

REMEMBER THE TORTURE TAPES?

Just about everyone is talking about ABC's confirmation of what we already knew: the torture was approved—in excruciating detail—by the most senior members of the Bush Administration.

In dozens of top-secret talks and meetings in the White House, the most senior Bush administration officials discussed and approved specific details of how high-value al Qaeda suspects would be interrogated by the Central Intelligence Agency, sources tell ABC News.

The so-called Principals who participated in the meetings also approved the use of "combined" interrogation techniques – using different techniques during interrogations, instead of using one method at a time – on terrorist suspects who proved difficult to break, sources said.

Highly placed sources said a handful of top advisers signed off on how the CIA would interrogate top al Qaeda suspects – whether they would be slapped, pushed, deprived of sleep or subjected to simulated drowning, called waterboarding.

The high-level discussions about these "enhanced interrogation techniques" were so detailed, these sources said, some of the interrogation sessions were almost choreographed – down to the number of times CIA agents could use a specific tactic.

The advisers were members of the National Security Council's Principals Committee, a select group of senior

officials who met frequently to advise President Bush on issues of national security policy.

At the time, the Principals Committee included Vice President Cheney, former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell, as well as CIA Director George Tenet and Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Now, the article is actually incredibly vague about which of the high-value detainees the Principals discussed interrogating. For example, it suggests that Abu Zubaydah's torture was planned by the Principals. But then—where elsewhere it asserts that all of the Principals approved the torture—it backs off that claim specifically with regards to Zubaydah.

But after Zubaydah recovered from his wounds at a secret CIA prison in Thailand, he was uncooperative.

[snip]

The CIA wanted to use more aggressive – and physical – methods to get information.

The agency briefed high-level officials in the National Security Council's Principals Committee, led by then-National Security Advisor Rice and including then-Attorney General Ashcroft, which then signed off on the plan, sources said. It is unclear whether anyone on the committee objected to the CIA's plans for Zubaydah.

"The agency" briefed the Principals Committee (note the briefers remain unnamed), which, as a group signed off on the plan. But rather than asserting (as the article does elsewhere) that "sources said that at each discussion, all the Principals present approved," the specific

discussion of Zubaydah notes that, "it is unclear whether anyone on the committee objected to the CIA's plans for Zubaydah."

Immediately after the discussion of Zubaydah, the article goes on to discuss Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's waterboarding without stating one way or another whether the Principals approved the details of his torture, either.

Now I don't mean to suggest that the Principals did not approve the water-boarding of Zubaydah and KSM—or of any other torture subject. I'm perfectly willing to believe that all of the Principals approved such things, even Powell.

I'm raising the alternating specificity and vagueness of this story to suggest certain things about its probable purpose. Ask yourself, where did this story come from? Who are the "highly-placed sources" behind this story?

Those who actually received the briefings would be limited to the Principals—who would have no incentive to admit they approved of torture—and their deputies (so, Libby, Stephen Hadley, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage, John McLaughlin, and Larry Thompson, then Comey—though given the Administration's habit of excluding Thompson from sensitive details, I wouldn't assume that he was included). I could see Armitage revealing embarrassing details about Cheney, but not ones that implicated Powell; and McLaughlin I'll put aside for the moment. As for the others, at least one of them has been willing to get convicted of a felony rather than rat on his boss, so I doubt they're sources for this story.

Then there are the people who did the briefing: "CIA directors Tenet and later Porter Goss along with agency lawyers." Now we're getting someplace.

Porter Goss, though he hasn't AFAIK gone on the record once during the discussions of the torture tapes, has been feeding regular leaks to the press throughout. And Scott Muller—General Counsel of the CIA until 2004—has told journalists working on the torture tape story

that he opposed the destruction of the tapes. John Rizzo—acting General Counsel after Muller left—has been less adept at working the press than Goss and Muller, though he has made it clear that junior lawyers at the CIA, not him, gave Jose Rodriguez the green light to destroy the torture tapes. All three men would be closely questioned in the DOJ investigation of the destruction of the torture tapes.

Add in the fact that the single named source in this story is John Kiriakou—the same guy who appeared on ABC to admit that the CIA had water-boarded just as the whole torture tape story was breaking (Kiriakou also worked for Robert Grenier in 2003, though I don't know if he was still working for him when Grenier was reportedly fired for opposing enhanced torture).

In other words, the most likely people behind this story are the same people who were working diligently, in December and January, to make sure the CIA alone did not pay for the destruction of the torture tapes.

This story does not—as earlier stories have—list the lawyers at the White House who were briefed on the torture tapes: Condi's NSA lawyer John Bellinger, Cheney's lawyer Addington, and Bush's lawyer Alberto Gonzales.

Rather, it strongly suggests (without, finally, asserting it directly) that the President's top aides—the Principals those three lawyers were expected to protect—approved every method used with Abu Zubaydah. That is, the President's top aides approved of everything that would have been revealed on the torture tapes, had they not been destroyed. Additionally—with the placement of John Ashcroft in the meetings—it puts DOJ at the center of discussions approving all the methods used (though of course Alberto Gonzales, and not Ashcroft, was in charge of DOJ during the destruction of the tapes).

What this article does—aside from tell us what we already knew—is explain why the top lawyers in the Administration would have a motive to

approve of the destruction of the torture tapes. And heck, while we're at it, it pressures those same top lawyers to try to stop the inquiry, to prevent any more damning details (Bush's participation?) get leaked to ABC.

You don't suppose John Durham's investigation is honing in on the CIA, do you?

WHERE IS MARY MCCARTHY NOW?

Reuters reports that the EU report on secret prisons got much of its information from anonymous US intelligence officers.

Dissident U.S. intelligence officers angry at former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld helped a European probe uncover details of secret CIA prisons in Europe, the top investigator said on Tuesday. Â

Swiss Senator Dick Marty, author of a Council of Europe report on the jails, said senior CIA officials disapproved of Rumsfeld's methods in hunting down terrorist suspects, and had agreed to talk to him on condition of anonymity.

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"There were huge conflicts between the CIA and Rumsfeld. Many leading figures in the CIA did not accept these methods at all," Marty told European Parliament committees, defending his work against complaints it was based on unnamed sources.

Which makes me wonder where Mary McCarthy is now. You remember—she was the CIA's Deputy Inspector General fired last year for allegedly

leaking classified information, including details on the secret prisons in Poland and Romania.

But another CIA officer – the agency’s deputy inspector general, who for the previous year had been probing allegations of criminal mistreatment by the CIA and its contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan – was startled to hear what she considered an outright falsehood, according to people familiar with her account. It came during the discussion of legislation that would constrain the CIA’s interrogations.

That CIA officer was Mary O. McCarthy, 61, who was fired on April 20 for allegedly sharing classified information with journalists, including Washington Post journalist Dana Priest. A CIA employee of two decades, McCarthy became convinced that "CIA people had lied" in that briefing, as one of her friends said later, not only because the agency had conducted abusive interrogations but also because its policies authorized treatment that she considered cruel, inhumane or degrading.

Whether McCarthy’s conviction that the CIA was hiding unpleasant truths provoked her to leak sensitive information is known only to her and the journalists she is alleged to have spoken with last year. But the picture of her that emerges from interviews with more than a dozen former colleagues is of an independent-minded analyst who became convinced that on multiple occasions the agency had not given accurate or complete information to its congressional overseers.

I think it relevant to ask because it sure seems like we’ve got a lot of potential witnesses to

Rummy's abuse out there, just waiting to speak to the appropriate authority. Now that we're in the majority, why aren't we contacting these people?

BILL MOYERS SAYS IT BEAUTIFULLY

When I grow up I aspire to write as well as Bill Moyers:

We have yet another remarkable revelation of the mindset of Washington's ruling clique of neoconservative elites—the people who took us to war from the safety of their Beltway bunkers. Even as Iraq grows bloodier by the day, their passion of the week is to keep one of their own from going to jail.

It is well known that I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby—once Vice President Cheney's most trusted adviser—has been sentenced to 30 months in jail for perjury. Lying. Not a white lie, mind you. A killer lie. Scooter Libby deliberately poured poison into the drinking water of democracy by lying to federal investigators, for the purpose of obstructing justice.

Attempting to trash critics of the war, Libby and his pals in high places—including his boss Dick Cheney—outed a covert CIA agent. Libby then lied to cover their tracks. To throw investigators off the trail, he kicked sand in the eyes of truth. "Libby lied about nearly everything that mattered," wrote the chief prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald. The jury agreed and found him guilty on four felony counts.

Judge Reggie B. Walton "a no-nonsense, lock-em-up-and-throw-away-the-key type, appointed to the bench by none other than George W. Bush" called the evidence "overwhelming" and threw the book at Libby.

You would have thought their man had been ordered to Guantanamo, so intense was the reaction from his cheerleaders. They flooded the judge's chambers with letters of support for their comrade and took to the airwaves in a campaign to "free Scooter."

Vice President Cheney issued a statement praising Libby as "a man of personal integrity" without even a hint of irony about their collusion to browbeat the CIA into mangling intelligence about Iraq in order to justify the invasion.

"A patriot, a dedicated public servant, a strong family man, and a tireless, honorable, selfless human being," said Donald Rumsfeld "the very same Rumsfeld who had claimed to know the whereabouts of weapons of mass destruction and who boasted of 'bulletproof' evidence linking Saddam to 9/11. "A good person" and "a decent man," said the one-time Pentagon adviser Kenneth Adelman, who had predicted the war in Iraq would be a "cakewalk." Paul Wolfowitz wrote a four-page letter to praise "the noblest spirit of selfless service" that he knew motivated his friend Scooter. Yes, that Paul Wolfowitz, who had claimed Iraq would "greet us as liberators" and that Iraq would "finance its own reconstruction." The same Paul Wolfowitz who had to resign recently as president of the World Bank for using his office to show favoritism to his girlfriend. Paul Wolfowitz turned character witness.

Bill Moyers gets it. Why don't the beltway
Heathers?