

JOSE RODRIGUEZ BRAGS THAT HE GOT TERRORISTS TO DENY THINGS USING TORTURE

Jose Rodriguez, the guy who as head of Counterterrorism Center oversaw the torture program and who as head of Clandestine Services had the videotapes that would prove torturers exceeded torture guidelines destroyed, has chosen this moment to give his first public interview. And according to Rodriguez, torture was key in finding Osama bin Laden.

“Information provided by KSM and Abu Faraj al Libbi about Bin Laden’s courier was the lead information that eventually led to the location of [bin Laden’s] compound and the operation that led to his death,” Rodriguez tells TIME in his first public interview. Rodriguez was cleared of charges in the video destruction investigation last year.

Of course, as the NYT reports but doesn’t note the implication of, the intelligence KSM and al-Libi gave interrogators were unreliable denials.

Because Mr. Mohammed and Mr. Libi had both steered interrogators away from Mr. Kuwaiti, C.I.A. officials concluded that they must be protecting him for an important reason.

“Think about circles of information – there’s an inner circle they would protect with their lives,” said an American official who was briefed on the C.I.A. analysis. “The crown jewels of Al Qaeda were the whereabouts of Bin Laden and his operational security.”

That’s what we’re arguing about, folks: whether

the torture program was so effective that it led two terrorists to protect particular information after they'd been tortured.

I guess Jose Rodriguez doesn't think he could have gotten KSM and al-Libi to deny this information without torture?

To be fair to Rodriguez, that's not what he said al-Libi—whom he describes as having provided the most important intelligence—gave us. Rather, al-Libi provided information that convinced Rodriguez that Osama bin Laden wasn't all that important.

Faraj told interrogators that the courier would only carry messages from bin Laden to the outside world every two months or so. "I realized that bin Laden was not really running his organization. You can't run an organization and have a courier who makes the rounds every two months," Rodriguez says. "So I became convinced then that this was a person who was just a figurehead and was not calling the shots, the tactical shots, of the organization. So that was significant."

As a reminder, Abu Faraj al-Libi would have provided this information some time in 2005—probably June or July. In late 2005, CIA closed Alec Station, its bin Laden unit, having decided that al Qaeda was no longer as hierarchical as it used to be, and so pursuing bin Laden was not that important.

The unit, known as Alec Station, was disbanded late last year and its analysts reassigned within the C.I.A. Counterterrorist Center, the officials said.

The decision is a milestone for the agency, which formed the unit before Osama bin Laden became a household name and bolstered its ranks after the Sept. 11 attacks, when President Bush pledged

to bring Mr. bin Laden to justice “dead or alive.”

The realignment reflects a view that Al Qaeda is no longer as hierarchical as it once was, intelligence officials said, and a growing concern about Qaeda-inspired groups that have begun carrying out attacks independent of Mr. bin Laden and his top deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Agency officials said that tracking Mr. bin Laden and his deputies remained a high priority, and that the decision to disband the unit was not a sign that the effort had slackened.

All of which suggests that that great piece of intelligence al-Libi gave us—that OBL’s couriers would only check in every two months which meant he was just a figurehead—led directly to the CIA’s decision to stop focusing on bin Laden.

And if that’s the case, then al-Libi’s torture didn’t lead us to OBL; rather, it led us to stop searching in concerted manner for OBL.

No wonder Jose Rodriguez has taken this moment to start spinning wildly.