

HOW THE TORTURE REPORT DECLASSIFICATION IS LIKELY TO WORK

Aspiring Senate Intelligence Chair Richard Burr has announced he will vote to declassify the Torture Report.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., also said he planned to vote to declassify.

[snip]

Burr added: "We've already expressed our opposition to the content."

Declassifying, he said, is "the only way that we get minority views out there," because the Republicans plan to offer their views on the report.

This gives a pretty strong indication of where this Torture Report debate will go – and why CIA got so quiet all of a sudden, aside from former CIA lawyer John Rizzo's tireless propaganda efforts.

The Committee would have published dissenting views in any case, but Republican Susan Collins specifically included them in her support for the report.

What we're going to get will be the Executive Summary, Findings, and Additional and Dissenting Views. Because we'll get just the Executive Summary, we won't get much hard detail – aside from that which has been public for years – about the allegations that will appear in the Executive Summary, which will make it harder to rebut any claims CIA's defenders make.

Moreover, I would not be in the least surprised if the same rule that applies to CIA Publication Review Board decisions – that the writings of

torture critics like Ali Soufan and Glenn Carle are aggressively censored, while the views of torture boosters like Rizzo and Jose Rodriguez will be permissively published – applied here. The CIA has – as McClatchy emphasizes – already assumed they’ll do the declassification review. And in spite of calls for the White House to take the lead, I expect they won’t. After all, the White House has relied on CIA to hide the Executive Privilege-lite documents (which I suspect would show that CIA only lied to some people at the White House, but not to people like David Addington). So CIA is owed something by the White House.

That mutual embrace of incrimination will provide the CIA a great deal of protection.

Remember, too, that torture critics have gotten recent warnings not to speak publicly, even while Rodriguez and Rizzo blather away.

And all this – what will surely be calls that Democrats have unfairly tainted noble Jose Rodriguez’ reputation – will play out against electoral politics, as Republicans try to take out Mark Udall for his opposition to torture.

Thus far, too, the torture boosters have laid the groundwork to win this debate. Even ignoring Rizzo and Rodriguez’ books, they’ve been working the press with details, as compared to the vague releases that the Torture Report will find CIA lied.

Which is my pessimistic way of saying that unless torture critics get a lot more serious about the propaganda onslaught the Republicans plan to launch to defend torture, this Torture Report release may not do all that much good at all. Torture critics largely lost this debate in 2009, and they’ll actually have less new information with which to fight this if CIA gets its way on declassification.