

JOHN MCCAIN: KSM LIED UNDER TORTURE, JUST LIKE I DID

John McCain has, on balance, a good op-ed in the WaPo refuting Michael Mukasey's embrace of torture. McCain's larger point is that our approach to the Arab Spring will have a key role in our ability to defeat terrorists, which is a point not being made vociferously enough. And while he places himself in the camp of people who believe the torturers and those who approved torture should not be prosecuted, he does have this to say of Mukasey's claim that KSM's torture produced intelligence that led to Osama bin Laden.

That is false.

[snip]

In fact, the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" on Khalid Sheik Mohammed produced false and misleading information. He specifically told his interrogators that Abu Ahmed had moved to Peshawar, got married and ceased his role as an al-Qaeda facilitator – none of which was true.

While I'm glad McCain provided these additional details on the lies KSM told under torture, I'm a bit more interested in two other details McCain includes.

The first mention of Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti – the nickname of the al-Qaeda courier who ultimately led us to bin Laden – as well as a description of him as an important member of al-Qaeda, came from a detainee held in another country, who we believe was not tortured.

[snip]

According to the staff of the Senate

intelligence committee, the best intelligence gained from a CIA detainee – information describing Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti's real role in al-Qaeda and his true relationship to bin Laden – was obtained through standard, noncoercive means.

The first bit of intelligence—that Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti was first IDed in another country—presumably introduces an entirely new detainee into the picture. Though the description “we believe was not tortured” must be viewed skeptically, as most of the other countries that were holding detainees do torture. This presumably happened no later than 2002, though, as Mohammed al-Qahtani talked about Abu Ahmed as an associate of KSM in 2002 and 2003.

It's the other detail I find even more interesting: that info on Abu Ahmed's real role and his real relationship with OBL came using “standard, noncoercive means.” This break in intelligence has fairly consistently been attributed to Hassan Ghul in tick tocks of the hunt for OBL. And while McCain doesn't confirm that Ghul provided the intelligence, if he did, then consider what it probably means.

I have noted that a detainee who appears to be Ghul was held for six months—from January to August 2004—before the CIA started getting approval for his CIA-led interrogation. If the detainee who provided the key information on Abu Ahmed was Ghul and did so through noncoercive means, it means that Ghul's interrogation before CIA got him—presumably, Ghul's interrogation by military interrogators not using torture—yielded the key piece of information that would eventually lead to OBL. And (such a scenario would further imply) CIA insisted on taking custody and torturing him, even after he yielded information that would lead to OBL. Which might explain the legal sensitivities around Ghul's torture, because if they got key info without torture the claims they based torture on would

all be demonstrably false.

It's all wildarsed speculation at this point, but such a scenario might explain why the torture apologists have been so vehement. Because one of their narratives, after all, is that they needed torture to get the key information. They needed torture, the torture apologists explained, because the standard interrogations done by the FBI and military weren't effective. But McCain's narrative suggests the possibility, at least, that for one of the few detainees interrogated at length by real interrogators first yielded the key piece of intelligence leading to OBL, after which the CIA ignored that intelligence and instead set about torturing a detainee who had already yielded crucial intelligence.

Update: McCain gave a version of this on the Senate floor today. He added details about the first detainee who gave information.

The first mention of the name Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, as well as a description of him as an important member of Al-Qaeda, came from a detainee held in another country. The United States did not conduct this detainee's interrogation, nor did we render him to that country for the purpose of interrogation. We did not learn Abu Ahmed's real name or alias as a result of waterboarding or any 'enhanced interrogation technique' used on a detainee in U.S. custody.

Note, it sounds like the US might have been involved in the interrogation, just not conducting it. Also interesting that we didn't render that detainee to the other country. Pakistan? Jordan?

Also note this admission that Ibn Shiekh al-Libi was tortured (which of course we already knew).

It has also been reported, and the staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee confirms for me, that a man named Ibn

al-Sheikh al-Libi, who had been captured by the United States and rendered to Egypt, where we believe he was tortured, provided false and misleading information about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programs. That false information was ultimately included in Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement to the UN Security Council, and, I assume, helped to influence the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq.