent to Frankfurt).

Gulfstream V N379P-N8068V-N44982

- Owned by Premier Executive (the main CIA shell company). The registration of this aircraft has been changed three times to make it untraceable. This is the aircraft which in December 2001 flew **Ahmed Agiza** and **Mohammed al-Zari** from Stockholm to Cairo. In June 2003, it flew between Kabul, Warsaw and Rabat and a month later was used for a return flight between Kabul and Warsaw. Overall, the aircraft made **145 stop-overs in Europe** between the end of 2001 and June 2005. The most frequent destinations outside Europe were: Uzbekistan, Egypt, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Morocco, Georgia, Afghanistan, Gambia, Algeria, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Libya and Guantanamo.

(The rapporteur will circulate a comprehensive file on all the aircraft used by the CIA.)

C. Conclusions

On the basis of the data obtained from Eurocontrol on the 32 flight codes monitored, it may be said that:

1. All the aircraft were operated by companies liked to or controlled by the CIA.
2. Overall, the aircraft made **1080 stop-overs in Europe**.
3. Among the destinations that can also be linked with the **transport of prisoners**, the following stop-overs were recorded between the end of 2001 and the end of 2005:
 - a. 70 in Jordan
 - b. 70 in Azerbaijan
 - c. 52 in Turkmenistan

- d. 50 in Egypt
- e. 46 in Uzbekistan
- f. 40 in Iraq
- g. 37 in Afghanistan
- h. 40 in Morocco
- i. 14 in Libya
- j. 11 at Guantanamo.

4. It should be noted that in many of the countries referred to, torture and imprisonment without trial are common. Bob Baer, a former CIA agent, said in an interview given to the New Statesman¹⁵: *'If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear - never to see them again - you send them to Egypt'*.¹⁶ Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, stressed in his last report to the General Assembly that some countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Sweden, had violated international human rights conventions by deporting suspected terrorists to countries such as Egypt, Syria, Algeria and Uzbekistan, where there was a high risk of them being tortured.¹⁷ Some of the countries referred to (namely Georgia, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Iraq) were recently the subject of concerns expressed by the US State Department which took a critical view of the situation in the relevant Human Rights Country Reports, particularly as regards the use of torture, arbitrary detention and the situation of prison inmates¹⁸.

¹⁵ <http://www.newstatesman.com/Politics>

¹⁶ <http://www.counterpunch.org/rajiva12052005.html>

¹⁷ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/476/51/PDF/N0547651.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁸ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt>

Georgia: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/eur/8256.htm>

Morocco: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27934.htm>

Azerbaijan: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27826.htm>

Egypt: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41720.htm>

Uzbekistan: [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CAT.C.CR.28.7.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CAT.C.CR.28.7.En?Opendocument)

Jordan: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.html?tbl=RSDCOI&id=441821a334>

Syria: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18289.htm>

Afghanistan: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/sa/721.htm>

Turkmenistan: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41714.htm>

Iraq: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61689.htm>