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Mystery jet ferries men to torture: CIA suspected: 'Ghost' company jet seen carrying hooded passengers

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National Post

WASHINGTON - A U.S. jet registered to a "ghost" company whisks terror suspects to countries that use torture, says The Washington Post, based on its own investigation.

The Gulfstream V turbojet is the kind of plane usually favoured by celebrities and top executives, but it has been seen at U.S. military bases around the world, often loading up hooded and shackled suspects and delivering them to countries known to use torture, a process the Central Intelligence Agency calls "rendition," the newspaper said in editions published on Monday.

The Washington Post investigated the ownership of the jet, which has been spotted in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, and which carries the tail number N379P.

Their names are given as Bryan P. Dyess, Steven E. Kent, Timothy R. Sperling and Audrey M. Taylor.

The officers of the plane's corporate owner, Premier Executive Transport Services, are all listed with dates of birth in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, but with social security numbers issued since 1998.

But no information is available on their residential, work, telephone or corporate histories --just the kind of "sterile identities," said current and former intelligence officials, that the agency uses to conceal its involvement in clandestine operations.

The CIA refused comment, but former operatives told the Post such "proprietary" or front corporations are standard procedure for the agency.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, secret renditions have become a principal weapon in the CIA's arsenal against suspected al-Qaeda terrorists, according to congressional testimony by CIA officials. But as the practice has grown, the agency has had significantly more difficulty keeping it secret.

The "rendering" of suspects to countries that use interrogation techniques banned in the United States is worrisome and could violate the UN Convention on Torture, Morton Sklar, the U.S. executive director of the World Organization for Human Rights, told the daily.

The Post article confirmed much of a Nov. 14 article published in The Sunday Times of London, which obtained flight plans for the plane, which, the Sunday Times said, always departs from Washington, D.C., and has visited the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where about 550 terror suspects are held.

The newspaper also reported that airport officials and amateur plane spotters, some using binoculars, have logged multiple sightings of N379P at several U.S. military airports and fueling stations.

In December, 2001, a Swedish television program, Cold Facts, reported the jet took hooded terror suspects to Egypt, according to the Post, which confirmed the Swedish report independently.

The newspaper said the plane, staffed by hooded crew members speaking with American accents, loaded two Egyptian nationals and took off at 4:30 a.m. for Cairo on Dec. 18, 2001.

Wearing red overalls and bound with handcuffs and leg irons, the men, who had applied for political asylum in Sweden, were flown to Cairo, according to Swedish officials and documents.

Ahmed Agiza was convicted by Egypt's Supreme Military Court of terrorism-related charges; Muhammad Zery was set free. Both say they were tortured while in Egyptian custody. Sweden has opened an investigation into the decision to allow them to be rendered.

A month later, in January, 2002, a U.S.-registered Gulfstream V landed at Jakarta's military airport.

According to Indonesian officials, the plane carried away Muhammad Saad Iqbal Madni, an Egyptian travelling on a Pakistani passport and suspected of being an al-Qaeda operative who had worked with shoe bomber suspect Richard Reid.

Without a hearing, he was flown to Egypt. His status and whereabouts are unknown.

The plane's tail number was not noted, but the CIA is believed to have only one of the expensive jets.

Three weeks ago, on Dec. 1, the plane, complete with a new tail number, was transferred to a new owner, Bayard Foreign Marketing of Portland, Ore., according to Federal Aviation Authority records. Its registered agent in Portland, Scott Caplan, did not return phone calls.

Like the officers at Premier Executive, Bayard's sole listed corporate officer, Leonard T. Bayard, has no residential or telephone history.