

2004

It seems the NYT was not the only one who knew that Addington, Gonzales, and Bellinger got a briefing on the terror tapes. It appears the whole SSCI knew that too.

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden told lawmakers privately last week that three White House lawyers were briefed in 2004 about the existence of videotapes showing the interrogation of two al-Qaeda figures, and they urged the agency to be "cautious" about destroying the tapes, according to sources familiar with his classified testimony.

The three White House officials present at the briefing were David S. Addington, then Vice President Cheney's chief counsel; Alberto R. Gonzales, then White House counsel; and John B. Bellinger III, then the top lawyer at the National Security Council, according to Hayden's closed-door testimony before the Senate intelligence committee.

When told that some high-ranking CIA officials were demanding that the tapes be destroyed, the White House lawyers "consistently counseled caution," said one U.S. official familiar with Hayden's testimony. Another source said that Harriet E. Miers followed up with a similar recommendation in 2005, making her the fourth White House lawyer "urging caution" on the action.

The ambiguity in the phrasing of Hayden's account left unresolved key questions about the White House's role. While his account suggests an ambivalent White House view toward the tapes, other intelligence officials recalled White House officials being more emphatic at the first meeting that the videos should not be destroyed.

Also unexplained is why the issue was discussed at the White House without apparent resolution for more than a year.

But note what's funny about this story (and therefore, about Hayden's testimony). Hayden says this briefing took place in 2004, not 2003, when we know the Gang of Four got a briefing.

Yesterday's NYT story suggested the discussions started in 2003.

At least four top White House lawyers took part in discussions with the Central Intelligence Agency between 2003 and 2005 about whether to destroy videotapes showing the secret interrogations of two operatives from Al Qaeda, according to current and former administration and intelligence officials.

So which is it? Did the briefings start in 2003? And if so, did Hayden tell the SSCI about those briefings?