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The Senate Torture Report released in December 2014 reads worse than even the foulest imaginings of Hieronymus Bosch: sleep deprivation, isolation and sensory deprivation, forced nudity, rectal feeding and rectal rehydration, waterboarding, beatings, threatening detainees with the rape of their mothers and harm of their children, chaining detainees to the ceiling for days clothed in only a diaper, rape, even [human experimentation](#) .

The house of horrors detailed in the Senate report – which even in its over 500 pages doubtless only scratches the surface of the depravity of U.S. “War on Terror” tactics – has been discussed at length. But what is outlined in the report is only part of the story. What the report omits is almost equally important to understanding the lengths that the U.S. will go to maintain and expand its Empire. One such omission: Diego Garcia.

Despite it being one of the most strategically important U.S. military bases on the planet, few have ever even heard of Diego Garcia or the Chagos archipelago on which it sits. The chain of over 50 small islands (today known as the British Indian Ocean Territory, or BIOT) is in the center of the Indian Ocean was once inhabited by a thriving population of indigenous islanders. Today, it is home to the US military base of Camp Justice or the Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia, nicknamed (ironically) the “Footprint of Freedom.” In some ways, the island looks like any American town – a bowling alley, tennis court, library, Post Office, gyms, a bank, a chapel, and even a 9-hole golf course. The B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers, 30 warships, satellite spy station, deep space surveillance system, nuclear storage facility, and the almost 5,000 U.S. servicemen and women that live there give lie to the façade, as do the crumbling homes, school, and church of the island’s previous inhabitants.

The Chagossians – the rightful inhabitants of the islands – have sustained a very different sort of torture. They were not beaten or raped, they were not waterboarded or forcibly deprived of sleep, but they were threatened, they were ripped from their homelands (ancestors, communities, schools, homes), they were forced onto the hull of a ship, and they were dropped on foreign islands and forgotten. And this didn’t happen in long ago history, it happened only 40 years ago – a slow and pronounced torture that continues today.

The first permanent inhabitants of the Chagos Islands were slaves brought by the French to work on coconut plantations around 1783. By 1814, one colonizer replaced another, and the British took control of Mauritius, including the Chagos Islands. In 1968, Mauritius received its independence from the U.K., but for a price. Mauritius would be freed from U.K. rule only if it did not lay claim to the Chagos Islands – thus the British Indian Ocean Territory was born. The U.S. and U.K. developed an informal lease agreement that would allow the U.S. to use Diego Garcia for a military base – prime real estate situated with eyes on the Middle East, Asia, and Russia. The agreement was hid from both U.S. Congress and the British Parliament and in direct contradiction with UN resolution 1514 and international law, which stated that colonies being decolonized had to be done as a whole – not carved up for profit.

The U.S./U.K. terror campaign was launched to have the islands “swept” and “sanitized” of the Chagossian people, first through an embargo aimed at starving the population out. Without basic supplies like milk, salt, and medication, many Chagossians left. In the Spring of 1971, officials in the U.S. military gave the order to round up all of the pet dogs on the island and have them killed. 1,000s of pet dogs were murdered – some taken straight from screaming children – gassed with exhaust fumes from military vehicles. The Chagossians that had held out were then rounded onto a ship allowed to take only one suitcase. The horses took precedence and were put on deck. The Chagossians – women and children – slept in the hull on bird fertilizer – bird shit.

Marie Lisette Talate, a Chagossian, recalled in the documentary written and directed by John Pilger, *Stealing a Nation*, “All of us Chagossians, women, children, it was ourselves who were the animals on the Nordvaer.”

They were taken to the Seychelles and kept in prison cells until finally being transported to Mauritius where many Chagossians remain today. They were dropped there with nothing – no food, money, housing, jobs, water, or any institutional support in a country unknown to them. Unable to provide for themselves, many Chagossians began to die. Malnutrition, disease, and drugs plagued the community. But many islanders say that the Chagossian people were dying of *sagren*, sadness.

Marie Rita Elysée Bancoult, one of the Chagossian people, recounted her life after the forced relocation in an interview with Vine. After learning that they would never be returning home, her husband, Julien, suffered a stroke and died five years later. In the years that followed, her sons Alex, 38, Eddy, 36, and Renault, 11, also died.

“My life has been buried...It’s as if I was pulled from my paradise to put me in hell. Everything here you need to buy. I don’t have the means to buy them. My children go without eating. How am I supposed to bear this life?”

This type of torture may leave no visible scars, but it is no less effective. The Chagossians have seen their homes destroyed, have left behind their land and belongings, have abandoned the graves of their ancestors, watched as their pets were ripped away and killed, and were left – deserted – on the shores of foreign lands, the forgotten refuse of Empire.

The torture continues today, as the Chagossians are ping-ponged back and forth between the two governments. The U.K. claims that the U.S. will not allow the islanders to live on the islands due to national security concerns of the base. Meanwhile the U.S. obviates responsibility, claiming it has no jurisdiction over the islands and that the Chagossians must direct their requests to the Crown. Justice, it seems, is only for the few.

What’s more, they must watch from afar as their homeland is destroyed and denigrated by the U.S. military. In addition to a recent admission by a senior Bush administration official to VICE News that the island of Diego Garcia has been used as a “transit site” where people were “interrogated from time to time,” studies of the waters surrounding the Diego Garcia military base as well have revealed massive environmental harms caused by the base, including decades of contamination from wastewater sewage, which the U.S. has been discharging into the water since at least the 1980s. The dumping of the treated sewage waters have resulted in elevated levels of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphates up to four times higher than normal and may be causing damage to the coral reefs.

Just the construction of Diego Garcia alone has eliminated much of the vegetation coverage on the island and decimated the coral reef – forests were bulldozed and coral reefs were blasted and dredged. As with most military bases, the usual nuclear contamination, fuel spills of millions of gallons of oil, carcinogenic pollutants in the soil and water, dangerous underwater sonars that harm marine life, and a litany of unexploded munitions plague the island. And yet, many argue against the Chagossian return to their native lands on environmental grounds, the implication being that the U.S. military is a better guardian of these islands than the people who had lived there in harmony for generations. The implicit racism in this notion is hard to ignore.

Despite the setbacks, Chagossians continue to fight, and while the U.S. and U.K. governments have continued to abdicate responsibility for their complicity in these crimes against humanity, the Chagossians seem better positioned for a return than at any other point in history. The U.K. government recently commissioned a [feasibility study](#) to determine whether a settlement may be achievable on the islands, which found “no insurmountable legal obstacles” to the Chagossians returning home. At the same time, negotiations over the military base are up for discussion between the U.S. and U.K. to decide if the informal lease of the land will be extended for the U.S. military.

The decades of torture imposed upon these people has yet to be adequately addressed or remunerated, and while the international community has expressed outrage over the U.S. use of some of the most vile and perverted means of torture against prisoners in rendition sites across the globe, the same international outcry must be directed at the decades of human rights abuses imposed upon the people of the Chagos Islands. Torture, after all, is not just carried out with drills, straps, and chains; there is also a psychological torture – the torture of neglect and marginalization that renders a people invisible – that can do just as much damage.