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## Jet Is an Open Secret in Terror War

By Dana Priest  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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The airplane is a Gulfstream V turbojet, the sort favored by CEOs and celebrities. But since 2001 it has been seen at military airports from Pakistan to Indonesia to Jordan, sometimes being boarded by hooded and handcuffed passengers.

The plane's owner of record, Premier Executive Transport Services Inc., lists directors and officers who appear to exist only on paper. And each one of those directors and officers has a recent issued Social Security number and an address consisting only of a post office box, according to an extensive search of state, federal and commercial records.

Bryan P. Dyess, Steven A. Kent, Timothy R. Sperling and Audrey M. Taylor are names without residential, work, telephone or corporate histories -- just the kind of "sterile identities," said current and former intelligence officials, that the CIA uses to conceal involvement in clandestine operations. In this case, the agency is flying captured terrorist suspects from one country to another for detention and interrogation.

The CIA calls this activity "rendition." Premier Executive's Gulfstream helps make it possible. According to civilian aircraft landing permits, the jet has permission to use U.S. military airfields worldwide.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, secret renditions have become a principal weapon in the CIA's arsenal against suspected al Qaeda terrorists, according to congressional testimony by CIA officials. But as the practice has grown, the agency has had significantly more difficulty keeping it secret.

According to airport officials, public documents and hobbyist plane spotters, the Gulfstream V, with tail number N379P, has been used to whisk detainees into or out of Jakarta, Indonesia; Pakistan; Egypt; and Sweden, usually at night, and has landed at well-known U.S. government refueling stops.



This Gulfstream V turbojet is believed to be used to transport suspected terrorists to other countries for interrogation -- a practice called rendition. (Special To The Washington Post)

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As the outlines of the rendition system have been revealed, criticism of the practice has grown. Human rights groups are working on legal challenges to renditions, said Morton Sklar, executive director of the World Organization for Human Rights USA, because one of their purposes is to transfer captives to countries that use harsh interrogation methods outlawed in the United States. That, he said, is prohibited by the U.N. Convention on Torture.

The CIA has the authority to carry out renditions under a presidential directive dating to the Clinton administration, which the Bush administration has reviewed and renewed. The CIA declined to comment for this article.

"Our policymakers would never confront the issue," said Michael Scheuer, a former CIA counterterrorism officer who has been involved with renditions and supports the practice. "We would say, 'Where do you want us to take these people?' The mind-set of the bureaucracy was, 'Let someone else do the dirty work.'"

The story of the Gulfstream V offers a rare glimpse into the CIA's secret operations, a world that current and former CIA officers said should not have been so easy to document.

Not only have the plane's movements been tracked around the world, but the on-paper officers of Premier Executive Transport Services are also connected to a larger roster of false identities.

Each of the officers of Premier Executive is linked in public records to one of five post office box numbers in Arlington, Oakton, Chevy Chase and the District. A total of 325 names are registered to the five post office boxes.

An extensive database search of a sample of 44 of those names turned up none of the information that usually emerges in such a search: no previous addresses, no past or current telephone numbers, no business or corporate records. In addition, although most names were attached to dates of birth in the 1940s, 150s or '60s, all were given Social Security numbers between 1998 and 2003.

The Washington Post showed its research to the CIA, including a chart connecting Premier Executive's officers, the post office boxes, the 325 names, the recent Social Security numbers and an entity called Executive Support OFC. A CIA spokesman declined to comment.

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According to former CIA operatives experienced in using "proprietary," or front, companies, the CIA likely used, or intended to use, some of the 325 names to hide other activities, the nature of which could not be learned. The former operatives also noted that the agency devotes more effort to producing cover identities for its operatives in the field, which are supposed to stand up under scrutiny, than to hiding its ownership of a plane.

The CIA's plane secret began to unravel less than six weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

On Oct. 26, 2001, Masood Anwar, a Pakistani journalist with the News in Islamabad, broke a story asserting that Pakistani intelligence officers had handed over to U.S. authorities a Yemeni microbiologist, Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed, who was wanted in connection with the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole.



This Gulfstream V private jet is believed to be used to transport suspected terrorists to other countries for interrogation -- a practice called rendition. (Special To The Washington Post)

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The report noted that an aircraft bearing tail number N379P, and parked in a remote area of a little-used terminal at the Karachi airport, had whisked Mohammed away about 2:40 a.m. Oct. 23. The tail number was also obtained by The Post's correspondent in Pakistan but not published.

The News article ricocheted among spy-hunters and Web bloggers as a curiosity for those interested in divining the mechanics of the new U.S.-declared war on terrorism.

At 7:54:04 p.m. Oct. 26, the News article was posted on FreeRepublic.com, which bills itself as "a conservative news forum."

Thirteen minutes later, a chat-room participant posted the plane's registered owners: Premier Executive Transport Services Inc., of 339 Washington St., Dedham, Mass.


"Sounds like a nice generic name," one blogger wrote in response. "Kind of like Air America" -- a reference to the CIA's secret civilian airlines that flew supplies, food and personnel into Southeast Asia, including Laos, during the Vietnam War.

Eight weeks later, on Dec. 18, 2001, American-accented men wearing hoods and working with special Swedish security police brought two Egyptian nationals onto a Gulfstream V that was parked at night at Stockholm's Bromma Airport, according to Swedish officials and airport personnel interviewed by Swedish

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television's "Cold Facts" program. The account was confirmed independently by The Post. The plane's tail number: N379P.

Wearing red overalls and bound with handcuffs and leg irons, the men, who had applied for political asylum in Sweden, were flown to Cairo, according to Swedish officials and documents. Ahmed Agiza was convicted by Egypt's Supreme Military Court of terrorism-related charges; Muhammad Zery was set free. Both say they were tortured while in Egyptian custody. Sweden has opened an investigation into the decision to allow them to be rendered.

A month later, in January 2002, a U.S.-registered Gulfstream V landed at Jakarta's military airport. According to Indonesian officials, the plane carried away Muhammad Saad Iqbal Madni, an Egyptian traveling on a Pakistani passport and suspected of being an al Qaeda operative who had worked with shoe bomber suspect Richard C. Reid. Without a hearing, he was flown to Egypt. His status and whereabouts are unknown. The plane's tail number was not noted, but the CIA is believed to have only one of the expensive jets.

Over the past year, the Gulfstream V's flights have been tracked by plane spotters standing at the end of runways with high-powered binoculars and cameras to record the flights of military and private aircraft.

These hobbyists list their findings on specialized Web pages. According to them, since October 2001 the plane has landed in Islamabad; Karachi; Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Dubai; Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Baghdad; Kuwait City; Baku, Azerbaijan; and Rabat, Morocco. It has stopped frequently at Dulles International Airport, at Jordan's military airport in Amman and at airports in Frankfurt, Germany; Glasgow, Scotland, and Larnaca, Cyprus.

Premier Executive Transport Services was incorporated in Delaware by the Prentice-Hall Corporation System Inc. on Jan. 10, 1994. On Jan. 23, 1996, Dean Plakias, a lawyer with Hill & Plakias in Dedham, filed incorporation papers with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts listing the company's president as Bryan P. Dyess.

According to public documents, Premier Executive ordered a new Gulfstream V in 1998. It was delivered in November 1999 with tail number N581GA, and reregistered for unknown reasons on March 2000 with a new tail number, N379P. It began flights in June 2000, and changed the tail number again in December 2003.

Plakias did not return several telephone messages seeking comment. He told the Boston Globe recently that he simply filed the required paperwork. "I'm not at liberty to discuss the affairs of the client business, mainly for reasons I don't know," he told the Globe. Asked whether the company exists, Plakias responded: "Millions of companies are set up in Massachusetts that are just paper companies."

A lawyer in Washington, whose name is listed on a 1996 IRS form on record at the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office in Massachusetts -- and whose name is whited out on some copies of the forms -- hung up the phone last week when asked about the company.

Three weeks ago, on Dec. 1, the plane, complete with a new tail number, was transferred to a new owner, Bayard Foreign Marketing of Portland, Ore., according to FAA records. Its registered agent in Portland, Scott Caplan, did not return phone calls.

Like the officers at Premier Executive, Bayard's sole listed corporate officer, Leonard T. Bayard, has no residential or telephone history. Unlike Premier's officers, Bayard's name does not appear in any other public records.

*Researchers Margot Williams and Julie Tate contributed to this report. Williams has since left The Washington Post.*

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