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Australia complicit in illegal military detention

Despite repeated denials by the Department of Defence, new evidence is emerging that points to Australia playing an “integral” role in the illegal detention of prisoners in Iraq.

“The Australian Government has always maintained it had no involvement in so-called secret prisons in Iraq,” the chief executive of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), Edward Santow, said today.

“But an official US report obtained by the *Guardian* suggests otherwise. The report apparently says that the Australian military played an ‘integral part of operations’ at a secret Iraqi prison known as H1. If true, this is deeply troubling,” Mr Santow said.

So-called secret prisons operate contrary to the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. They don't allow prisoners to be formally registered and they don't allow visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is unclear whether prisoners are treated humanely in such facilities.

PIAC has been investigating Australia's role in Iraqi military detentions.

“PIAC has obtained a number of previously classified and [confidential documents](#) relating to Australia's involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. PIAC believes that these documents contain a number of important revelations,” Mr Santow said.

“The Australian Government deliberately tried to [avoid its obligations](#) under international law in relation to alleged combatants captured by the Australian Defence Force in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“Australia's detainee policy had disastrous consequences.

“The Australian Government has said that the first it knew of prisoner mistreatment was when details of the Abu Ghraib torture and mistreatment became public.

“But PIAC’s investigations have showed that the Australian military knew about the disturbing practices in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere well before the media broke the story.

“These latest revelations raise further questions about what Australian authorities knew, how the Australian Defence Force was involved, and when.

“Despite Department of Defence denials, it is becoming clear that Australia was complicit in breaches of international law.

“We need a Royal Commission to get to the bottom of these allegations, and to ensure that the Australian military now complies fully with the Geneva Conventions and international law,” Mr Santow said.

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