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Detainee Task Force Discusses 'Black Sites' with Lithuanian Officials

WASHINGTON, D.C.--The Constitution Project's [Task Force on Detainee Treatment](#) met with Lithuanian government officials in Vilnius this week to discuss that country's role in the CIA's extraordinary rendition program in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, including the alleged detention and mistreatment of Abu Zubaydah.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, a task force member, and Alka Pradhan, a task force counsel, were investigating reports of a secret CIA prison at a riding academy on the outskirts of Vilnius, the Baltic nation's capital. They discussed the topic with members of Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament, and with an official from the office of the Prosecutor-General. They also met with Lithuanian journalists and human rights advocates.

"There are a number of credible reports that Lithuania housed one or more of the 'black site' detention facilities that the CIA allegedly used to interrogate, and some claim torture, individuals they thought were involved in terrorist activity against the United States," Pradhan said.

"Ambassador Pickering and I wanted to get information from the Lithuanian government officials closest to the situation to help the task force ascertain the veracity of these reports," she said.

As part of a distinguished diplomatic career, Pickering served as Ambassador to the United Nations under President George H.W. Bush, and as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, the agency's number three position, under President Bill Clinton.

After ABC News [first revealed](#) in 2009 the likely existence of a CIA detention facility in the country, the Lithuanian parliament launched an investigation which concluded that Lithuanian officials participated in the CIA rendition program, and that "conditions were created for holding detainees in Lithuania," but that it could not establish that the facility was ever actually used for interrogation of CIA detainees. Pickering and Pradhan met with members of the Seimas committee responsible for the investigation.

The United Nation's [Joint Study on Secret Detention](#) and the Council of Europe's [Committee for the Prevention of Torture](#) also conducted independent investigations that separately concluded Lithuania had participated in the CIA rendition program.

The Lithuanian Prosecutor General opened a criminal inquiry in January, 2010 into whether State

Security Department officials had colluded with the CIA in the rendition program, but the inquiry was halted in January, 2011 for "lack of information." The office considered reopening their inquiry last fall, but did not.

Last September, several [human rights organizations](#) released new data from flight logs of CIA flights, information which they said linked detainee Zayn Al-Abidin Muhammed Husayn (frequently referred to as "Abu Zubaydah") to the Vilnius site. One group, UK-based Interights, has filed an application before the European Court of Human Rights against Lithuania on Zubaydah's behalf. His lawyers hope to win a verdict "recognizing (Zubaydah) as a victim of torture, secret detention and enforced disappearance" in Lithuania. Zubaydah is currently being held as a "high value detainee" at the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay.

Pradhan said the information gleaned from their various meetings would be incorporated into the discussion of the extraordinary rendition program in the task force's final report, set for release in early 2013.

Created late in 2010, the goal of the task force is to provide the American people with a broad understanding of what is known--and what may still be unknown--about the past and current treatment of suspected terrorists detained by the U.S. government. The task force seeks to identify and promote detention policies and practices that comply with the nation's legal obligations, foreign policy objectives and fundamental values.

[About The Constitution Project](#)

Created out the belief that we must cast aside the labels that divide us in order to keep our democracy strong, The Constitution Project (TCP) brings together policy experts and legal practitioners from across the political spectrum to foster consensus-based solutions to the most difficult constitutional challenges of our time. TCP seeks to reform the nation's broken criminal justice system and to strengthen the rule of law through scholarship, advocacy, policy reform and public education initiatives. Established in 1997, TCP is based in Washington, D.C.



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