

THE LOGIC BEHIND THE SCRIPT “THE REMOVAL OF CLOTHING IS NOT NUDITY”

Watching the lawyers who established the torture regime a few weeks ago was particularly stunning in one respect. Jim Haynes, Dougie Feith, Jane Dalton, Diane Beaver—all of them at some point in the hearings repeated the non-sensical claim, “the removal of clothing is not nudity” (or naked).

In this video, for example, Jerrold Nadler asks Dougie Feith,

Nadler: How could you force someone to be naked and undergo a twenty hour interrogation?

Feith: It doesn't say naked. It doesn't say naked. This is why the words...

Nadler: Removal of clothing doesn't mean naked?

Feith: Removal of clothing is different from naked.

Haynes repeated the mantra in his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Haynes: Some conflation. Two of items for Qahtani included clothing and use of phobia. What was approved by SecDef. Widely held understanding of what was in those two categories. Use of dogs not intended to be dogs in interrogation room with detainee. Muzzled dogs in perimeter. Removal of clothing not nudity. You then jumped to dogs in room and naked people.

Jane Dalton explained that in context (remember, she's talking about a two page memo with no

footnotes) the removal of clothing is not nudity.

Dalton: If conducted with oversight. In context in which discussed. Removal of clothing not nudity, working dogs not dogs unmuzzled and snarling, stress limited to standing for four hours. When you put them together, those techniques could be consistent with domestic and intl law.

And Claire McCaskill gave Jane Dalton and Diane Beaver a short reading lesson.

McCaskill Reading memo. You understand words matter. Removal of clothing. It says Using detainee phobias such as fear of dogs. I'm trying to figure out as a lawyer, how that does not envision naked people having dogs sicced on them. How does that not occur?

Beaver When you develop a plan, if someone had said, lets sic the dogs on them. That did not happen.

McCaskill Dogs were used with naked people.

Beaver Not at Gitmo

McCaskill Within our military. It happened/

Beaver I can't comment..

McCaskill Ms Dalton

Dalton: Those approved for Gitmo and did not involve nudity.

McCaskill Removal of clothing. When you were discussing safeguards. Did any one talk putting in the word all. If I saw removal of clothing and I was trying to get info, how would anyone know?

Dalton General Miller said it did not involve nudity.

McCaskill there's nothing here that would say [limit] removal of clothing. It's not in there.

Aside from the sheer idiocy of the claim, after watching both those hearings I was haunted by the seeming formulaic quality of the claim: removal of clothing is not nudity, removal of clothing is not naked, as if the repetition of the phrase would somehow divorce the actual nakedness seen everywhere in our torture regime from the authorization for that nakedness.

But a couple of passages from Jane Mayer's book—describing the Standard Operating Procedures that came out of the approval—make it clear that the reason why the DOD approval doesn't specify nakedness has more to do with the institution of "learned helplessness" rather than any carelessness about language. That is, the reason why DOD doesn't put any limits on when removal of clothing becomes nudity is because the goal is to put the interrogator in complete control of the detainee. As Mayer writes:

A secret government document, which was originally written for use in Guantanamo, gave further credence to the Bush Administration's official use of forced nakedness as a psychological weapon. "In addition to degradation of the detainee, stripping can be used to demonstrate the omnipotence of the captor or to debilitate the detainee," it said. The document advised interrogators to "tear clothing from detainees by firmly pulling downward against buttoned buttons and seams. Tearing motions shall be downward to prevent pulling the detainee off balance." (273)

She describes how this "removal of clothing is not nudity" translated for Abu Zubaydah (which, admittedly, did not rely on the DOD SOPs):

... the CIA interrogators also announced they planned to become Zubaydah's "God." They reportedly took his clothing as punishment, and reduced his human interaction to a single daily visit in which they would say simply, "You know what I want," and then leave. (168)

You see, the word games these monsters are playing are all about playing "god" with other human beings. It's not the status of nudity that they're so much interested in. It's the process, the power, the ability to remove another human's clothing at will.