



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 12, 2014

Did CIA Spy on Senate Committee to Cover Black Site Prison Details?

Was it their digging into the truth about the activities carried on at “black site” prisons that prompted the CIA to spy on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence?

That’s the theory supported by a recent *New York Times* article reporting on the alleged surveillance.

On March 4, [Mark Mazzetti wrote](#):

The Central Intelligence Agency’s attempt to keep secret the details of a defunct detention and interrogation program has escalated a battle between the agency and members of Congress and led to an investigation by the C.I.A.’s internal watchdog into the conduct of agency employees.



The New American’s Thomas R. Eddlem added to the story, reporting on Senator Mark Udall’s letter to President Obama charging the CIA with spying on the Senate committee. [Eddlem writes](#):

Among the CIA’s actions against the American Republic, Udall implies that the CIA had been “posing impediments and obstacles” to the oversight responsibilities of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, particularly regarding the CIA’s secret torture prisons used primarily during the Bush era.

Senator Udall’s press secretary, James Owens added context to the story, counterbalancing the effort of the Obama administration to downplay the details of the story.

“These documents, whatever it is that you call them, it is our understanding that some of the contents contradict the CIA’s official response,” Owens said, as reported in *The Daily Beast*, referring to the spy agency’s “official response” to claims that the black site prisons maintained overseas were used to conduct torture of detainees, torture that violates U.S. law.

For those unfamiliar with the term, “black sites” is the name given to the supposedly shuttered network of secret prisons located throughout the world used by the CIA to imprison and interrogate individuals suspected of committing or conspiring to commit terrorist activities.

These facilities are built outside of the jurisdiction of the U.S. government and thus not subject to American laws against torture.

Persons accused by the U.S. government of being “enemy combatants” were subject to “extraordinary rendition” and then captured and shipped off to one of the prisons for questioning, often reportedly using inhuman tactics to illicit responses from detainees.



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In 2011, the the Associated Press (AP) teamed with German investigative reporters to conduct an investigation that seemed to discover a suspected black site prison in Romania. Reportedly, former CIA operatives led the reporters to the building. In fact, the AP story claims that, “former intelligence officials both described the location of the prison and identified pictures of the building.”

The existence of the Romanian location, while never confirmed by the government of the United States, the CIA, or the government of Romania, was part of a report adopted by the European Parliament in 2007. The document listed 1,245 flights operated by the CIA in the area, especially into and out of Poland and Romania.

The building in Bucharest (city shown) reported to be the former CIA holding facility was used to detain Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, as well as other “high-profile terrorists” before they were shipped off to Guantanamo Bay.

Among the other suspected terrorists believed to have been confined in the Romanian prison was Walid bin Attash (accused of participating in the bombing of the USS *Cole*) and Abu Faraj al-Libi, the reputed source of the name of Osama bin Laden’s courier.

Mohammad was arrested in Pakistan in 2003 and has been held at Guantanamo Bay since 2006. He has yet to be tried on the charges that he masterminded the attacks of September 11, 2001.

President George W. Bush admitted the existence of the secret prisons in 2006, the same year they were supposedly shuttered and all the inmates transferred to Guantanamo.

After that, it was reported that the policy of maintaining the sites was abandoned in 2009.

Predictably, the government of Romania denies any knowledge of the activities of the U.S. government at the building suspected of being a prison, and the CIA will not comment on the story.

The building itself, a rather nondescript beige one-story building on the outskirts of Bucharest, is home to the Office of the National Register for Secret State Information (ORNISS). This Romanian government agency manages and stores classified material from the United Nations and NATO.

When asked by one of the German reporters if the building was ever used to torture terrorists, ORNISS deputy head Adrian Camarassan replied, “Here? No! Impossible! Impossible!”

Camarassan did confirm that the basement of the ORNISS building was “one of the most secure rooms,” but that it was never used by American intelligence to detain or torture suspected terrorists.

One of the former CIA employees who supposedly led reporters to the site confirmed the secrecy of the goings on, explaining that, “It was very discreet there. It was not as though Romanian officials came out to greet me.”

A former U.S. official who spoke to the AP on the condition that they would protect his anonymity, described the logistics of bringing a suspect to the secret prison. His account was summarized in the AP story from 2011: “Shuttling detainees into the facility without being seen was relatively easy. After flying into Bucharest, the detainees were brought to the site in vans. CIA operatives then drove down a side road and entered the compound through a rear gate that led to the actual prison.”

The German reporters wrote that the facility was codenamed “Bright Light” and was located at 4 Mures Street in a “busy residential neighborhood minutes from the center of Romania’s capital city.”

AP reported that while imprisoned at the Romanian facility, prisoners would be subject to several harsh interrogation techniques, but not to the infamous waterboarding, as the Romanian hosts would not



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permit such treatment.

The same cannot be said of the alleged Polish facility, however. In 2010, the BBC published a story claiming that while confined in the CIA black site in Poland, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was waterboarded in an effort to extract intelligence information from the alleged terrorist.

It was the closing by the CIA of the Polish prison in 2003 that led to the opening of the Romanian facility, the AP reports.

In 2010, Warsaw petitioned the American government for help in investigating the purported prison. The request was denied.

Informants are quoted by the AP as having told the AP and its colleagues that “the basement [of the Romanian prison] consisted of six prefabricated cells, each with a clock and arrow pointing to Mecca.” The cells, the AP insists, were kept on springs so as to cause “disorientation” of the prisoners.

That sort of scenario is oddly offset in the same report where the CIA operatives are credited with treating prisoners “with care”: “The CIA shipped in Halal food to the site from Frankfurt, Germany.”

Also, although the victims endured torture, including sleep deprivation, the detainees “received regular dental and medical check-ups,” the story continued.

Romania was first suspected in 2005 of being host to one of the CIA secret prisons, but denials were issued by all believed to have knowledge of the facility.

Despite the denials, however, the story began to unfold in 2007 after a investigation by the Council of Europe called out Romania for having permitted a prison to have been operated in its territory. Again, denial followed denial, from Washington and Bucharest.

In fact, the Romanian foreign affairs minister stated at the time of the council’s investigation, “No public official or other person acting in an official capacity has been involved in the unacknowledged deprivation of any individual, or transport of any individual while so deprived of their liberty.”

The Legal Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe released a document in 2006 that sparked the wider inquiry. In the report issued by the Legal Affairs Committee, 14 nations in Europe were accused of collaborating with the CIA by either permitting the prisons to be run in their countries or aiding in the facilitating of “extraordinary rendition” flights.

Bucharest is only the beginning. If the now-legal definition of a “covered person” (read: enemy combatant) as codified in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is put into practice, such secret torture facilities could be constructed in the United States in the future. Justice Antonin Scalia [hinted at such a scenario](#) in a recent university address.

Despite the CIA’s attempts to stymie the Senate’s efforts to expose the truth about the agency’s overseas torture facilities, Senator Udall’s office tells *The New American* the senator is committed to “getting all the facts” about the black site network and the potentially actionable activities carried out in them.

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