

FROM THE BLOGGER'S BASEMENT ON JANE MAYER

Since Spencer asked, I read Jane Mayer's piece this morning while sitting at my kitchen table eating mr. ew's "best in the world" sourdough pancakes (from our homegrown sourdough), syrup from my syrup guy out in Mason, my butcher Bob's amazing breakfast links, and locally roasted Ethiopian Yirgacheffe coffee. Though I admittedly read it while still wearing the t-shirt I had slept in.

Aside from the bloggers-on-cheetos slur, there were some interesting bits in the story. Mayer catalogs the changing fortunes of Mitchell and Jessen's torture boondoggle.

In April, Panetta fired all the C.I.A.'s contract interrogators, including the former military psychologists who appear to have designed the most brutal interrogation techniques: James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen. The two men, who ran a consulting company, Mitchell, Jessen & Associates, had recommended that interrogators apply to detainees theories of "learned helplessness" that were based on experiments with abused dogs. The firm's principals reportedly billed the agency a thousand dollars a day for their services. "We saved some money in the deal, too!" Panetta said. (Remarkably, a month after Obama took office the C.I.A. had signed a fresh contract with the firm.)

According to ProPublica, the investigative reporting group, Mitchell and Jessen's firm, which in 2007 had a hundred and twenty people on its staff, recently closed its offices, in Spokane, Washington. One employee was Deuce Martinez, a former C.I.A. interrogator

in the black-site program; Joseph Matarazzo, a former president of the American Psychological Association, was on the company's board. (According to Kirk Hubbard, the former head of the C.I.A.'s research and analysis division, Matarazzo served on an agency professional-standards board during the time the interrogation program was set up, but was not consulted about the interrogations.)

I'll note that April was the same month that the ICRC Report, SASC Report, and Ali Soufan's first public statements came out (all of which specifically implicated the contractors). It's amazing how quickly a little sunshine can make outsourcing torture unsustainable.

Mayer also notes something I've been sensing too—that John Durham's investigation into the torture tape destruction may well have to investigate the reasons why the CIA had to destroy the tapes, most notably all the torture they did before OLC had authorized it.

A prosecutor appointed by the Justice Department, John Durham, has convened a grand jury in Washington to weigh potential criminal charges against C.I.A. officers who were involved in the destruction of ninety-two videotapes documenting the interrogations of Abu Zubaydah and other detainees. Mickum told me that he has met several times with Durham, and believes that the scope of his inquiry may have expanded to include a review of whether the C.I.A. began using brutal methods on Zubaydah before it received written authorization from the Justice Department. (This would provide an extra motive for destroying the videotapes.) Mickum said, "I got the sense he was very serious."

Other than that, it really takes a thorough

reading of the whole thing to get a handle on
Obama's wavering approach to stamping out
torture.