

Obama administration operates illegal torture compound in Somalia

By Tom Carter
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The Obama administration is operating an illegal secret CIA prison compound in Somalia into which targeted individuals are “rendered” without trial to be tortured.

According to an investigative report by journalist Jeremy Scahill published last week, the walled facility is located on the site of Mogadishu’s Aden Adde International Airport.

“Set on the coast of the Indian Ocean, the facility looks like a small gated community, with more than a dozen buildings behind large protective walls and secured by guard towers at each of its four corners. Adjacent to the compound are eight large metal hangers, and the CIA has its own aircraft at the airport.”

The compound doubles as both a prison and a training site for Somali “counterterrorism” intelligence agents and operatives, who are used in assassinations and kidnappings of targeted individuals. It appears that in order to maintain “plausible deniability,” the CIA prefers to use indigenous Somali operatives for these brutal operations wherever possible so that the US can later disclaim involvement.

Inmates at the secret compound are subjected to the most horrific conditions. The prison “consists of a long corridor lined with filthy small cells infested with bedbugs and mosquitoes.... The former prisoners described the cells as windowless and the air thick, moist, and disgusting. Prisoners, they said, are not allowed outside. Many have developed rashes and scratch themselves incessantly. Some have been detained for a year or more. According to one former prisoner, inmates who had been there for long periods would pace around constantly, while others leaned against walls rocking.”

Prisoners include individuals from Kenya, Somalia,

and other countries in the Horn of Africa who were targeted for “rendition” by US agents. In flagrant violation of US and international law, targeted individuals are disappeared from the streets—with friends and relatives having no idea what has happened—and spirited to the secret compound for interrogation.

One former prisoner, a 26-year-old man from Kenya named Ahmed Abdullahi Hassan, described his ordeal: “They put a bag on my head, Guantanamo style. They tied my hands behind my back and put me on a plane. In the early hours we landed in Mogadishu. The way I realized I was in Mogadishu was because of the smell of the sea—the runway is just next to the seashore. The plane lands and touches the sea. They took me to this prison, where I have been up to now. I have been here for one year, seven months. I have been interrogated so many times. Interrogated by Somali men and white men. Every day. New faces show up. They have nothing on me. I have never seen a lawyer, never seen an outsider. Only other prisoners, interrogators, guards. Here there is no court or tribunal.”

Scahill confirmed the existence of the compound by means of interviews with senior Somali intelligence and government officials, US government officials speaking on condition of anonymity, former inmates at the compound, and former Somali intelligence operatives who had worked with CIA agents inside the compound. Scahill’s report makes clear that the Obama administration is responsible for serious violations of international law, including war crimes.

The record of US imperialism in Somalia—a geostrategically significant country that commands the sea lanes of the oil-rich gulf—is notoriously bloody.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the US government supported the government of military dictator Siad

Barre with massive shipments of weapons. The US-backed Barre regime devastated the country, exacerbating clan warfare and failing to address a series of famines.

The US supported Siad Barre during the rebellions that wracked the country in the 1980s, as the regime committed numerous atrocities and massacres. In 1988, the regime obliterated the city of Hargeisa in an attempt to destroy a rival clan.

In 1991, the Barre regime was overthrown, and US policy in Somalia shifted to using military force to back local warlords in attempts to raise up a strongman to fill the vacuum left by the deposed regime. This policy ultimately led, among other debacles, to the infamous 1993 massacre—known as the First Battle of Mogadishu or the “Black Hawk Down” incident—in which US soldiers killed as many as 1,000 people and injured as many as 4,000 in an effort to extricate a small force that was stranded after a bungled kidnapping operation.

In 2006, the US backed a consortium of warlords known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism in a bid for control of the country, which was defeated by militias loyal to the Islamic Court Union. The ongoing US support for the various warlords has contributed substantially to the anarchy, violence, famine and disease that afflict the impoverished country.

The Obama administration, under the guise of the so-called “war on terror,” has intensified the efforts of US imperialism to establish control over the country, including by means of drone missile assassinations, weapons shipments and bribes to warlords, and proxy operations by US-trained Somali agents. The CIA compound in Mogadishu serves as a launch pad for such lawless operations, as well as a torture and interrogation center for individuals seized in them.

Scahill’s report was published in *The Nation* magazine in an article titled, “The CIA’s Secret Sites in Somalia.” While *The Nation* has from time to time criticized torture and the lawlessness with which the US intelligence agencies operate, the publication—and Scahill’s article—are careful not to make direct criticisms of the administration of President Barack Obama or the Democratic Party, which preside over these crimes. *The Nation* endorsed Obama in the 2008 elections, and accordingly bears a measure of political responsibility for his administration’s conduct.

The Obama administration, despite vague promises to halt the deeply unpopular policies of the Bush administration, has continued and deepened them. The administration has expanded the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, initiated a war with Libya, and launched a program of “targeted killings” —including directed against US citizens—in Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere. The administration has routinely blocked all litigation related to torture and rendition on the grounds of the authoritarian “state secrets” doctrine, and as Scahill’s article makes clear, the illegal network of torture camps and “black sites” erected by the Bush administration remains in operation.

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