

APRIL 13, 2002; MAY 6, 2002, MAY 20, 2002; MAY 23, 2002; MAY 28, 2002; AUGUST 4, 2002; AUGUST 11, 2002

April 13, 2002; May 6, 2002, May 20, 2002; May 23, 2002; May 28, 2002...

Those are some of the most important dates from from the log of "all contemporaneous and derivative records" on the destruction of Abu Zubaydah's (and some time that fall, al-Nashiri's) interrogation tapes [corrected per Spencer—thx Spencer].

Here's why they're important.

April 13, 2002: This is the first date, the CIA claims, for which it has any records. That either suggests they weren't keeping records right away (in spite of claims that they were meticulously trying to document that they weren't killing Abu Zubaydah). Or it represents the first date that the CIA got to him. If it's the latter, it would suggest the FBI had a while—perhaps as many as ten days—working with Abu Zubaydah before the CIA came in. That would be consistent, though, with Ali Soufan's narrative.

May 6, 2002, May 20, 2002; May 23, 2002; May 28, 2002: Check out how many pages each of these cables from the field (Thailand) back to HQ is. The longest days are:

May 6, 2002: 28 pages

May 20, 2002: 12 pages

May 23, 2002: 13 pages

May 28, 2002: 12 pages

June 12, 2002: 10 pages

August 11, 2002: 11 pages
August 20, 2002: 10 pages
November 17, 2002: 11 pages
November 30, 2002: 11 pages*
December 2, 2002: 11 pages

Most of the rest of the cables are just 2-5 pages long.

These dates are significant because, with the exception of two August dates, all of the longer reports came when at least one of the FBI interrogators remained on the scene; the longest one came when Ali Soufan was on the scene.

The CIA's description of most of the cables from August are fairly standard (part one, part two). Here's what they're willing to tell us about that August 11, 11-page cable:

This is an eleven-page cable from the Field to CIA Headquarters. The cable includes information concerning the strategies for interrogation sessions; the use of interrogation techniques to elicit information on terrorist operations against the U.S.; reactions to the interrogation techniques; raw intelligence; and a status of threat information. The cable also includes CIA organizational information, CIA filing information, locations of CIA facilities, and the names and/or identifying information of personnel engaged in counterterrorism operations.

Like I said, most of these descriptions are pretty standard, with just a little variation. Though we have descriptions only for August cables, not May ones.

From that we can surmise one of several things about those days when the Field sent longer cables. The days with the longer cables might

include more raw intelligence. In other words, the interrogations were more productive. Or, those cables (the May cables for which we don't have descriptions) include details of something else—such as squabbles and turf battles with the FBI interrogators present. Or those dates might be days when James Mitchell, doing his experiments with Abu Zubaydah was gleefully regaling those in HQ (though Soufan said the small box came out but was not yet used before he left, so not the worst of the torture). While we can't be sure of which it is—either evidence that non-coercive interrogations were more productive than all but two of the harshest interrogations (or something else)—it sure makes it worthwhile for ACLU to demand descriptions for those longer days, particularly for May 6, 2002, when Ali Soufan was probably present.

Next look at the length of the handwritten logs during the early months of Abu Zubaydah's interrogation. 133 pages on April 13, 2002. And another one of 59 on August 4, 2002. These may well be medical logs (or the earlier one could be FBI/CIA notes from before the Mitchell contractors arrived). But again, the longer one comes from the early days, just as CIA begins to track his interrogation.

There's more of interest from the later periods (such as the October 11, 2002 photo and the many drafts of a timeline—what I could do with a timeline...) I'll look at those in later posts. Also, see Spencer's post on this.

* Remember, these later dates may be al-Nashiri, not Abu Zubaydah. Also, note the November 30, 13-page memo, which is one of the few examples of written communication from HQ to the field.