

# CHENEY'S SABOTAGE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Just a day after the Brits finally prosecuted some (but not all) of the terrorists who were plotting to blow up planes with liquid explosive, a prosecutor in the case explains how the Americans almost blew the case.

Fearful for the safety of American lives, the US authorities had been getting edgy, seeking reassurance that this was not going to slip through our hands. We moved from having congenial conversations to eyeball-to-eyeball confrontations.

We thought we had managed to persuade them to hold back so we could develop new opportunities and get more evidence to present to the courts. But I was never convinced that they were content with that position. In the end, I strongly suspect that they lost their nerve and had a hand in triggering the arrest in Pakistan.

The arrest hampered our evidence-gathering and placed us in Britain under intolerable pressure.

Now, I've been following these accusations since August 2006, shortly after the arrests (which was, it should be said, shortly after Lamont's primary victory over Joe Lieberman demonstrated how the Iraq War was hurting Bush and the Republicans). But the best explanation of what happened came a year ago from Ron Suskind:

NPR: I want to talk just a little about this fascinating episode you describe in the summer of 2006, when President Bush is very anxious about some intelligence briefings that he is getting from the British. What are they telling him?

SUSKIND: In late July of 2006, the British are moving forward on a mission they've been—an investigation they've been at for a year at that point, where they've got a group of "plotters," so-called, in the London area that they've been tracking...Bush gets this briefing at the end of July of 2006, and he's very agitated. When Blair comes at the end of the month, they talk about it and he says, "Look, I want this thing, this trap snapped shut immediately." Blair's like, "Well, look, be patient here. What we do in Britain"—Blair describes, and this is something well known to Bush—"is we try to be more patient so they move a bit forward. These guys are not going to breathe without us knowing it. We've got them all mapped out so that we can get actual hard evidence, and then prosecute them in public courts of law and get real prosecutions and long prison terms"...

Well, Bush doesn't get the answer he wants, which is "snap the trap shut." And the reason he wants that is because he's getting all sorts of pressure from Republicans in Congress that his ratings are down. These are the worst ratings for a sitting president at this point in his second term, and they're just wild-eyed about the coming midterm elections. Well, Bush expresses his dissatisfaction to Cheney as to the Blair meeting, and Cheney moves forward.

NPR: So you got the British saying, "Let's carefully build our case. Let's get more intelligence." Bush wants an arrest and a political win. What does he do?

SUSKIND: Absolutely. What happens is that then, oh, a few days later, the CIA operations chief—which is really a senior guy. He's up there in the one,

two, three spots at CIA, guy named Jose Rodriguez ends up slipping quietly into Islamabad, Pakistan, and he meets secretly with the ISI, which is the Pakistani intelligence service. And suddenly a guy in Pakistan named Rashid Rauf, who's kind of the contact of the British plotters in Pakistan, gets arrested. This, of course, as anyone could expect, triggers a reaction in London, a lot of scurrying. And the Brits have to run through the night wild-eyed and basically round up 25 or 30 people. It's quite a frenzy. The British are livid about this. They talk to the Americans. The Americans kind of shrug, "Who knows? You know, ISI picked up Rashid Rauf."

DAVIES: So the British did not even get a heads-up from the United States that this arrest was going to happen?

SUSKIND: Did not get a heads-up. In fact, the whole point was to mislead the British...The British did not know about it, frankly, until I reported it in the book... my emphasis]

Rodriguez, of course, is one of the people involved in destroying the torture tapes, as well as overseeing the earliest torture, including that of Abu Zubaydah. I would imagine this little episode is one of many reasons why Cheney would like to keep Rodriguez quiet and happy.

In any case, note that the Brits got harsher sentences for just three of the eight people tried in this conviction. Who knows what the guy who got off scot free will do, now that Cheney has given him a second opportunity to pursue terrorism?