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# Report: US continuing rendition secretly holding terror detainees in 'floating prisons'

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The United States has engaged in more than 200 new cases of extraordinary rendition since President Bush vowed to end the practice in 2006 and has operated more than a dozen secretive "floating prisons" aboard military ships at sea, according to a soon-to-be released report from an international human rights organization.



The secret capture, transportation and detention of suspected terrorists in foreign prisons has not abated, despite the uproar over its probable violation of international law, according to the report from human rights group Reprieve, which was noted in *The Guardian* Monday. The detention of prisoners aboard military ships "is raising fresh concern and demand for inquiries" in the US and Great Britain, according to the paper.

Ships that are understood to have held prisoners include the USS Bataan and USS Peleliu. A further 15 ships are suspected of having operated around the British territory of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, which has been used as a military base by the UK and the Americans.

Reprieve will raise particular concerns over the activities of the USS Ashland and the time it spent off Somalia in early 2007 conducting maritime security operations in an effort to capture al-Qaida terrorists.

At this time many people were abducted by Somali, Kenyan and Ethiopian forces in a systematic operation involving regular interrogations by individuals believed to be members of the FBI and CIA. Ultimately more than 100 individuals were "disappeared" to prisons in locations including Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Guantánamo Bay.

The use of US military ships as prisons has been reported before, but never in as much detail. The *Washington Post's* Dana Priest [reported](#) in December 2004 that CIA detention facilities "on ships at sea," but a year later, in her [comprehensive report](#) revealing the CIA's rendition program, she reported that the idea of secretly holding prisoners aboard ships in international waters "was discarded for security and logistics reasons."

A June 2004 [report](#) from the organization Human Rights First revealed suspicions that prisoners were being held aboard the USS Bataan and USS Peleliu.

Reprieve's newest report shows that the use of floating prisons is far more widespread than previously believed. As many as 17 ships were used to house detainees since 2001, according to the report, which claims the suspects are interrogated aboard the ships before being rendered to other secret prisons.

The Reprieve study includes the account of a prisoner released from Guantánamo Bay, who described a fellow inmate's story of detention on an amphibious assault ship. "One of my fellow

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prisoners in Guantánamo was at sea on an American ship with about 50 others before coming to Guantánamo ... he was in the cage next to me. He told me that there were about 50 other people on the ship. They were all closed off in the bottom of the ship. The prisoner commented to me that it was like something you see on TV. The people held on the ship were beaten even more severely than in Guantánamo."

The legal director of the human rights group tells the Guardian that the use of these floating prisons raises serious concerns about whether the military is complying with international law and the extent to which it seems to be going to hide from oversight of its activities.

"They choose ships to try to keep their misconduct as far as possible from the prying eyes of the media and lawyers. We will eventually reunite these ghost prisoners with their legal rights," Reprieve's Clive Stafford Smith tells the paper.

"By its own admission, the US government is currently detaining at least 26,000 people without trial in secret prisons, and information suggests up to 80,000 have been 'through the system' since 2001. The US government must show a commitment to rights and basic humanity by immediately revealing who these people are, where they are, and what has been done to them."



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