

Source: US Used UK Isle for Interrogations

By ADAM ZAGORIN

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The U.S. military base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

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Almost two years have passed since President George W. Bush publicly acknowledged the existence of a CIA program in which agency-leased aircraft fly terrorism suspects between secret prisons and interrogation sites around the world. "This program has helped us to take potential mass murderers off the streets before they have a chance to kill," the President said on Sept. 6, 2006. Since that admission, the White House has declined to elaborate or comment further on the program's

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specifics, although multiple reports have surfaced regarding the existence of secret facilities in Poland and Romania.

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An aerial view of Diego Garcia, an atoll located in the heart of

According to a former senior American official, it appears another locale can be added to the international roster of interrogation sites — one both more obscure and potentially more controversial than the alleged sites in Poland and Romania. The source tells TIME that in 2002 and possibly 2003, the U.S. imprisoned and interrogated one or more terrorism suspects on Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean controlled by the United Kingdom.

The official, a frequent participant in White House Situation Room meetings after Sept. 11 who has since left government, says a CIA counterterrorism official twice said that a high-value prisoner or prisoners were being held and interrogated on the island. The identity of the captive or captives was not made clear. According to this account, the CIA officer surprised attendees by volunteering the information, apparently to demonstrate that the agency was doing its best to obtain valuable intelligence. According to this single source, who requested anonymity because of the classified nature of the discussions, the U.S. may also have kept prisoners on ships within Diego Garcia's territorial waters, a contention the U.S. has long denied. The White House meetings were also attended by a variety of other senior counterterrorism officials.

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TIME discussed the allegation with Richard Clarke, who served as a special adviser to Bush on the National Security Council dealing with counterterrorism until 2003 but is not the source for this story. "In my presence, in the White House, the possibility of using Diego Garcia for detaining high-value targets was discussed," he says. Clarke did not witness a final resolution of the issue, but adds, "Given everything that we know about the Administration's approach to the law on these matters, I find the report that the U.S. did use the island for detention or interrogation entirely credible."

Since leaving the White House, Clarke has written *Against All Enemies*, a scathing critique of the Bush Administration's handling of the war on terrorism. Clarke, who was in charge of U.S.-U.K. cooperation on Diego Garcia in the early '90s, says using the island for interrogations or detentions without British permission "is a violation of U.K. law, as well as of the bilateral agreement governing the island."

Diego Garcia is a tiny island, but its use by the U.S. as a detention or interrogation site has global significance. While the governments of Poland and Romania have faced few domestic consequences for their rumored cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism measures, many in Britain have been voluble in their opposition to what they see as the U.S.'s abrogation of human rights as well as violations of law and British sovereignty. Says the chief spokesman for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: "Our intelligence and counterterrorism relationship with the U.S. is

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vital to the national security of the United Kingdom. We accept U.S. assurances on rendition in good faith. But if others have definitive evidence of rendition through the U.K. or our overseas territories, including Diego Garcia, then we will raise it with the U.S. authorities."

A CIA spokesman says there have been no changes in the agency's position on Diego Garcia since February 2008, when CIA director Michael Hayden admitted that the agency's previous denials about U.S. activities on the island were incorrect. Hayden acknowledged then that the U.S. had inadvertently misled the British government and that two suspects had been on flights that stopped to refuel on Diego Garcia en route to Guantánamo Bay and Morocco in 2002. "Neither of those individuals was ever part of CIA's high-value terrorist-interrogation program," said Hayden. "These were rendition operations, nothing more." Hayden did not identify the suspects who were transited on the island and said that no other U.S. prisoners have been on Diego Garcia since Sept. 11.

A variety of press reports over the years have claimed otherwise, citing evidence that people ranging from alleged Sept. 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to his associate Abu Zubaydah and other suspected terrorists were in American hands there. (Britain leased Diego Garcia, which is halfway between Africa and Southeast Asia, to the United States and barred anyone from entering the island, except by permit, in 1971.) In 2003, [TIME reported that Hambali, alleged architect of the Bali discotheque bombings, was held there.](#)

U.K. foreign secretary David Miliband and his predecessor, Jack Straw, who served under Prime Minister Tony Blair, have both repeatedly denied that the U.S. detained terrorism suspects on British territory.

Hayden's attempt to set the record straight has failed to quiet British protests about American activities on the island. Instead, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition has begun an investigation, raising a variety of pointed questions about the island with Gordon

Brown's Labour government. Speaking to the BBC, Labor MP and Foreign Affairs Committee member Fabian Hamilton said this week, "I think it's important the British government makes plain its ... deep concern that it's not being told the truth and that our territories are being used for these purposes."

In late June, Foreign Secretary Miliband said the U.S. had studied a list of 391 flights compiled by British human rights groups and assured British authorities it had found that no further extraordinary-rendition flights had passed through British territory. But Hamilton's committee insists that Britain can no longer take at face value America's assurances that it is not torturing prisoners and, in a clear reference to Diego Garcia, says the U.K. now bears a "legal and moral obligation" to make certain that no British territory abets American rendition flights or interrogations.

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