

POLAND'S TORTURE PALACES

My supposition that one reason Dana Priest's black site article precipitated the torture tape destruction is because the tapes were dangerous to the country on whose territory the CIA tortured Abu Zubaydah led to me to read something I should have already read—the July 2007 COE report on European participation in the US HVD program. This post lays out what it says about Poland. I'm still reading the report, but given the direction of the comment threads on my other posts, I wanted to get this up for discussion.

Assuming the COE report is accurate (it is based on public reports and anonymous sources, including a number of CIA sources), Abu Zubaydah, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and probably al-Nashiri, were in Poland when Dana Priest's article ran.

In accordance with the operational arrangements described below, Poland housed what the CIA's Counterterrorism Centre considered its "most sensitive HVDs," a category which included several of the men whose transfer to Guantanamo Bay was announced by President Bush on 6 September 2006.

We received confirmations – each name from more than one source – of eight names of HVDs who were held in Poland between 2003 and 2005. Specifically, our sources in the CIA named Poland as the "black site" where both Abu Zubaydah and Khalid Sheikh Mohamed (KSM) were held and questioned using "enhanced interrogation techniques." The information known about these interrogations has formed the basis of heated debate in the United States and the wider international community, leading, in Zubaydah's case, to high-

level political and legislative manoeuvres and, in KSM's case, to the admission of some troubling judicial precedents.

But it remains unclear on whether Abu Zubaydah was moved to Poland in 2002 or 2003. The report describes the HVD program as evolving between 2002 and 2003.

The United States negotiated its agreement with Poland to detain CIA High-Value Detainees on Polish territory in 2002 and early 2003. We have established that the first HVDs were transferred to Poland in the first half of 2003.

It describes top-level Polish officials as being aware of the program starting in 2002.

[S]ome individual high office-holders knew about and authorised Poland's role in the CIA's operation of secret detention facilities for High-Value Detainees on Polish territory, from 2002 to 2005.

And it describes the genesis of the program as starting in 2001.

In my understanding, the narrative of the HVD programme has played out largely over a five-year period, from September 2001 to September 2006. CIA insiders told us that there was widespread surprise that it operated and remained secret quite as long as it did. From 2004 onwards, the President was being strongly advised to place a time limit on the programme because it was regarded as having been somewhat improvisational in its nature and therefore could not be sustained: "every period in history has its bookends".

It also admits that its sources about the Polish facility where top AQ members were held did not provide specifics about timing.

Beyond this fleeting insight, however, neither Polish nor American sources who discussed the HVD programme with us would agree to speak about the exact “operational details” of secret detentions at Stare Kiejkuty, nor would they confirm how long it was operated for, which other facilities were used as part of the same programme in Poland, nor how and when exactly the detainees left the country.

So from the report, we cannot tell whether the waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah alleged to have started in August 2002—and therefore the filming of that waterboarding—happened in Poland or Thailand, which the COE report mentions briefly.

Second we have been told that Thailand hosted the first CIA “black site,” and that Abu Zubaydah was held there after his capture in 2002. CIA sources indicated to us that Thailand was used because of the ready availability of the network of local knowledge and bilateral relationships that dated back to the Vietnam War.

[footnote] One CIA source told us: “in Thailand, it was a case of ‘you stick with what you know’;” however, since the allegations pertaining to Thailand were not the direct focus of our inquiry, we did not elaborate further on these references in our discussions. The specific location of the “black site” in Thailand has been publicly alleged to be a facility in Udon Thani, near to the Udon Royal Thai Air Force Base in the north-east of the country. This base does have long-standing connections to American defence and intelligence activities overseas: during the Vietnam

War it served as both a deployment base for the US Air Force and the Asian headquarters of the CIA-linked aviation enterprise, Air America.

That said, the report explains one reason why the Priest article would be so problematic for Poland. While her article didn't name Poland, it was a reasonably easy guess (I guessed it the day her article came out). More importantly, the then-President of Poland was responsible for negotiating Poland's participation in the program personally.

The following persons could therefore be held accountable for these activities: the President of the Republic of Poland, Aleksander KWASNIEWSKI, the Chief of the National Security Bureau (also Secretary of National Security Committee), Marek SIWIEC, the Minister of National Defence (Ministerial oversight of Military Intelligence), Jerzy SZMAJDZINSKI, and the Head of Military Intelligence, Marek DUKACZEWSKI.

[snip]

There was complete consensus on the part of our key senior sources that President Kwasniewski was the foremost national authority on the HVD programme. One military intelligence source told us: "Listen, Poland agreed from the top down... From the President – yes... to provide the CIA all it needed." Asked whether the Prime Minister and his Cabinet were briefed on the HVD programme, our source said: "Even the ABW [Internal Security Agency] and AW [Foreign Intelligence Agency] do not have access to all of our classified materials. Forget the Prime Minister; it operated directly under the President."

Now, aside from all the reasons why Poland

wouldn't want civilized types to know they hosted our torture program for up to three years, there are reasons why Kwasniewski wouldn't want that known as well. At the time of the Priest article, Poland had just elected a new President (Kwasniewski was term-limited, so couldn't run, but Kwasniewski's party did poorly in the election, so he knew an opposition party would take over). Kwasniewski even had aspirations to becoming the UN Secretary General.

Kwasniewski wasn't much use to use at the point Priest's article came out—he had even already announced the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. But when a news article threatens to ruin the aspirations of statesmen, I can imagine they would make further cooperation more difficult to negotiate.