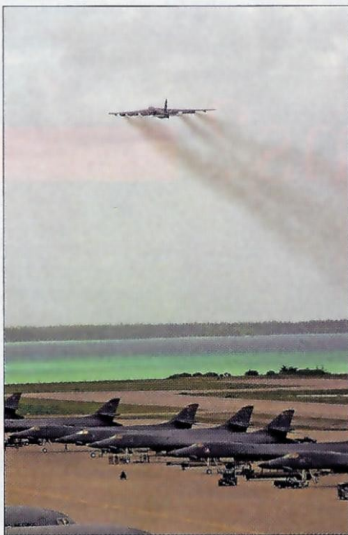


## How they see us: Did Britain get duped over rendition?

The Americans lied to us about their “extraordinary rendition” policy, said Rod Liddle in the London *Sunday Times*. Rendition is the polite term for the American practice of transporting Muslim detainees to “some Third World dump” and torturing them until they “fess up to various real or imagined terrorist offenses.” For years under Tony Blair’s government, British ministers insisted there was no evidence that any of the flights transporting the unfortunate prisoners were refueled on British soil. Yet now the CIA has admitted to two stopovers on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, “which somehow we still own.” So it turns out that we British did in fact collude, however unwittingly, in “the Americans’ filthy and immoral practice.”

The British government claims to be shocked—*shocked*, said the London *Guardian* in an editorial. Foreign Minister David Miliband now says he will press the U.S. for information about all stopovers of U.S. flights that might have been carrying detainees. That’s a good first step. But “why could all this not have been done before? It is hard not to suspect that ministers, here and in Washington, simply lacked the will” to face up to what was going on. One wonders if the British public will ever trust its government—or the Americans—again.

What did we expect? asked the London *Mirror*. The Bush administration lied to its



Diego Garcia: A British territory home to U.S. troops

own people, to say nothing of the United Nations, about Iraq’s nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. It was probably “inevitable” that America’s lies over rendition flights would extend to us, its closest ally. Yet the Blair government backed the Iraq war anyway. “So closely were we aligned to the U.S.’s ill-fated invasion of Iraq and wholesale demolition of Middle

East stability that the stench of each new American outrage normally taints us.”

Besides, “they didn’t tell us!” excuse doesn’t wash, said Shami Chakrabarti in the London *Independent*. “It is easy to feel smug and superior about the Bush administration.” After all, it has admitted to kidnapping and torturing people—something the British government would not do. But “since when was our sovereign government dependent on another to keep us informed about what is happening on U.K. territory?” If British soil was used to abet the transfer of prisoners for torture, Britain is responsible. And the appropriate response would be to rethink our “special relationship” with torturers.

The island of Diego Garcia now stands as a painful symbol of British fecklessness, said Richard Beeston in the London *Times*. Britain allowed the U.S. to build a military base there during the height of the Cold War; we even “removed the indigenous population” to accommodate American security needs. The base has become an important asset for the American military, hosting bombers for missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and harboring ships and submarines. At this point, our sovereignty over the island, for all practical purposes, is gone. “A Union flag may fly over the Resident’s house and British laws might apply on paper, but the real masters are the U.S. Navy and Air Force.”