

Torture, CIA Rendition Flights. “Interrogations took place” on Diego Garcia, says Bush Administration Official

By [Reprise](#)

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A former senior aide in the Bush administration has said that the British territory of Diego Garcia was used for secret interrogations by the CIA, contradicting years of denials by the UK Government.

Lawrence Wilkerson, who was chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2002-05, told Vice News that his CIA contacts “indicated...that interrogations took place” on Diego Garcia as part of the CIA’s rendition and torture programme.

“[Y]ou might have a case where you simply go in and use a facility at Diego Garcia for a month or two weeks or whatever and you do your nefarious activities there,” he said.

Colonel Wilkerson’s comments contradict years of assurances by British ministers, who have consistently claimed that “no US detainees have ever been held on Diego Garcia.” While the UK conceded that there had been two CIA rendition flights, each carrying a single detainee, that passed through the island in 2002, ministers claimed that was the full extent of Diego Garcia’s involvement.

Col. Wilkerson believes it is likely that the UK – or at least personnel on the island – would have known about the use of Diego Garcia for CIA interrogations: “It’s difficult for me to think that we could do anything there of any duration to speak of without the British knowing – at least the British on the island – knowing what we were doing,”

Col. Wilkerson’s comments come in the wake of a report published late last year by the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), which revealed new details about the CIA’s rendition programme, in which detainees were flown around the world to face torture. The report contained no reference to UK complicity, despite existing evidence in the public domain, leading to questions over whether the British Government lobbied to have certain details removed.

Despite repeated calls, the British Government has still not published flight records relating to Diego Garcia, which could shed light on its involvement in the CIA rendition programme.

The US operates a major military base on Diego Garcia, which it leases from the UK. That lease is due to expire in 2016, and there have been calls from Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee that any renewal of the lease should include “formalis[ing] the existing informal arrangements by which the US seeks permission for rendition or other politically sensitive

operations in Diego Garcia.”

Cori Crider, a director at legal charity Reprieve said: “This suggests the UK Government has not told the whole truth about Diego Garcia’s part in the CIA’s torture programme. Ministers have consistently claimed that only two CIA rendition victims ever landed on Diego Garcia – Lawrence Wilkerson’s comments suggest that either they haven’t been honest with the public, or the US Government hasn’t been honest with them.

“These revelations will also cast suspicion over the British Government’s ongoing refusal to publish flight records for the island. Until we can get a straight answer from the US and UK Government on what went on on Diego Garcia, there should be no renewal of the US lease, which is due to expire next year.”

Notes:

1. For further information, please contact Donald Campbell in Reprieve’s press office: +44 (0) 207 553 8140 / donald[DOT]Campbell[AT]reprieve.org.uk

2. For UK ministers’ comments on Diego Garcia, see then-Foreign Secretary [David Miliband’s 21 February 2008 statement to the Commons](#):

“Contrary to earlier explicit assurances that Diego Garcia had not been used for rendition flights, recent US investigations have now revealed two occasions, both in 2002, when that had in fact occurred. An error in the earlier US records search meant that those cases did not come to light. In both cases, a US plane with a single detainee on board refuelled at the US facility in Diego Garcia. The detainees did not leave the plane, and the US Government have assured us that no US detainees have ever been held on Diego Garcia. US investigations show no record of any other rendition through Diego Garcia or any other overseas territory, or through the UK itself, since then.”

Subsequent ministers and Governments have reaffirmed Mr Miliband’s position, for example Foreign Office Minister [Tobias Ellwood on 11 December 2014](#):

“The US Government has assured us that there have been no cases of rendition through the UK, our Overseas Territories including Diego Garcia (British Indian Ocean Territory), or the Crown Dependencies since 11 September 2001, apart from the two cases in 2002, about which the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the then Member for South Shields, Mr Milliband informed the House in 2008.”

3. The Foreign Affairs Committee’s comments on Diego Garcia, and the need for further agreements over its use in light of the rendition programme, can be found [here](#).

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