

WILKERSON: AL-LIBI'S WATERBOARDING

As a number of you have pointed out, Lawrence Wilkerson unloaded on Cheney after hearing his latest apologies for torture last night. This detail is incredibly important with regards to the overall torture timeline.

Likewise, what I have learned is that as the administration authorized harsh interrogation in April and May of 2002—well before the Justice Department had rendered any legal opinion—its principal priority for intelligence was not aimed at pre-empting another terrorist attack on the U.S. but discovering a smoking gun linking Iraq and al-Qa'ida.

So furious was this effort that on one particular detainee, even when the interrogation team had reported to Cheney's office that their detainee "was compliant" (meaning the team recommended no more torture), the VP's office ordered them to continue the enhanced methods. The detainee had not revealed any al-Qa'ida-Baghdad contacts yet. This ceased only after Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, under waterboarding in Egypt, "revealed" such contacts. Of course later we learned that al-Libi revealed these contacts only to get the torture to stop.

There in fact were no such contacts. (Incidentally, al-Libi just "committed suicide" in Libya. Interestingly, several U.S. lawyers working with tortured detainees were attempting to get the Libyan government to allow them to interview al-Libi...)

~~Wilkerson is stating, clearly, that in early 2002, Dick Cheney ordered Ibn Sheikh al-Libi to~~

~~be tortured even after the interrogation team reported that al-Libi was compliant.~~

Update: See Spencer's post, which makes it clear Wilkerson doesn't know what the timing of this was.

I asked Wilkerson if he wished to respond.

If their account is the accurate one, explain to me why Tenet and McLaughlin [then the director and deputy director of the CIA] came to Secretary Powell in February 2003—yes, 2003—with the information about al-Libi as if it were fresh as the morning dew. Powell was ready to throw out almost everything Tenet had given him on the contacts of Baghdad with terrorists, particularly al-Qa'ida. Suddenly, on 1 Feb, there was the shocking revelation of a high-level al-Qa'ida operative who had just revealed significant contacts between al-Qa'ida and Baghdad. Powell changed his mind and that information went into his presentation to the [United Nations Security Council] on 5 Feb 2003. We were never told of the DIA dissent.

And what about the timeline – or suggested timeline – in the original post?

I am basing my conclusions on the fact that DCI Tenet and DDCI McLaughlin presented the information about al-Libi to Secretary Powell in Feb 2003 and not in Feb 2002. The strong impression was that the

interrogation had just occurred or, at a minimum, that Tenet had just received the information (otherwise, why wouldn't they have given it to Powell much earlier, say when he first expressed concerns over the terrorist links some days earlier?). I have no idea when the Egyptians waterboarded al-Libi other than what Tenet and McLaughlin implied in their presentation to Powell—which, incidentally, was quite effective on him.

Who says the Egyptians tortured al-Libi in Feb 2002? I'm prepared to modify my views if that can be proved. But not by much because that is a minor part of my position.

Note, earlier reporting stated that al-Libi gave up the Iraq intelligence in 2002 under torture. It is not clear it was waterboarding, though.

I apologize I said Wilkerson's statements were clear—I took what I understood to be the only logical sense of his meaning. I agree the timeline, as stated now, does not add up. But this ought to raise questions about Tenet's and McLaughlin's role, as well. Unfortunately, al-Libi is no longer around to clarify these issues.

While we can't be sure of the date when Cheney started ordering people to be waterboarded even after they were compliant, we know this order had to have occurred before February 22, 2002—because that's when al-Libi first reported on ties between Iraq and al Qaeda. From DIA's report on that day:

This is the first report from Ibn al-

Shaykh [al-Libi] in which he claims Iraq assisted al-Qa'ida's CBRN efforts. However, he lacks specific details on the Iraq's involvement, the CBRN materials associated with the assistance, the location where the training occurred. It is possible he does not know any further details; it is more likely this individual is intentionally misleading the debriefers. Ibn al-Shaykh has been undergoing debriefs for several weeks and may be describing scenarios to the debriefers that he knows will retain their interest.

So sometime in February 2002—when Bush was declaring that the Geneva Convention did not apply to al Qaeda and when Bruce Jessen was pitching torture to JPRA—Cheney was personally (according to Wilkerson) ordering up waterboarding. The DIA immediately labeled the result of this session of waterboarding probable disinformation.

And a month later, when the CIA captured Abu Zubaydah, James Mitchell immediately set up as a contractor so he could waterboard Abu Zubaydah.

We chose waterboarding—not simply torture, but waterboarding itself—knowing it'd be unreliable. Or rather, Dick Cheney chose it.