

## US military planes criss-cross Europe posing as civilian flights

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The American military have been operating flights across Europe using a call sign assigned to a civilian airline that they have no legal right to use.

Not only is the call sign bogus -- according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) -- so, it appears, are some of the aircraft details the Americans have filed with the air traffic control authorities.

In at least one case, a plane identified with the CIA practice of “extraordinary rendition” -- transporting terrorist suspects -- left a US air base just after the arrival of an aircraft using the bogus call sign.

The call sign Juliet Golf Oscar (JGO) followed by a flight number belongs, says the ICAO, to a now bankrupt Canadian low-cost airline called Jetsgo of Montreal.

But for several years and as recently as last December it has been used selectively by both the American air force and army to cover the flights of aircraft to and from the Balkans.

These range from Learjet 35 executive jets to C-130 transport planes and MC-130P Combat Shadows, which are specially adapted for clandestine missions in politically sensitive or hostile territory.

A Sunday Times analysis of flight plans and radio logs has placed these aircraft at locations including Tuzla in Bosnia, Pristina in Kosovo, Aviano, the site of a large joint US-Italian military air base in northern Italy, and Ramstein in Germany, the headquarters of the US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE).

On December 11, 2004, USAFE in Ramstein filed a flight plan for a Learjet 35 to fly from Tuzla to Aviano. The flight plan was copied to 15 addressees including Tuzla airport, Aviano airport and a mysterious recipient labeled “xxxxxxx”.

The aircraft's identity was given as JGO 80, the flight was a Learjet 35 operated by the Department of Defense and the registration was 99999E.

The status of the flight was given as "humanitarian". But it was also given as "state", which means government, and as "protected", which means diplomatic.

During the time the plane was in the air, USAFE changed some of the flight plan timings and at the same time the registration changed. The aircraft metamorphosed into 40112E but continued to be a Learjet 35 and was still JGO 80 and a humanitarian, government and diplomatic flight.

While the Learjet was on the ground at Tuzla, an Ilyushin 76 was loading a cargo of 45 tons of surplus weapons and ammunition sold off by the Bosnian military and destined for Rwanda in defiance of a UN embargo.

The Ilyushin left Tuzla, flew over Italy and headed south in the direction of Africa. The American Learjet took off 55 minutes later.

In a report exposing arms trafficking to war-torn central Africa, Amnesty International has suggested that "US security authorities were engaged in a covert operation to ferry arms to Rwanda in the face of political opposition from the European Union".

Another interesting convergence of flights occurred in February 2004. On February 24, an MC-130P Combat Shadow using the call sign JGO 50 took off from Aviano for an unknown destination.

Two days later, on February 26, the aircraft left Pristina for Tuzla. A short while after that, a Gulfstream 5 executive jet, call sign JGO 47, flew from Tuzla to Aviano, arriving at 23.11 GMT. The next day, a Learjet 35 using the call sign SPAR 92 left Aviano for an unknown destination.

SPAR is short for Special Air Resources, an American military airlift service that transports senior military officers and civilian VIPs.

However, SPAR 92 has been identified as the aircraft which was used by the CIA secretly to transport a Muslim preacher who was kidnapped by CIA agents in Milan in 2003.

A USAFE spokesman last week said American aircraft using the JGO call sign were performing "Joint Guard Operations" for the NATO/European peacekeeping mission in the Balkans.

However, inquiries have shown that the military operation called “Joint Guard” ended in 1998. They also show that none of the US aircraft deployed in it match ones using the JGO call sign.

A spokesman for the ICAO said: “Our records indicate that the designator JGO is still assigned to Jetsgo and the ICAO does not assign the same code to two operators.”

**London Times** staff writer Peter Danssaert contributed to this report.