

BUSH'S APPROVED TORTURE ... IN 2003?

A number of people have pointed to a comment Bush made in MI on Thursday about his role in approving torture. Here's how CNN described it:

Bush spoke in broad strokes about how he proceeded after the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in March 2003.

"The first thing you do is ask, what's legal?" he said. "What do the lawyers say is possible? I made the decision, within the law, to get information so I can say to myself, 'I've done what it takes to do my duty to protect the American people.' I can tell you that the information we got saved lives."

Here's how Eartha Jane Meltzer from MI Messenger described it:

But the former president spoke indirectly of his administration's authorization of the use of torture against detainees captured during the War on Terror, avoiding the words "torture" and "abuse."

"You have to make tough decisions," Bush said. "They've captured a guy who murdered 3,000 citizens ... that affected me ... They come in and say he may have more information ...and we had an anthrax attack ... and they say he may have more information. What do you do?"

Bush was firm and defended his record as president: "I will tell you that the information gained saved lives."

And here's how the Detroit Free Press described it:

Former President George W. Bush defended

on Thursday his decision to allow harsh interrogation of the terrorist who ordered the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, saying it was cleared by his lawyers to prevent what his advisers believed was another, imminent attack.

"I made a decision within the law to get information so I can say, I've done what it takes to do my duty to protect the American people," he said. "I can tell you, the information gained saved lives."

Here's how SW MI's Herald-Palladium described it:

He defended his decision to authorize waterboarding on the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Now, I'm trying to get clarification on this point, particularly since Bush used to claim frequently that Abu Zubaydah ordered up 9/11, but between CNN and H-P, they seem to be clear that Bush was referring specifically to KSM, not AZ. [See updated below.]

If his reference to KSM was explicit, I find that very odd.

Why would Bush talk about the seminal moments in his tenure as President, and refer to approving the torture of the third guy we waterboarded, and not number one or number two? Wouldn't the first approval of waterboarding be the most important?

I ask for a number of reasons. First, there's Cheney's bizarre description of the torture authorization process, the "presidential-level decision" that Bush "basically" signed off on.

SCHIEFFER: ... somewhere down the line. Did President Bush know everything you knew?

CHENEY: I certainly, yes, have every reason to believe he knew – he knew a great deal about the program. He basically authorized it. I mean, this was a presidential-level decision. And the decision went to the president. He signed off on it.

This makes me wonder whether Bush "basically authorized" the torture of Abu Zubaydah and only actually authorized the torture of KSM?

Then there's the timing. As I've pointed out, when Jane Harman asked explicitly in February 2003 (before KSM was captured) whether Bush had bought off on torture, Scott Muller basically told her not to worry her pretty little head about such legal niceties as Presidential authorization. We know the White House provided CIA some kind of Presidential authorization in June 2003. But that was in response to Bush saying, in a speech on June 26, that the US would prosecute torturers. So when, exactly, did Bush approve the torture of KSM? And was it before or after we waterboarded KSM 183 times in one month?

Then there's the detail W0 found the other day—a Tenet memo to Condi at about the same time as Tenet was demanding Presidential buyoff, which presented inaccurate information about when we torture Abu Zubdayah. When Cheney says that Bush knew "a great deal" about the program, is he sure that all that information was accurate?

Finally, we now know that Cheney's defense of his torture program is going to focus primarily on the utterly false claim that torture helped them stop the Library Tower plot. There's no way to claim the torture of either AZ or KSM stopped an attack, but the torturers are making a much more sustained claim wrt KSM. So is that why Bush is focusing on the approval of KSM's torture (if, indeed, he is), because someone told him it really did "save lives"?

Again, I'm seeking clarification of whether Bush

really described authorizing torture of KSM and not AZ. But if he did, it may be another hint that Bush didn't authorize our earliest embrace of torture.

Update, from Eartha:

Bush did not say "Khalid Sheikh Mohammed." He talked about having to make a tough decision about a guy who he was told masterminded the murder of 3,000 citizens.

So it's not clear whether Bush meant AZ or KSM.