

9/11 COMMISSION DECRIES OBSTRUCTION

Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton must have been waiting all holiday long to launch this grenade against the Administration just as Congress returns and the torture tape inquiry heats up.

MORE than five years ago, Congress and President Bush created the 9/11 commission.

[snip]

The commission's mandate was sweeping and it explicitly included the intelligence agencies. But the recent revelations that the C.I.A. destroyed videotaped interrogations of Qaeda operatives leads us to conclude that the agency failed to respond to our lawful requests for information about the 9/11 plot. Those who knew about those videotapes – and did not tell us about them – obstructed our investigation.

The op-ed goes on to lay out the key details included in Zelikow's memo, the chronology of dates when the 9/11 Commission asked for interrogation records that would have included the torture tapes the CIA later went on to destroy. Of note, Kean and Hamilton clearly include the White House among those who obstructed the Commission's work.

There could have been absolutely no doubt in the mind of anyone at the C.I.A. – or the White House – of the commission's interest in any and all information related to Qaeda detainees involved in the 9/11 plot. Yet no one in the administration ever told the commission of the existence of videotapes of detainee interrogations.

I'll be curious to see whether and how Kean and

Hamilton can ratchet up attention on this issue. Unlike the several judges who were ignored in their requests regarding the tapes, Kean and Hamilton are in a position to really hammer this issue. And unlike Congress (who appears to have been lied to about matters depicted in the tapes), Kean and Hamilton seem willing to call obstruction obstruction. They do acknowledge that they aren't the ones who will get to investigate the torture tape destruction.

As a legal matter, it is not up to us to examine the C.I.A.'s failure to disclose the existence of these tapes. That is for others. What we do know is that government officials decided not to inform a lawfully constituted body, created by Congress and the president, to investigate one the greatest tragedies to confront this country. We call that obstruction.

But it's probably worth noting that they're launching this grenade from Mukasey's home town.