

Germany seeks 13 suspected CIA agents

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[摘要] February 1, 2007, BERLIN - German prosecutors said Wednesday that they have issued arrest warrants for 13 suspected CIA agents who allegedly abducted a German citizen in an apparent anti-terrorist operation gone wrong, in the latest European legal challenge to US treatment of terror suspects.

[关键词] CIA agents; anti-terrorist

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German prosecutors said Wednesday that they have issued arrest warrants for 13 suspected CIA agents who allegedly abducted a German citizen in an apparent anti-terrorist operation gone wrong, in the latest European legal challenge to US treatment of terror suspects.

The arrest warrants, filed in Munich, represent the second case in which prosecutors have lodged criminal charges against CIA employees involved in counterterrorism operations in Europe.

Italian prosecutors want to question 25 agents and one other American - all but one believed to be CIA agents -

in the 2003 alleged kidnapping in Milan of Egyptian cleric and terror suspect Osama Moustafa Hassan Nasra. Five Italian intelligence officials also face possible indictment in the case.

European investigators acknowledge that it is highly unlikely the US spies - most of whom worked undercover or using false identities -

would ever be handed over to face trial. But the prosecutions have strained US-

European relations and underscore deep differences over how to fight terrorism. Munich prosecutor Christian Schmidt-

Sommerfeld told The Associated Press that warrants in the latest case were issued in the last few days. He said the unidentified agents were sought on suspicion of wrongfully imprisoning Khaled al-

-Masri and causing him serious bodily harm. Al-

Masri, a German citizen of Lebanese descent, says he was detained in December 2003 at the Serbian-

Macedonian border and then flown by the CIA to a jail in Afghanistan, where he was abused. He says he was let go in Albania five months later and told he had been seized in a case of mistaken identity.

The case comes at a time when German Chancellor Angela Merkel is trying to maintain improved relations with the United States, after a chill between the two countries under former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder -

a fierce critic of the war in Iraq. Rights activists have seized on al-

Masri's story and other cases to demand that the US stop "extraordinary rendition" -

moving terrorism suspects to third countries where they could face torture.

German opposition parties have accused the government of turning a blind eye to such practices. Foreign Minister Frank-

Walter Steinmeier faces questioning in a parliamentary committee over whether the previous German government blocked the release of Murat Kurnaz, a Bremen

-born Turk kept at Guantanamo for more than four years. Steinmeier at the time was Schroeder's chief of staff.

Merkel has said the Bush administration acknowledged making a mistake with al-

Masri. Germany's government refused to comment on the arrest warrants, as did the CIA. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales also declined to comment, saying he did not know enough about the action by German authorities. He also declined comment when asked if he knew

NDR television released a list of 11 men and two women reportedly named in the warrants. It said three had been contacted by its reporters and had refused comment.

The prosecutor's office refused to confirm the list, while revealing the suspects' real names weren't known.

"The personal details contained in the arrest warrants are, according to our current knowledge, aliases of CIA agents," Schmidt-

Sommerfeld said in a statement. "Further investigation will, among other things, concentrate on trying to determine the clear identities of the suspects."

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Masri's attorney, Manfred Gajdic, said the issuing of the arrest warrants was "a very important step in the rehabilitation" of his client. "It shows us that we were right in putting our trust in the German authorities and the German prosecutors," he told reporters.

Prosecutors were led to the suspects after receiving a list in December 2005 of possible people involved in al-

Masri's detention compiled by a Spanish journalist from sources within Spain's Civil Guard, a paramilitary police unit, Schmidt-Sommerfeld said.

He said Spanish authorities then provided help and prosecutors were able to pursue an investigation against "concrete persons," Schmidt-

Sommerfeld said tips were also received from others, including prosecutors in Milan, Italy, and Dick Marty, a Swiss senator who led a Council of Europe inquiry into purported CIA "extraordinary rendition" flights. The prosecutor did not give any details on the tips.

The CIA agents are suspected of flying aboard a Boeing 737 from the Spanish island of Palma de Mallorca in January 2004 to pick up al-

Masri from Macedonian authorities, another prosecutor, August Stern, said.

ARD television said last year investigators were working from passport photocopies made by a hotel where the suspects stayed, but Stern said he could not confirm that or other details. The report last year gave what it said were the cover names of three men who were picked up

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Masri has asked a federal appeals court in Richmond, Va., to reinstate a lawsuit against the CIA seeking compensation. A judge dismissed the suit last May, ruling that a trial could harm national security by revealing details about CIA activities.

The German government has said it learned of the case only after al-

Masri's release. In late 2005, Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaueble said the then-

US ambassador to Germany had told his predecessor, Otto Schily, about it May 31, 2004.

Schaueble said Ambassador Dan Coats provided no details of al-Masri's treatment, but told Schily that "one had apologized to him (al-

Masri) and agreed (on) confidentiality and paid him a sum of money," Gajdic, al-

Masri's lawyer, has said his client denies receiving either an apology or money.

