

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

Bosnian State TV Investigates Allegations of Secret CIA Prisons

BBC (British Broadcasting European) Monitoring European

30 December 2005

Excerpt from report aired on Public Secret current affairs programme, broadcast by Bosnian public broadcaster BHTV1 on 29 December

[Host Amir Zukic] The most prominent international media have reported that the US secret service CIA has dozens of well-hidden Guantanamo-like prisons in Europe and Asia, where terror suspects are questioned far from the public eye. While the governments of Afghanistan, Thailand, Poland, Romania and other countries have rejected allegations on the existence of secret prisons, the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina have never checked the information that CIA secret prisons are to be found here as well. Merima Spahic has investigated the identity of the individuals saying that they have been questioned in secret prisons and whether the Bosnia-Herzegovina security services have any control whatsoever over foreign intelligence operatives.

[Reporter Merima Spahic] According to The Washington Post reports, the US secret service CIA has for years had unofficial camps in Europe where terror suspects are detained and questioned. According to some Bosnians who have been detained and questioned at the Eagle base near Tuzla, a similar CIA prison may exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well. Almin Harbaus and Nihad Karsic have personally experienced the US methods of questioning. They were arrested as employees of a humanitarian organization attached to the High Saudi Committee in [Sarajevo district] Ilidza ten days after the terrorist attack on the US.

[Harbaus] They burst in. All of a sudden I heard what was probably practice ammunition, four or five shots. Then there was a loud noise, they were breaking the door in. They were violent at the very beginning.

[Reporter] Nihad Karsic's experience is the same. The two were questioned separately by members of the then SFOR [NATO-led Stabilization Force] at the Butmir base in Sarajevo. After they failed to admit that they were terrorists, a soldier threatened them.

[Passage omitted: Karsic repeats the details reported in his interview for the 16 December issue of Sarajevo weekly Dani]

[Reporter] The final destination, where they were kept for six days, was precisely the Eagle base. They say that they were questioned at the base by Americans in civilian clothes, while soldiers only hit them.

[Passage omitted: Karsic provides more details known from the Dani interview]

[Reporter] The roughest methods were used at the Eagle base in questioning Harbaus and Karsic about terrorism and arms, but not about Al Qai'dah.

[Karsic] They did not ask me anything directly about Al Qai'dah. Rather, they asked about some of our people here, for instance [prominent Bosnian Muslim official involved in arms supplies] Hasan Cengic and his father.

[Reporter] It is a question of how far the US agents violated the rules of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina by detaining these and other young men without an obligation to inform their families about it.

[Harbaus] My family did not know anything for seven days. I had no right to a lawyer or anything or to contacts outside the base.

[Reporter] On their release from the base, they were told that they had found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. They received 500 dollars towards damages, but also threats.

[Passage omitted: Harbaus described details of the release known from Karsic's Dani interview]

[Reporter] Bosnia-Herzegovina's Intelligence and Security Agency [OSA] has no information that US intelligence operatives are abusing Bosnia-Herzegovina citizens.

[Zoran Kuljanin, OSA spokesman] The Intelligence and Security Agency of Bosnia-Herzegovina can say with responsibility that it is not in possession of any information that would indicate that those camps exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

[Reporter] Although Bosnia-Herzegovina officials do not wish to admit a strong influence by foreign intelligence

services, experts from this field are of a different opinion.

[Edhem Basic, former Bosnian intelligence officer] No-one can reliably know at the moment how many intelligence services are present on the territory of the sovereign, independent and internationally-recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina. The number is certainly not lower than 30.

[Zoran Kusovac, geostrategic commentator with Jane's Intelligence] It is certain that in today's Europe Bosnia is a place reminiscent of Vienna after WWII: a place where various interests of various intelligence services meet. And it is certain that most serious services have their secret agents in Bosnia.

[Reporter] The Eagle military base was erected in 1995 near Dubrave airport. Around 900 Americans are stationed at the base today, although there are a total of 1,300 of them in the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The media speculate that the base also serves as a CIA secret camp.

[Kusovac] The Eagle base in and of itself is a big autonomous US base. It is very convenient because it also has airport facilities, two functioning runways, and so on. The Americans are practically using the base without any outside supervision. In pure organizational and logistical terms, it would be quite possible for the CIA to bring prisoners from the outside and process them there without much disturbance, or practically completely free from disturbance.

[Reporter] CIA camps are said to be built like fortresses, many of them underground. Numerous camps are unknown even to politicians in the countries where they are located. The US embassy in Sarajevo has said that it is US policy not to comment on alleged intelligence issues. The CIA too is denying the existence of camps, at the same time defending the right to have prisoners outside the US, like in Guantanamo, in the fight against terrorism.

[Passage omitted: the Bosnian wife of an Algerian extradited by Bosnian authorities four years ago and currently kept at Guantanamo reports that the Bosnian Algerian prisoners were well-known to other prisoners because their screams could be heard at night when they were tortured; the wife questions the truth of the report by government officials who visited the Guantanamo prisoners, who said that the climate was the biggest problem for the prisoners]

[Reporter] The existence of CIA camps has so far been denied by Thailand. The European Union has not issued any comment as yet. Neither have Indonesia, Afghanistan, France, Hungary or Poland confirmed the information. The only one who has publicly spoken about this is Marek Nowicki, the UN ombudsman in Kosovo, who recently stated that there is no doubt whatsoever that a secret CIA prison is located at the US Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo.

The US Eagle base near Tuzla is not subject to the control of local authorities. We tried to visit them during the Christmas holidays, but what we found in these watchtowers, looking only through the [barbed] wire were, instead of guards, inflated rubber soldiers [footage shown of watchtowers with visible rubber soldiers]. It is obvious that they continue playing with the local authorities, as well as with the population. The question mark above the heads of our citizens is still there. For no-one knows who, according to the assessment of US agents, may find himself in the wrong place at the wrong time.