

DID CHENEY ORDER UP ABU ZUBAYDAH'S 83RD WATERBOARDING?

McClatchy reports that one of the reasons Khalid Sheikh Mohammed got waterboarded 183 times and Abu Zubaydah got waterboarded 83 times is that Cheney and Rumsfeld refused to believe they had no information on ties between Al Qaeda and Iraq. (h/t Hmmm)

The Bush administration put relentless pressure on interrogators to use harsh methods on detainees in part to find evidence of cooperation between al Qaida and the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's regime, according to a former senior U.S. intelligence official and a former Army psychiatrist.

[snip]

A former senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the interrogation issue said that Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld demanded that intelligence agencies and interrogators find evidence of al Qaida-Iraq collaboration.

"There were two reasons why these interrogations were so persistent, and why extreme methods were used," the former senior intelligence official said on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity.

"The main one is that everyone was worried about some kind of follow-up attack (after 9/11). But for most of 2002 and into 2003, Cheney and Rumsfeld, especially, were also demanding proof of the links between al Qaida and Iraq that (former Iraqi exile leader Ahmed) Chalabi and others had told them were there."

This suggests that when Abu Zubaydah was waterboarded an additional time—perhaps his 83rd—against the judgment of the interrogators working with him directly, the "elements with CIA Headquarters" that ordered up the additional torture were being pushed by Cheney and Rummy (a suggestion JimWhite made here).

This is not to say that the interrogation program has worked perfectly. According to the *IG Report*, the CIA, at least initially, could not always distinguish detainees who had information but were successfully resisting interrogation from those who did not actually have the information. See *IG report* at 83-85. On at least one occasion, this may have resulted in what might be deemed in retrospect to have been the unnecessary use of enhanced techniques. On that occasion, **although the on-scene interrogation team judged Zubaydah to be compliant, elements with CIA Headquarters still believed he was withholding information.** [Redaction of more than one full line] See *id*, at 84. **At the direction of CIA Headquarters interrogators, therefore used the waterboard one more time on Zubaydah.** [Redacted] See *id*, at 84-85. [my emphasis]

I'll have more to say on the intelligence they got from Abu Zubaydah in a later post. But if Cheney can be tied—presumably through Tenet—to waterboarding sessions that even the torturers considered excessive, it sure explains why Tenet got the White House to endorse its torture program in a statement as one of the last things he did as DCI. And it explains why Cheney has been so quick to enter the fray with his torture apologies.

We're mighty close to tying Cheney—through just one degree of separation—to "frivolous" torture. And I suspect he's aware of that.