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Is Internment of U.S. Dissidents Fact or Urban Legend?

Reporter Explores Winding Trail of American Detention Camps Reports

by Andrei V. Lefebvre

Conspiracies, urban legends, and apocalyptic rumors have always intrigued me. One of them has been coming up in the e-world with a stubborn persistence lately. For the last few years, fringe Left-, Libertarian-, and far Right-leaning websites have been buzzing with the reports that a branch of the U.S. Government had built a network of the internment camps inside the United States. Depending on political ideology, the websites speculated that the camps are either for the opponents of Barack Obama or George W. Bush.

Wrote Chuck Baldwin, a radio talk show host and self-described Christian Conservative, in his August 11 Internet column:

"... there are those who continue to deny that these camps exist at all. But then, were there not thousands of Germans who

denied the existence of concentration camps during World War II? These types of people would refuse to believe the sun came up in the east if the government spinmeisters told them it didn't."

http://www.vdare.com/baldwin/090811_internment_camps.htm

I did some digging and traced the most recent escalation of the camp story to a help wanted ad posted on an official U.S. Army website. It read:

"Internment/Resettlement (I/R) Specialists in the Army are primarily responsible for day-to-day operations in a military confinement/correctional facility or detention/internment facility. I/R Specialists provide rehabilitative, health, welfare, and security to U.S. military prisoners within a confinement or correctional facility; conduct inspections; prepare written

reports; and coordinate activities of prisoners/internees and staff personnel."

<http://www.goarmy.com/JobDetail.do?id=292>

For comments, I called a local U.S. Army recruitment office in Southern California, where I reside. A U.S. Army sergeant, who answered the phone, said that he knows nothing about the ad and directed me to an Army press office in Southern California. I called. No one there would talk on the record about the ad either. A non-commissioned officer, who took my call, suggested that I try a press contact in Fort Knox, KY by the name of Douglas Smith. When I asked for Smith's military rank, the non-commissioned officer said, "He is a civilian. He is Mr. Smith."

I channeled Matrix for a brief moment.

My next phone call was to Fort Knox, obviously. I got voicemail. While I waited for Mr. Smith to call me back—he had not returned my call as of the publication date—my mouse traveled the e-world.

I put the help wanted ad situation aside and dug into the issue of the camps. This subject proved to be more pliable. After thumbing through a number of Left- and Right-wing websites I came upon an article in a mainstream newspaper.

Lewis Seiler and Dan Hamburg wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle on Feb 4, 2008:

"Since 9/11, and seemingly without the notice of most Americans, the federal government has assumed the authority to institute martial law, arrest a wide swath of dissidents (citizen and non-citizen alike), and detain people without legal or constitutional recourse in the event of "an emergency influx of immigrants in the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs."

Beginning in 1999, the government has entered into a series of single-bid contracts with Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) to build detention camps at undisclosed locations within the United States. The government has also contracted with several companies to build thousands of railcars, some reportedly equipped with shackles, ostensibly to transport detainees."

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/02/04/ED5OUPQJ7.DTL>

I called Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR). No one would speak to me on the record regarding this matter. However, Heather L. Browne, Director of Corporate Communications, wrote me the following e-mail note (as a reply to my query):

"KBR does not comment on rumors, urban legends or speculation."

I e-mailed her back asking if this was a flat denial or a "no

comments.” Browne answered right away:

“The extent of KBR’s work on a detainment facility is GITMO.”

I decided not to press her more until the time when (and if) I find something more tangible, other than an un-attributed statement, linking KBR to the building of camps.

My mouse continued its e-travels. Another story, dated Jan 10, 2008 with an author identified only as Geopolitical Monitor, this time on GlobalResearch.ca, a website of the Canadian-based The Centre for Research on Globalisation, caught my eye. This organization described itself as “... independent research organization and media group of writers, scholars, journalists and activists.” The article said:

“The United States Federal Emergency Management Agency has numerous detainment camps throughout the United States. Some camps have been recently constructed and/or renovated and are fully staffed,”

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7763>

I called FEMA and spoke to a woman by the name of Jennifer Adams in the press office. She was friendly enough at first. However, when I explained that I am chasing a story about the camps on the U.S. soil, her professional tone developed a hostile edge. She would not

comment on the record and asked me to put my questions in writing. I e-mailed her (Adams’ domain address belonged to the Department of Homeland Security) a query. As of the publication date, I received no answer.

I went back to my laptop. The e-world revealed more material on this subject and I began to put my arms around the story. Apparently, George W. Bush’s administration, with willing participation of the legislative brunch, had constructed a legal mechanism for a wholesale detention of people.

Many observers point to the 109th Congress (2005-06) which passed a law known as National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal 2006. The critics—on the Right and on the Left—interpreted it as a catastrophic destroyer of civil liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Revolution, a newspaper of the Communist Party USA (no less), wrote in its March 25 online article without a byline:

“In October 2006, Bush signed into law the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. Quietly slipped into the law at the last minute, at the request of the Bush administration, were sections changing important legal principles, dating back 200 years, which limit the U.S. government’s ability to use the military to intervene in domestic affairs.

These changes would allow Bush, whenever he thinks it necessary, to institute martial law—under which the military takes direct control over civilian administration.

Sec. 1042 of the Act, 'Use of the Armed Forces in Major Public Emergencies,' effectively overturns what is known as posse comitatus. The Posse Comitatus Act is a law, passed in 1878, that prohibits the use of the regular military within the U.S. borders."
<http://www.rwor.org/a/083/martial-en.html>

This was interesting stuff. Yet, I failed to discover the definitive proof that a network of internment camps on American soil existed. I found plenty of suppositions and extrapolations, however.

For instance, Freedom-FightingRadio.com, a Libertarian-leaning (I think) website published an article on March 8, 2009 by BMcDonald (this is not my typo). In it, the author asserted that more than 800 "prison camps" had been constructed. A map of the United States with a plethora of blue dots, representing the camp locations, accompanied the story.

Wrote BMcDonald:

"The camps all have railroad facilities as well as roads leading to and from the detention facilities. Many also have an airport nearby. The majority of the camps can house a population of 20,000 prisoners. Currently, the largest of these facilities is just outside of Fairbanks, Alaska. The Alaskan

facility is a massive mental health facility and can hold approximately 2 million people."
<http://www.rwor.org/a/083/martial-en.html>

BMcDonald was not the only one claiming that he knew the locations of the camps. On mindfly.com, an un-attributed Sep 3, 2004 story headlined, "FEMA Concentration Camps: Locations and Executive Orders." As one may guess from the headline, the story was vehemently anti-government and also asserted that 800-plus camps existed in the United States. It provided an added bonus—a link to the Google Maps with the addresses for these alleged facilities.

The map page reported a camp in my neck of the woods, on the—now closed—Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, CA.

However, I have been passing by this location for the last seven years. I had seen neither any new construction projects, after the base shut down in 1994, nor had I remembered any existing structures which resembled an internment camp. To make sure, I punched up Google Earth on my laptop and spent an hour examining the site from top to bottom. I found nothing which could have resembled a camp.

After this exercise, I turned to the comments which the camp map page had received from the readers. I decided not to change the spelling and the grammar

liberties the responders took with the English language. I cut pasted them below "as is," if you will.

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=en&gl=us&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&msa=19&msid=118135173934136151745.00045bc25ee928a8872d0>

Wrote a person who goes by an e-name of duncankunz:

"I have been to EVERY SINGLE location in Arizona, since this 'FEMA Concentration Camp' scam has been going around for over ten years now, and I'd thought I'd see if there was really anything to it. There isn't. Every single Arizona location listed on the map is bogus,"

Ringel5876 wrote the following comment:

"The site in s/w south dakota and north of edgemont SD is along the BN railline at a place called Oracle. It is an old WWII italian and german POW camp. It was mostly flat concrete slabs when I was last by there but I have seen private type sec guards at the front gate at times."

Robert (an e-name) claimed to have found a camp. He posted a note as follows:

"If you travel out of Kingwood, WV, on Rte. 7 East and right before crossing the river, you will see Rte. 72. Travel south along the river. Across the river is WV National

Guard Camp Dawson. If you look at the southern most developed part of Camp Dawson, you will see an airstrip. On the Rte. 72 side of the river, you will a group of buildings. Between Rte. 72 and the wood line along the river, there is a small area that looks a little gray and square shaped. On each corner of the gray square is a guard tower. This gray square is a POW camp with barbed wire surrounding the square. See the shadows casting on the ground by the towers? The builings to the south of this camp is storage of unknown equipment by the Army. Could it be tents to erect inside the camp? That is all the camp needs is shelter for the people being held."

Another comment maker, who identified himself as Todd, too, wrote that he found a camp in his reply to Robert:

"Tashona - Canada is on page 2, there's 6 total, mostly in the middle to north-west Providences of Canada. Robert - I took a good look at the area you described with google maps. I saw the shadows of the towers. As for the tents, it's very possible. In my recent deployment to Iraq, I have lived in tents, connexes(the ones you see on semi's on the highway and double stacked on flatbed railcars), a garage with an asbestos roof at an abandoned Iraqi house and in other abandoned/comandeered houses and pre-fabbed trailers. Should these camps ever be used, the govt. will store/house people by

whichever means is easiest and cost effective to them."

Next, my mouse took on the winding narrow passages of the You Tube maze. The search words "FEMA Camps" produced a promising result. I found a number of video clips purportedly showing the camps. One clip, posted by someone with an e-moniker of Masterpiece-ConCen, seemed interesting. This video showed a fenced in railroad facility. A voiceover—female, well spoken—identified the area as an abandoned Amtrak station in Beach Grove, ID. The clip presented numerous shots of the empty buildings with entrances barred by the tubular turnstiles. As I continued watching, I saw the fresh-looking red banners sporting white lettering, "Red Zone," while the voiceover informed that the clip maker found areas marked "Blue Zone" and "Green Zone" also. The video had many shots of a tall chain link fence with the rows of barbed wire on top. Overall, the video and the authoritative-sounding voiceover left a convincing aftertaste. Yes, this facility could be an empty detention camp.

Since I go by an old reporters' wisdom, "Trust none of what you hear and only half of

what you see," I remained dissatisfied and burrowed into the 12,621 comments left by the viewers. One note stood out like a ham sandwich on a kosher deli counter. A viewer by an e-name of SWEPTAOTC2002 wrote the following (I cut and pasted it without any edits),

*"1) This video is 15 years old
2) The person posting this video is NOT the creator of the video
3) The creator of the video is linda thompson She was a militia nut that was as far as to the political right as obama is politically left She was so far right that even her own militia bretheren disowned her*

4) Look at the video It is obvious how they got in The facility was closed for the weekend and they were able to walk through the parking lot and get limited interior shots through the fence"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP-hvPJPTi4>

At this point, I realized that I need to take a break and have the rest of the story wait until I figure out another approach. For now, I found no "smoking gun" pointing to the existence of the camps. Yet, I smelled enough of the proverbial "smoke" to make me suspect that it may lead me to the proverbial "fire."

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