

RIGHT ON CUE, THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT TO THE TORTURE APOLOGY COMES OUT

Three years ago, I rather sheepishly gave Dianne Feinstein kudos for the seriousness of the Senate Intelligence Committee inquiry into torture. I said then—and I maintain now—that reports of the investigation make it sound like a far more substantive investigation than I had at first worried it would be.

But I will say that the apparent timing of its release seems unfortunate. Because it is likely to come out in the wake of the Jose Rodriguez propaganda, the SSCI report is being portrayed as the other side of a two-sided debate rather than the result of the sustained, exhaustive inquiry it is.

A nearly three-year-long investigation by Senate Intelligence Committee Democrats is expected to find there is little evidence the harsh “enhanced interrogation techniques” the CIA used on high-value prisoners produced counter-terrorism breakthroughs.

[snip]

President Barack Obama and his aides have largely sought to avoid revisiting Bush administration controversies. But the debate over the effectiveness of enhanced interrogations, which human rights advocates condemn as torture, is resurfacing, in part thanks to a new book by a former top CIA official.

In the book, “Hard Measures,” due to be published on Monday, April 30, the former chief of CIA clandestine operations Jose Rodriguez defends the use of interrogation practices including

water-boarding, which involves pouring water on a subject's face, which is covered with a cloth, to simulate drowning.

Whether the timing—coming out just as Mitt Romney and his torturer-advisors face off against Obama in the General Election—was planned or not, the effect will be to turn torture into a campaign issue with two sides treated as legitimate by a spineless press, rather than one side with self-preservation in mind and the other with exhaustive study.

And sadly, that will probably mean the most interesting (and politically explosive) result of the investigation gets lost, relegated to paragraph 26 of 27.

Critics also say that still-classified records are likely to demonstrate that harsh interrogation techniques produced far more information that proved false than true.

Dana Priest reveals that, when Jose Rodriguez tried to persuade her not to publish news of the black sites in 2005, he tried to argue torture “was producing real results and helping to keep the country safe.” We’re about to get validation that the example of Ibn Sheikh al-Libi was not unique (though his treatment was included in the scope of the SSCI study). If torture “was producing real results” those results were false confessions, not real intelligence.

If we’re going to have a debate about torture, the fact that Cheney and his torturers used it to create false stories to—among other things—get us into the Iraq War should be at the center of that debate.