

SUB-HEADING: WHITE HOUSE PANICS

As Scarecrow pointed out in the last thread, the White House has done something colossally stupid: they've objected to the sub-heading of the NYT's story revealing the involvement of David Addington and Alberto Gonzales (among others) in the destruction of the terror tapes.

The White House on Wednesday took the rare step of publicly asking *The New York Times* to change the sub-headline of a story on the destruction of CIA tapes showing the interrogations of suspected terrorists.

At issue is the story's sub-headline that stated: "White House Role Was Wider Than It Said." The White House called this sub-headline inaccurate and demanded that it be corrected.

[snip]

The White House argues that the newspaper article implies that "there is an effort to mislead in this matter," adding that such a conclusion is "pernicious and troubling."

They appear to be making a fairly narrow objection. Since they have not publicly, officially, responded to the news that someone destroyed the terror tapes, they can't be described to have "said" anything. Never mind that someone has been shopping the cover story that only Harriet Miers was involved in the deliberations on the tapes.

And, as we might expect from the Bill Keller- and Pinch Sulzberger-led NYT, they have obliged with the White House's request and changed the entire title to: "Bush Lawyers Discussed Fate of C.I.A.Tapes." Given that the point of the sub-headline was that the story had been floated, by

someone, that Harriet was the only one involved in the terror tape deliberations, I think the more appropriate response would have been to demand that the source for those original allegations either publicly retract them, or consider his source confidentiality sacrificed. Because, as it is, the NYT's change of headlines coddles the people who have been pitching the cover story about Harriet.

But I'm also interested in the White House's ham-handed response to this. The last time they handled a public allegation this badly was, oh, around July 8, 2003, when on Dick Cheney's apparent order, Scooter Libby outed a CIA spy to (the NYT again!) Judy Miller. Thus far, they haven't tried to out any of the parties involved—at least as far as we know. But as with Joe Wilson's allegations, they are responding in such a panicked mode that the most logical conclusion is that they are, truly, panicked by the possibility that they will have to answer for the destruction of the torture tapes.

Mr. Mukasey—can we return to the discussion of a Special Prosecutor for this issue?

Update: Oh, this is rich. Here's the White House statement:

The *New York Times* today implies that the White House has been misleading in publicly acknowledging or discussing details related to the CIA's decision to destroy interrogation tapes.

The sub-headline of the story inaccurately says that the "White House Role Was Wider Than It Said", and the story states that "...the involvement of White House officials in the discussions before the destruction of the tapes...was more extensive than Bush administration officials have acknowledged."

Under direction from the White House General Counsel while the Department of Justice and the CIA Inspector General conduct a preliminary inquiry, we have

not publicly commented on facts relating to this issue, except to note President Bush's immediate reaction upon being briefed on the matter. Furthermore, we have not described – neither to highlight, nor to minimize – the role or deliberations of White House officials in this matter.

The *New York Times*' inference that there is an effort to mislead in this matter is pernicious and troubling, and we are formally requesting that NYT correct the sub-headline of this story.

It will not be surprising that this matter will be reported with a reliance on un-named sources and individuals lacking a full availability of the facts – and, as the *New York Times* story itself acknowledges, some of these sources will have wildly conflicting accounts of the facts. We will instead focus our efforts on supporting the preliminary inquiry underway, where facts can be gathered without bias or influence and later disseminated in an appropriate fashion.

We will continue to decline to comment on this issue, **and in response to misleading press reports.** [my emphasis]

First, in response to "misleading press reports," you're going to do what? Are you going to finish that sentence? Did someone forget to have this reviewed by someone smarter than Dana "Pig Missile" Perino?

And where does this Administration get off, after leaking Valerie Wilson's cover as an un-named source, getting all skittish about the use of un-named sources? Not to mention the same Administration that brought us to war by laundering classified information through un-named sources.