

PANETTA: NO DETAINEE IN CIA CUSTODY REVEALED COURIER'S REAL NAME

Greg Sargent has liberated the letter that Leon Panetta sent to John McCain to explain how torture didn't find Osama bin Laden. Sargent has three paragraphs of the letter (go read them), but here is the operative passage.

Let me further point out that we first learned about the facilitator/courier's nom de guerre from a detainee not in CIA custody in 2002. It is also important to note that some detainees who were subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques attempted to provide false or misleading information about the facilitator/courier. These attempts to falsify the facilitator/courier's role were alerting.

In the end, no detainee in CIA custody revealed the facilitator/courier's full true name or specific whereabouts. This information was discovered through other intelligence means.

Consider the significance of this letter. The Director of the CIA claims no credit for the two biggest intelligence leads that led to OBL (mind you, he oversaw that actual op to get OBL, so CIA did have a big role). While this letter doesn't say it, McCain's two statements (which I presume reflect further conversations with Panetta) reveal that the detainee who first discussed Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti was interrogated by another country.

The first mention of the name Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, as well as a description of him as an important member of Al-Qaeda, came from a detainee held in another

country. The United States did not conduct this detainee's interrogation, nor did we render him to that country for the purpose of interrogation. We did not learn Abu Ahmed's real name or alias as a result of waterboarding or any 'enhanced interrogation technique' used on a detainee in U.S. custody.

And we know from other descriptions that we got Abu Ahmed's real name and location via SIGINT. Rather bizarrely, Pakistan even claims to have collected and handed over those intercepts to us (doesn't the NSA have the best intercept capability in the Milky Way?).

The Sunday Telegraph has learned that the ISI, which prides itself on arresting a series of key terrorists including the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, has now broken off relations with the Central Intelligence Agency.

"They are furious. They handed over telephone intercepts in 2009 that were crucial in leading to bin Laden's courier – the key breakthrough in the hunt," said a source briefed on relations between the two countries.

"Then four months ago they were told there was nothing in it, it was what the Americans called a 'cold lead'. Since then they have been left out completely out of the loop."

In addition, we also used various means of tracking him (presumably including more SIGINT and satellite imagery).

Note, too, that in this passage at least, Panetta doesn't even take credit for the intelligence provided by Hassan Ghul about the true role of al-Kuwaiti in al Qaeda. As McCain describes he, he had to learn that from SSCI staffers.

I have sought further information from the staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and they confirm for me that, in fact, the best intelligence gained from a CIA detainee – information describing Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti's real role in Al-Qaeda and his true relationship to Osama bin Laden – was obtained through standard, non-coercive means, not through any 'enhanced interrogation technique.'

In other words, the CIA Director is not even bragging about stuff that did come from a CIA detainee (though I've raised my doubts about when he was transferred into CIA custody).

Now, maybe Panetta is doing this to appease the Pakistanis. While we can't publicly say the SIGINT came from them (and possibly the first detainee interrogation intelligence), if CIA doesn't claim credit it sort of makes it easier for others to do so.

But think about the other implication of this. Panetta has a date with—among others—Jeff Sessions and Scott Brown for confirmation hearings to become Secretary of Defense. This letter—and the fact it was liberated just in time to spoil AEI's torture fest—is not going to make things easy for Panetta among the nuttier Republicans on the committee and in the Senate more generally.

Good thing the guy he wrote the letter to is the Ranking Member on the Senate Armed Services Committee.