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26/02/05

Plane 'used in US terrorist snatch' passed through Shannon

By John Breslin

A PLANE used by the United States for an alleged illegal snatch of a terrorist suspect passed through Shannon during the operation, it has been revealed.

Flight logs of the Boeing 737, one of the two planes used by the CIA for the "extraordinary rendition" of suspects, reveal a landing in Shannon just days before a German citizen apprehended in Macedonia was transported to Afghanistan for interrogation.

The plane, at the time owned by what is believed to be a CIA front company, Premier Executive Transport Services, passed through Shannon twice in January 2003.

The plane, identification number N313P, was also spotted at Shannon in August by members of the Aviation Society of Ireland.

The Boeing, along with a Gulfstream V craft, which has landed in Shannon at least 13 times in the last two years, is known to have been used to pick up suspects in various countries and bring them for interrogation either to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan or to a third country, such as Jordan, Egypt, Uzbekistan and Syria.

A number of alleged illegal snatches have already been documented, including two men in Sweden who were taken

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to Egypt and a Canadian engineer at JFK Airport, who was transported to Syria. According to US news sources, the administration has now stopped sending suspects to Syria.

Those who have surfaced say they have been tortured after being grabbed and transported.

Khaled el-Masri, a German citizen, was on holiday in Macedonia when he was taken off a bus and brought to a motel outside the capital city of Skopje. Three weeks later, on January 23, he was brought blindfolded aboard what he believed to be a jet.

He told the New York Times he was chained to clamps on the bare metal floor and wall of the jet.

Mr el-Masri claimed he was flown to Afghanistan, to a US prison facility where he said he was shackled, repeatedly punched and questioned about alleged extremists at his mosque in Germany.

He said he was released five months later, flown back to Macedonia and left by the side of a road.

Flight logs show the Boeing 707, which had its named ownership and identification changed late last year, flew out of Dulles Airport in Washington on January 16 and landed in Shannon early the following day. After a number of stops, it landed in Skopje on January 23, then travelled to Baghdad and finally to Kabul, Afghanistan.

Anti-war activists here have urged gardaí to investigate the use of Shannon by these two planes.

Tim Hourigan, of the Anti War Movement, said the law on torture, enshrined in the Criminal Justice Act, 2000, states that a person, whatever nationality, whether within or outside the State, who attempts to commit or conspires to commit the offence of torture, shall be guilty of an offence.

The Limerick man has made an official complaint to the gardaí.

The Government said it had been assured by the US authorities that our airports have not been used to illegally transport suspects and that they would not do so in the future without seeking the authorisation of the Irish authorities.

No inspections of any craft has taken place.

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