

By Andy Worthington

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On Friday, the Polish Border Guard Office released a number of documents to the Warsaw-based [Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights](#), which, for the first time, provide details of the number of prisoners transferred by the CIA to a secret prison in Poland between December 5, 2002 and September 22, 2003, and, in one case, the number of prisoners who were subsequently transferred to a secret CIA prison in Romania. The documents (available [here](#) and [here](#)) provide important information about the secret prison at Szymany, in north eastern Poland, and also add to what is known about the program in Romania, which has received far less scrutiny.

The existence of the prisons was first revealed in the [Washington Post](#) on November 2, 2005, although the *Post* refrained from “publishing the names of the Eastern European countries involved in the covert program, at the request of senior US officials.” However, on November 6, 2005, [Human Rights Watch](#) identified the countries as Poland and Romania, and stated that it had seen “flight records showing that a Boeing 737, registration number N313P — a plane that the CIA used to move several prisoners to and from Europe, Afghanistan, and the Middle East in 2003 and 2004 — landed in Poland and Romania on direct flights from Afghanistan on two occasions in 2003 and 2004.”

Although the Polish and Romanian governments denied the claims, Swiss Senator Dick Marty, a Rapporteur for the Council of Europe, concluded in a report in June 2007 ([PDF](#)), based on two years' research and interviews with over 30 current and former members of the intelligence services in the United States and Europe, that he had enough "evidence to state that secret detention facilities run by the CIA did exist in Europe from 2003 to 2005, in particular in Poland and Romania." Marty also identified both sites, noting that the flights to Romania flew into the Mihail Kogalniceanu military airfield, and also explained how the flights were disguised using fake flight plans.

In September 2008, a Polish intelligence official [confirmed](#) that between 2002 and 2005 the CIA had held terror suspects inside a military intelligence training base in Stare Kiejkuty in north eastern Poland. He said that only the CIA had access to the prison, and that, although Prime Minister Leszek Miller and President Aleksander Kwasniewski knew about it, "it was unlikely either man knew if the prisoners were being tortured because the Poles had no control over the Americans' activities."



It was not until March 23, 2009, however, that the first details of specific flights into Szymany were officially confirmed in Poland, when the Polish Air Navigation Service Agency released information about a Lockheed L100-30 Hercules, registration number N8213G, which had flown in on February 4, 2003. This was followed up on September 16 with [far more incriminating records](#), demonstrating that a notorious "torture jet," a Gulfstream V, registration number N379P, had flown into Szymany on six occasions between February 8 and September 22, 2003 (see [here](#) and [here](#)), and on June 2 this year, a further release identified a Gulfstream IV, registration number N63MU, which had flown in on July 28, 2005.

Friday's revelations by the Polish Border Guard Office are, however, even more significant, firstly because they include, for the first time, confirmation that N63MU flew into Poland on December 5, 2002, and secondly, because they provide details of the number of passengers on seven of the flights, as follows:

December 5, 2002: 8 passengers delivered

February 8, 2003: 7 passengers delivered; 4 others flown to an unknown destination

March 7, 2003: 2 passengers delivered

March 25, 2003: 1 passenger delivered

May 6, 2003: 1 passenger delivered

July 30, 2003: 1 passenger delivered

September 22, 2003: 0 passengers delivered; 5 flown to Romania

Who are the “high-value detainees” held in Poland?

In identifying these 20 passengers, the documents provide more questions than answers, as it is not known how many of them were prisoners, and how many were US government operatives accompanying them.

However, what can be stated with certainty is that three of the men who arrived on December 5, 2002 were the “high-value detainees” [Abu Zubaydah](#) , [Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri](#) and [Ramzi bin al-Shibh](#) , who had all been held previously in a secret CIA prison in Thailand.



In the CIA Inspector General's Report on "Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities (September 2001-October 2003)," published in May 2004, but only made publicly available last August ([PDF](#)), it was stated that the "enhanced interrogation of al-Nashiri continued through 4 December 2002" and that, "after being moved, al-Nashiri was thought to have been withholding information", indicating that it was at this time that he was rendered to Poland.

Moreover, in research for a "Joint Study on Global Practices in Relation to Secret Detention in the Context of Counter-Terrorism," published by the United Nations in February this year ([PDF](#) , or see my [cross-post here](#)), an analyst

identified a flight from Bangkok to Szymany, Poland, on 5 December 2002 (stopping at Dubai) ... though it was disguised under multiple layers of secrecy, including charter and sub-contracting arrangements that would avoid there being any discernible "fingerprints" of a United States Government operation, as well as the filing of "dummy" flight plans.

This, clearly, is the flight identified in the newly released documents as having flown into Poland via Dubai.



In addition, according to information provided to [ABC News](#) by "[c]urrent and former CIA officers" in December 2005, seven other "high-value detainees," as well as Zubaydah, al-Nashiri and bin al-Shibh, were held in Poland, while an eleventh, Hambali, was held elsewhere

(possibly on the British island of

[Dingo Garcia](#)

[Di](#)

, in the Indian Ocean, which is leased to the US). ABC News identified these men as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Waleed bin Attash, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, Abdul Rahim al-Sharqawi, Mohammed Omar Abdel-Rahman, Hassan Ghul and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani.

Of these seven, [Hassan Ghul](#) (whose whereabouts are still unknown, although he was [reportedly held](#)

in a Pakistani prison in 2006) and

[Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani](#)

(who was one of 14 “high-value detainees” transferred to Guantánamo in September 2006) were seized in 2004, outside of the period from December 2002 to September 2003 covered by the documents, but the other five may all have been held in Poland at this time.

In April 2009, [Der Spiegel](#) reported that [Khalid Sheikh Mohammed](#) (another of the 14 HVDs, and the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks) was flown to Szymany on March 7, 2003, and if this is the case (and the date, noticeably, corresponds with one of the dates in the newly released documents), then it is possible that Mustafa al-Hawsawi, who was seized with him on March 1, 2003 (and who was also transferred to Guantánamo in September 2006), was the other passenger who arrived with him on that date — although it is also, of course, possible that the second passenger was

[an interrogator](#)

or

[a psychologist](#)

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As for the others identified by ABC News, Waleed bin Attash (another of the 14 HVDs), seized in Karachi, Pakistan on April 29, 2003, could be the passenger delivered on May 6, and Mohamed Omar Abdel-Rahman, one of the sons of Omar Abdel-Rahman, the “Blind Sheikh,” imprisoned in the US, could have been on any of the flights. [Seized in Quetta in February 2003](#), his detention has never been officially acknowledged by the US authorities, and his current whereabouts are unknown.



look forward