

YET MORE COMMUNICATIONS DIRTY BUSINESS: KARL ROVE AND PHILIP ZELIKOW

By this point, it should surprise no one that Karl Rove does a lot of dirty business using his phone and blackberry. Apparently, that extends to softening the reports of the 9/11 Commission: a Philip Shenon book coming out in February will reveal that Rove carried on back-channel discussions with Philip Zelikow, the Commission's Executive Director (h/t Steven Aftergood), for some time after the Commission told him to stop speaking with Senior Administration Officials.

In a revelation bound to cast a pall over the 9/11 Commission, Philip Shenon will report in a forthcoming book that the panel's executive director, Philip Zelikow, engaged in "surreptitious" communications with presidential adviser Karl Rove and other Bush administration officials during the commission's 20-month investigation into the 9/11 attacks.

[snip]

Karen Heitkotter, the commission's executive secretary, was taken aback on June 23, 2003 when she answered the telephone for Zelikow at 4:40 PM and heard a voice intone, "This is Karl Rove. I'm looking for Philip." Heitkotter knew that Zelikow had promised the commissioners he would cut off all contact with senior officials in the Bush administration. Nonetheless, she gave Zelikow's cell phone number to Rove. The next day there was another

call from Rove at 11:35 AM.

[snip]

In late 2003, around the time his involuntary recusal was imposed, **Zelikow called executive secretary Karen Heitkotter into his office and ordered her to stop creating records of his incoming telephone calls.** Concerned that the order was improper, a nervous Heitkotter soon told general counsel Marcus. He advised her to ignore Zelikow's order and continue to keep a log of his telephone calls, insofar as she knew about them.

Although Shenon could not obtain from the GAO an unredacted record of Zelikow's cell phone use—and Zelikow used his cell phone for most of his outgoing calls—the *Times* reporter was able to establish that Zelikow made numerous calls to "456" numbers in the 202 area code, which is the exclusive prefix of the White House. [my empahsis]

Click through for a description of how Zelikow was able to prevent the Commission from describing Condi as incompetent (I know—we all know it to be true, but it'd have been nice to get it in writing).

I'm particularly interested in the timing of this. Apparently, Zelikow's executive secretary figured out Zelikow had ongoing discussions with Rove on June 23, just when the whole Plame leak was brewing. As I pointed out last week, the White House was contemplating having to turn over emails to the Commission on the day Libby would do so in some depth on July 8; did they learn they would have to turn over emails through formal—or back-channel—means? And then Zelikow was trying to cover up the evidence of his ongoing communications with the 9/11 Commission at the same time that a bunch of emails started not showing up in the CIA Leak

investigation.

Don't get me wrong—I highly doubt there is any connection between the two investigations. But I do think it curious that Karl Rove was trying to obstruct one investigation during the same time frame as he appears to have obstructed another.

And I wonder whether Karl was the only one Zelikow heard from?

Update: cinnamonape makes a really good point. One of the topics of discussion might have been the terror tapes that George Tenet never told the 9/11 Commission about.

Zelikow has asserted he was never told about the waterboarding of Al Qaeda detainees like al-Zubaida and Sheik Khalid Mohammed either. Makes one really wonder what Zelikow actually was told and what he (and the WH) were filtering away from the Commission. Many folks have said that they told Commission staff information that never made it up to the Committee.