

JOHN RIZZO PRE-EMPTS THE OPR REPORT

As we speak, the CIA—including, by all appearances, John Rizzo—is reviewing the Office of Professional Responsibility’s report on OLC’s torture memos.

As if on cue, the LAT has a story profiling him. (Also, as if on cue, I take up Spencer’s bait.)

Given its scope, the OPR report must focus on two different periods: the months leading up to the August 2002 OLC memos, and the months leading up to the May 2005 OLC memos (as well as, probably, the time leading up to the March 2003 OLC memo, but that was a DOD memo, not a CIA one).

Those are, not surprisingly, the two years, at least, that appear in this story. We are told—with no sourcing—that Rizzo never dealt with legal questions about torture before the capture of Abu Zubaydah.

Rizzo had never dealt with legal questions about interrogation until officials from the agency’s Counterterrorism Center approached him in 2002 with a list of techniques they wanted to employ to get a suspected Al Qaeda captive, Abu Zubaydah, to talk. Among them was waterboarding, in which a prisoner is strapped to a plank and doused to make him feel he is drowning.

This would suggest the War Council—David Addington, Jim Haynes, John Yoo, and Rizzo—weren’t already talking about torture in December 2001, when Mitchell and Jessen first started developing their torture program. It would also suggest that Rizzo never weighed in on the treatment of Ibn Sheikh al-Libi and others rendered to torture. It would repeat the same myth the Cheney apologists like to tell—that these ideas bubbled up from CTC,

rather than were imposed from the top.

It's an interesting story. If true, then I wonder why it's taking CIA so long to review that OPR report?

And then there are the 2005 dates. As Spencer describes, at some point in 2005 Rizzo personally observed the Salt Pit.

Rizzo kept close watch on the interrogation program. Once, during a 2005 trip by senior CIA executives to Kabul, Afghanistan, Rizzo disappeared from the crowd after dinner with Afghan intelligence officials.

It wasn't until the next day, one participant remembered, that Rizzo revealed he had arranged a midnight trip to the Salt Pit, a secret CIA prison on the outskirts of the city, to see detention operations up close.

A CIA detainee had died at the site in 2002. But Rizzo came away newly assured that the operation was well-run, former officials said.

The story would have you believe that Rizzo thought, in 2005, that the torture we were conducting at the Salt Pit was all hunky dory. But the same article would have you believe that John Rizzo (and not Robert Grenier, who was fired in 2006 for his opposition to torture) led the push to end the torture program.

As the controversy escalated, Rizzo worked to contain the damage. Goss said that he ordered the interrogation program halted in late 2005, based largely on Rizzo's advice.

So here's the same nice story already told—that Porter Goss fought the White House to end torture—with the added wrinkle that Rizzo was the one pushing it.

Call me crazy, but that doesn't make any sense to me (though it's possible that John Rizzo offered CIA the radical advice that when Congress makes a law saying you shouldn't do something, you shouldn't).

Moreover, I wonder whether the news about Rizzo's trip to the Salt Pit came out now to pre-empt some information we may learn from the OPR report? Just curious. Did John Rizzo bop down for his visit to the Salt Pit during the drafting of the 2005 memos, when Cheney and Addington were pressuring Bradbury and Gonzales to approve the memos before Jim Comey could look too close at the facts behind them? Did John Rizzo see Abu Faraj al-Libbi in the Salt Pit sometime in May 2005, for example?

I don't know the answers to those questions. But I do get the sense that Porter Goss wanted to get the following message out just as Rizzo leaves the agency.

"In many ways John was sort of martyred to political correctness for doing the hard mission for the agency," said former CIA Director Porter J. Goss, who described Rizzo as a "rock solid" advisor and pushed his nomination to be general counsel.