

February 2011

## Q & A: Aero Contractors and North Carolina's role in TORTURE

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**What is “extraordinary rendition”?** The Bush Administration kidnapped and flew dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people to places where they could be held outside the reach of law. These included CIA “black sites” (secret detention centers) and countries such as Egypt and Morocco. The captives were held incommunicado and interrogated under torture. They were detained indefinitely with no access to lawyers, courts, or family. Many “disappeared” entirely, are now held at Guantánamo Bay, or have been released without charges.

**How do we know Aero Contractors has taken part in “extraordinary rendition”?** Aero Contractors is a company based in Smithfield, North Carolina, that has served as the aviation hub of the CIA’s rendition program. This is well documented by journalists<sup>1,2</sup>, human rights groups, and governments<sup>3,4</sup>. A German public prosecutor has issued arrest warrants for three Aero Contractors pilots involved in the kidnapping, illegal detention, and torture of a German citizen, Khaled El-Masri. These pilots live in or near Clayton, North Carolina, and their real names are available<sup>5</sup>.

**Is Aero still operating “torture taxis”?** Aero still flies planes linked to extraordinary rendition in and out of the Johnston County Airport. We have photographed several rendition-linked planes at Aero’s hangar and at the Fayetteville Airport, where the planes are operated by Centurion Aviation<sup>6</sup>. Some of the Aero and Centurion planes still make trans-Atlantic flights. A leading human rights organization estimates there have been 200 renditions *since 2006*.<sup>7</sup> So far, President Obama has left the door open to carrying out more “extraordinary renditions.”

**Isn’t Aero just a private contractor, and therefore not responsible?** Aero personnel have conspired to kidnap human beings for the purpose of torturing them. Journalists confirm Aero pilots know they work for the CIA, and realize that drugged and bound detainees are shackled to the floors of their planes<sup>2</sup>. A senior official at Jeppesen DataPlan, the Boeing subsidiary that planned Aero’s rendition flights, stated, “We do all of the extraordinary rendition flights – you know, the torture flights. Let’s face it, some of these flights end up that way.”<sup>8</sup> [Conspiracy to torture someone outside the U.S. is illegal under 18 U.S.C. §2340A.](#) Involvement in torture also violates the Convention Against Torture, which binds the U.S. and all state and local governments.

**What is torture?** According to international law, torture is “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person ... ” To be torture, an act does not have to result in organ failure or near-death. The U.S. has commonly used extreme temperatures, hanging from the ceiling, extended sensory deprivation, continuous loud noise, and head slapping, all of which are cruel and inhumane. The U.S. practice of near-drowning, or “waterboarding,” is seen as torture by all our allies. The U.S. has rendered dozens of prisoners to Egypt, Syria, and Morocco, precisely *so that* they would be interrogated using beatings with electrical cables, cigarette burns, and genital mutilation with knives – all clearly torture.

**Is torture morally defensible or effective?** Plainly, torture violates the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” Torture permanently injures the victim, and warps and haunts the torturer forever after. Moreover, torture yields bad information. Most people will agree to anything if tortured, so the resulting confessions are unreliable. Such information is also not admissible in a court of law. The use of torture by the U.S. has made us enemies all over the world, and has put U.S. troops and civilians abroad in danger.

(over)

## What if a suspect has information that could avert an imminent disaster (the so-called “ticking time-bomb” scenario)?

Law enforcement officials and intelligence professionals know this is a phony scenario – it never actually occurs. Instead, the Bush Administration used torture to fish for information on past events, and to force confessions that would only prove inadmissible in court and, thereby, compromise prosecutors' ability to convict the most threatening individuals.

**Now that President Obama has ended torture, isn't this issue over with?** On January 22, 2009, President Obama ended torture by uniformed U.S. personnel, which is a good start. But he left the door open to continue transferring detainees to other countries where human rights are abused. He is also still considering whether to let the CIA use torture on prisoners. And the survivors and victims have never had their day in court, and have never been compensated. We need accountability for the authorization to torture, and for the renditions of Khaled el-Masri, Maher Arar, Khaled al-Maqtari, Binyam Mohamed, and so many more. We need an accounting for all missing rendered persons. And, we urgently need a law that forbids extra-judicial kidnapping and detainee transfer.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/31/national/31planes.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/G/Grey,%20Stephen>

<sup>2</sup>'Ghost Plane,' Stephen Grey, St. Martin's Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>The Council of Europe report: <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2006/jun/COE-EM-rendition-7-6-06.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>The European Parliament report: <http://www.statewatch.org/cia/documents/working-doc-no-8-nov-06.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Category:Alleged\\_CIA\\_pilots](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Category:Alleged_CIA_pilots)

<sup>6</sup>[www.ncstoptorturennow.net/resourcesplanespotting.html](http://www.ncstoptorturennow.net/resourcesplanespotting.html)

<sup>7</sup><http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/02/usa.humanrights>

<sup>8</sup>Jane Mayer, The New Yorker, Oct. 30, 2006

**WHAT CAN WE DO?** NCSTN is a coalition of peace, human rights, and religious organizations working to end torture and the practice of “extraordinary rendition.” Our immediate goal is to get Aero Contractors investigated, and evicted from public property if they have carried out crimes. We want justice for Binyam Mohamed, Khaled el-Masri, Ahmed Agiza, Bisher al-Rawi, Maher Arar, and other rendition survivors.

- 1) Call President Obama at 202-456-1414 and ask him for a **transparent investigation of the U.S. torture program.**
- 2) Call on Gov. Perdue, Attorney General Roy Cooper, and our U.S. and state legislators to **end all North Carolina support for rendition and torture.** Ask them to urge the U.S. Department of Justice to **investigate Aero Contractors and Centurion Aviation**, according to the wishes of 22 state legislators and Congressional Representatives Mel Watt and David Price as available at: [www.ncstoptorturennow.net/1220\\_001-1.pdf](http://www.ncstoptorturennow.net/1220_001-1.pdf)
- 3) Urge Congress to establish an **independent inquiry by a special prosecutor and/or bipartisan commission** to investigate the development, approval, and execution of U.S. torture policy. The rule of law means nothing if it can be violated by the powerful without consequences. Support Rep. Price's request for Congressional investigation of Aero and other private rendition contractors: [www.ncstoptorturennow.org/IntelCommitteeLtr20080717.pdf](http://www.ncstoptorturennow.org/IntelCommitteeLtr20080717.pdf).
- 4) Encourage **the three Aero pilots who are wanted in Germany to come forward** and tell what they know about the renditions of Khaled El-Masri, Binyam Mohamed, and many others.
- 5) **Reinstate habeas corpus** immediately so that all detainees have the right to know the charges against them and the right to a fair trial.
- 6) Urge the **Obama Administration to stop asserting that “state secrets”** require us to deny rendition survivors their day in court, and let the victims' lawsuits go forward.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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