

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

Prison Secrets Rice's Assurances to U.S. Allies are not Credible

Editorial

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

December 8, 2005

Whatever is going on? Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is visiting America's European allies to deliver the message that the United States does not practice and, in fact, is opposed to, torture.

The other astonishing part is that her visit this week is in response to the allies' fury and indignation that the CIA has carried out flights to their countries to transport prisoners to secret prisons where torture may have been used. That is, torture that presumably cannot be carried out in the United States without running so far afoul of the law that even this administration won't undertake it.

Yesterday in Ukraine she gave her most specific policy clarification yet, saying no U.S. personnel may use cruel or degrading practices at home or abroad.

So what is going on? First of all, the CIA has been carrying out such flights and other activities in cooperation with sister intelligence services across the globe ever since there has been such a thing as the CIA. The agency has worked for years in liaison relationships with intelligence services of other countries, some of them countries whose governments were not even friendly with the United States.

Those foreign services have sometimes informed their governments of their cooperation with the CIA -- and sometimes not, depending on the coloration of the government in power. The intelligence agencies justified their past cooperation with the CIA when the collaboration was in their nation's interest. Or, they cooperated with the U.S. agency to build up credit, to call in one day if they needed it.

So what has gone wrong now? First of all, the Bush administration butchered U.S. relations with many of the United States' allies in the run-up to the Iraq war. Most of the Europeans made it very clear that they did not agree with the rush to war of the United States, in disregard of the United Nations and in disregard of their own, carefully considered advice.

Second, much of what has come out, particularly in the realm of treatment of prisoners has been so repugnant to European governments and populations that those governments are forced to look into U.S. disregard of the Geneva Conventions on Treatment of Prisoners of War, international standards of justice, and of the general prohibitions of torture enshrined in the laws of most civilized countries.

Some Americans may be prepared to look the other way on matters such as what happens at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, or in Afghanistan, or at Guantanamo Bay or even the incredible spectacle of the Bush administration declaring American citizens to be "enemy combatants" in order to deal with them extra-judicially.

Europeans are not willing to give the administration a pass on the subject, particularly if it involves the use of

their country for secret prisons where brutal interrogations, and perhaps torture, may be occurring.

So the decades-old relationships between the CIA and its sister intelligence services are under siege across Europe and perhaps across the world. The rupture of these relationships, of course, increases the risk to the American population from terrorism, because intelligence is no longer provided to the agency by the foreign services in the old, time-honored channels.

Europeans are going to ask for a lot more than comforting words from Condoleezza Rice to lay off this subject. Why, after all, should they believe her while the Bush administration continues to make a mockery of American principles of justice at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan and in holding pens that may be in Romania, Poland, Egypt and elsewhere?