TORTURED DIPLOMACY

The AP has a story reporting (something that was public) that Colin Powell was not briefed on torture from the start, which meant in several cases Ambassadors to affected countries got briefed and instructed not to tell their superiors.

> A Senate report on the CIA's interrogation and detention practices after the 9/11 attacks concludes that the agency initially kept the secretary of state and some U.S. ambassadors in the dark about harsh techniques and secret prisons, according to a document circulating among White House staff.
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> The still-classified report also says some ambassadors who were informed about interrogations of al-Qaida detainees at so-called black sites in their countries were instructed not to tell their superiors at the State Department, the document says.
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> [snip]
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> A former senior CIA official said the secretary of state at the time, Colin Powell, eventually was informed about the program and sat in meetings in which harsh interrogation techniques were discussed. But Powell may not have been informed when the techniques were first used in 2002, the official said.
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> [snip]
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> The former CIA official said it would be standard practice for ambassadors informed about a covert operation to be instructed not to share it with others who did not have a "need to know," as determined by the National Security Agency. Ambassadors in countries in which the CIA set up black sites to interrogate prisoners were usually told

> about it, said the official, who, like others interviewed for this story, would not be quoted by name because some of the information remains classified.

This narrative — developed as part of the initial Senate Intelligence Committee effort to study torture which ultimately became the torture report — suggests Colin Powell may not have briefed on torture techniques until September 16, 2003.

> According to CIA records, pursuant to a request from the National Security Adviser, the Director of Central Intelligence subsequently briefed the Secretary of
> State and the Secretary of Defense on the CIA's interrogation techniques on September 16, 2003.

That seems very late — but he was apparently specifically not invited to a July 2003 meeting at which Principals reauthorized torture even in light of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's treatment. And these two comments from 2009 were awfully vague.

Remember, in January 2002, Powell and others at State tried very hard to get Bush to adhere to the Geneva Conventions they failed. Which is probably why he didn't find out for a long time.

In any case, the implication is that Powell's Ambassadors knew, but Powell did not.

I've just started looking at who the Ambassadors in question might be — especially with AP's anonymous and probably lying CIA source claiming Ambassadors did get told (which the CIA often doesn't do but which is a violation of protocol) but two stick out right away.

First, there's Darryl Johnson, Ambassador to Thailand while Abu Zubaydah was being tortured. I don't know anything about him, but note he presented his credentials on March 29, literally the day after Zubaydah was captured in Pakistan.

Imagine asking your hosts to use their military base to torture people on on your second day officially on the job!

Even more interesting is Chris Hill, the lifetime diplomat who was Ambassador to Poland from 2000 through 2004, spanning the period when a number of detainees were being tortured. Hill went on to serve as Ambassador to South Korea immediately thereafter, then became Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia. In the latter two roles he played a key role in the 6-party talks with North Korea and had very significant disagreements with Dick Cheney. Hill then went on to serve as Ambassador to Iraq. I find it interesting to imagine how knowledge of Cheney's torture might have made their principled disagreements even worse.

Of course, it's possible AP's source is lying and none of these men — or the other Ambassadors in the black site countries — really were briefed.

Update: Here's a 2008 story (there were many similar ones at the time) that insinuates Powell was at the torture meetings. I think it's meant to deceive.