

# Italy may not seek CIA case extraditions

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**ROME** - The Italian government is signaling it will not press Washington for the extradition of 26 Americans - mostly CIA agents - who were indicted in the alleged kidnapping of an Egyptian cleric in Milan, according to remarks published Monday.

Milan prosecutors want the government to forward to Washington their request for the extradition of the Americans. The previous government of Silvio Berlusconi refused, and Premier Romano Prodi's center-left government has been elusive on the issue.

A decision might be announced Thursday, when Justice Minister Clemente Mastella briefs parliament, although Justice Ministry officials declined to say when a decision would be made.

Mastella suggested in an interview with an Italian newspaper that the government would not seek the Americans' extradition, saying that the friendship with the United States needed to be safeguarded.

"It is an act of institutional caution," he said in an interview with the daily *Il Messaggero*. "And in this decision - for which I already know I will be accused - I see no interference between politics and the judiciary, just the necessary caution."

"Relations with the United States are fundamental. We are friends and we will remain friends," Mastella said.

The government has tried to avoid souring relations with the U.S. following the indictments this month of the 26 and, in a separate case, of an American soldier who shot and killed an Italian intelligence officer in Baghdad in 2005.

A large demonstration against the planned expansion of a U.S. base in northern Italy also fueled speculation of anti-U.S. sentiment here.

The decision on whether or not to forward an extradition request is generally made by the Justice Ministry. But in this case, Mastella has said all along that the decision would be made by the whole government, given the sensitivity of the issue.

The Americans have all left Italy, and it is unlikely they would be turned over for prosecution, even if Italy decided to request their extradition.

The 26 - all but one of them CIA agents - are accused in the kidnapping of Osama Moustafa Hassan Nasr from a Milan street on Feb. 17, 2003.

Nasr was allegedly taken to Aviano Air Base near Venice, Ramstein Air Base in southern Germany, and then to Egypt, where he was held for four years and, according to his lawyer, tortured. He was freed last week by an Egyptian court that ruled his detention was "unfounded."

The trial is scheduled for June and will be the first criminal trial stemming from the CIA's extraordinary rendition program to secretly transfer terror suspects to third countries, where critics say they are tortured.

Five Italians, including the former chief of the military spy agency, have also been indicted in the case.

