

Some were grabbed off the streets, blindfolded and bundled into the back of a car. Others were detained at airports and taken away by force on small private jets, often to secret locations in countries known for torture. Extraordinary rendition, a kind of state-sanctioned kidnapping that breaches international law, became a popular method used by US authorities to capture terror suspects in the years following the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. But only now are full details about the practice, and the many corporations that have profited from it, beginning to emerge.

In recent weeks human rights group Reprieve has been publicising some of the companies that helped organise the renditions, most carried out under the authority of the George W Bush administration between 2001 and 2008. Among the firms are military contractors such as Virginia-based DynCorp, paid to organise the logistics of rendition flights to places like Thailand, Egypt, Syria and Morocco. But there are also less conspicuous firms that played a key role, some with strong UK connections. One is Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), an IT firm that has held contracts with the NHS and Transport for London.

"The role played by the prime contracting companies – DynCorp and CSC – was extremely significant," says Crofton Black, a Reprieve investigator. "They basically ran a significant proportion of the entire project in terms of helping move people around between detention sites. The various operating companies that provided the airplanes and crews are significant too, because it's unlikely these guys didn't know what was happening in their planes."

According to Reprieve, court documents show that CSC organised rendition flights on behalf of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to carry prisoners between a number of locations, including the notorious Guantánamo Bay detention camp and secret "black sites" in North Africa, South East Asia and Eastern Europe. It is alleged that the prisoners were held incommunicado and tortured during lengthy interrogations. CSC, which turned over £10.2 billion in



The practice of secretly flying terror suspects to places they can be tortured has been a blot on the West's human rights record since it was unearthed following 9/11. Now new revelations about the organisations involved are coming to light. By **Ryan Gallagher**

2011, has a string of British investors, including Barclays, Lloyds, HSBC and Prudential.

Earlier this year, Reprieve wrote and asked CSC to sign a pledge promising that it would not be involved in rendition, secret detention and torture in the future. The company declined, saying that individual pledges on specific topics were "not within the framework" of its existing corporate responsibility programme. Reprieve is now writing to investors in the company asking them to "confirm whether investing in companies implicated in torture is compatible with their ethical commitments".

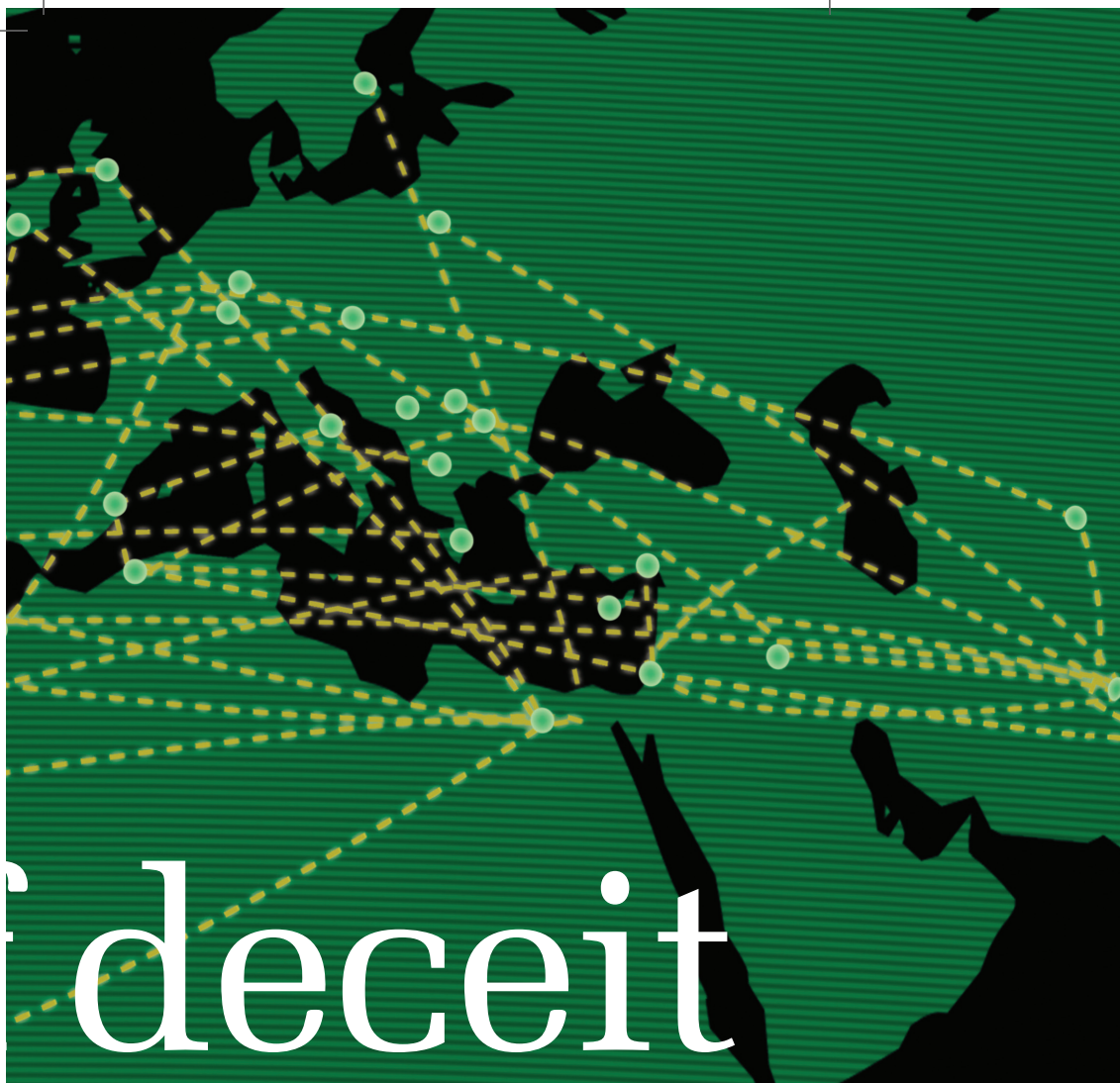
"CSC has explicitly refused to rule out taking on such missions in the future," Black says. "It's fine for the investors to say, with the benefit of hindsight, that 'we didn't know such

missions were going on in 2005'. But they can't say that anymore."

New information about the scale of Britain's role in rendition has also been revealed. In the wake of the civil war in Libya last year, documents were uncovered showing that in 2004 MI6 had helped US authorities abduct Libyan dissident Abdelhakim Belhadj and his pregnant wife in Bangkok, where they were flown to Tripoli and abused by Muammar Gaddafi's secret police.

Belhadj is now suing MI6 and then foreign secretary Jack Straw, MP for Blackburn, for complicity in torture and misfeasance in public office. Government sources say MI6's role in rendition was part of "ministerially authorised government policy" – but Straw has gone on record claiming that "no foreign secretary can know all the details of what its intelligence agencies are doing at any one time".

In other countries too the repercussions of extraordinary rendition continue to be felt. In March, Poland became the first EU country to indict one of its officials over CIA renditions, with the country's prime minister promising an end to "under-the-table deals". It is alleged that a military garrison in the north east of Poland was used as a CIA black site where terror suspects were interrogated and subjected to



TORTURE BY PROXY

Human rights groups say rendition is “torture by proxy” and argue transferring terror suspects to third-party countries known for brutal interrogation techniques is part of a deliberate strategy to avoid American legal standards. The practice is prohibited by the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment, ratified by the US in 1992.

A public inquiry into British security forces’ role in the mistreatment of terrorism suspects since 9/11 – including involvement in extraordinary rendition – was announced by the government in 2010. However, due to ongoing police investigations it was cancelled in January this year. In a statement, the justice minister Ken Clarke said: “The government fully intends to hold an independent, judge-led inquiry once all police investigations have concluded, to establish the full facts and draw a line under these issues.”

waterboarding, a kind of torture that makes a person feel as if they are drowning.

More revelations may soon emerge as part of a major new academic effort to pull together all the information that has so far published about extraordinary rendition. Launched by University of Kent academic Dr Ruth Blakeley last month, the Rendition Project is studying reams of court documents and flight logs, collating data about hundreds of victims of rendition and secret detention since 2001. It hopes to chronicle the 45 countries, 6,500 flights and 140 aircraft allegedly connected to the CIA renditions programme.

“I don’t think the world is very well informed about the types of things that governments in the US and UK do,” Blakeley says, explaining her motivation for starting the project. “On both sides of the pond current governments don’t really want to carry out investigations [into rendition] because their own records are not that squeaky clear either.”

Prior to coming in to office in 2008, US president Barack Obama condemned many of his predecessor’s more aggressive counter-terror policies. He barred waterboarding and signed an executive order entitled “Ensuring

The rendition programme could have involved 6,500 flights, 140 aircraft and 45 countries

Lawful Interrogations” to increase oversight. But he didn’t outlaw extraordinary renditions.

Obama has also significantly heightened the use of unmanned military drones to bomb suspected militants in places such as Pakistan and Yemen. Some argue that, to avoid using the costly and controversial rendition method, Obama has favoured drone strikes – killing rather than capturing.

“It’s expensive to detain people in prison,” Blakeley says. “A lot of

people say drone attacks are Obama’s preference because you just get rid of the people and you don’t have all the messy stuff afterwards to deal with... It avoids the public outcry around rendition.”

London-based human rights group Cage Prisoners, founded by Birmingham-born Moazzam Begg, a former Guantánamo detainee, believes rendition is still happening today but on a lesser scale. The group, which campaigns to raise awareness about individuals held extra-judicially as part of the so-called war on terror, argues public inquiries into extraordinary rendition are the only way to redress the abuses of international law that became commonplace after 2001.

“There’s no way that we can adequately compensate those who had these things happen to them,” says Asim Qureshi, executive director at Cage Prisoners. “In the grand scheme of things, for those people inquiries mean nothing, because they’ve already had their lives ruined by renditions.

“But for the future they become important, because this is effectively the way the human rights industry can fight back – by bringing these legal cases, by having the process of accountability, and by really placing the emphasis back on due process and the rule of law.” ■

LIVERPOOL FC LINK

A private jet owned by Phillip Morse, vice-president of Liverpool FC’s parent company Fenway Sports Group, was hired to a firm working for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) more than 55 times between 2002 and 2005. It was used to extraordinarily render terrorism suspects from locations in Europe to countries including Thailand, Malta, Egypt, Libya, Djibouti and Azerbaijan, where they were allegedly tortured during interrogation.

In 2003, Morse’s jet was used to render a Muslim cleric known as Abu Omar from Italy to Egypt. Omar, who American authorities accused of plotting terrorism, was snatched by CIA agents on a Milan street in broad daylight. He was subsequently flown to Egypt and imprisoned in Tura, 20 miles south of Cairo, where he claims he was twice raped, suffered electro shock treatment and lost the hearing in his left ear due to repeated beatings. Omar was eventually released by the Egyptian government in 2007, after a state security court ruled that his detention was “unfounded”. An Italian judge later convicted, in absentia, 23 CIA operatives over the kidnapping.