

ISIKOFF TO CONGRESS: MAKE SURE YOU ASK FOR THE NEGROPONTE MEMO

For all his faults, Michael Isikoff is certainly a reliable journalist through whom people can launder leaks. Take his story (with Hosenball) today (h/t bmaz). Note the grammar of these first two paragraphs:

In the summer of 2005, then CIA director Porter Goss met with then national intelligence director John Negroponte to discuss a highly sensitive matter: what to do about the existence of videotapes documenting the use of controversial interrogation methods, apparently including waterboarding, on two key Al Qaeda suspects. The tapes were eventually destroyed, and congressional investigators are now trying to piece together an extensive paper trail documenting how and why it happened.

One crucial document they'll surely want to examine: a memo written after the meeting between Goss and Negroponte, which records that Negroponte strongly advised against destroying the tapes, according to two people close to the investigation, who asked for anonymity when discussing a sensitive matter. The memo is so far the only known documentation that a senior intel official warned that the tapes should not be destroyed. Spokespeople for the CIA and the intel czar's office declined to comment, citing ongoing investigations. [my emphasis]

This article is framed in terms of what Congressional investigators want, not in terms

of what the DOJ investigation is finding. Indeed, the leak about the Negroonte memo appears to come from two people involved in the investigation in some manner—whatever that investigation may be—who want to make sure news of this memo comes out and who seem to have little faith that news of Negroonte's clear instructions to Goss will come out otherwise.

Also, note the curious no comment in this paragraph. "Spokespeople for the CIA and the intel czar's office." You might assume, forgetting the last year of jostling within the Bush Administration, that it means that Isikoff called Negroonte's office and got a no comment. But while Negroonte was "intel czar" when he wrote this memo, he's not now; he's at State running things for Condi. So unless Isikoff forgot all these details, I'd suggest this article only appears to record a "no comment" from Negroonte, and it certainly doesn't exclude a pretty big comment from him. As in, "Mikey, I'd like you to write about this memo I wrote to Porter, because I'm afraid it's getting buried in the DOJ investigation."

There's another candidate to be one of Isikoff's sources. The article also includes a clear signal from the masterful press manipulator, Bob Bennett, that he intends to advise his client ~~John~~ Jose Rodriguez to plead the Fifth.

Bennett told NEWSWEEK that his client had been "a dedicated and loyal public servant for 31 years" and "has done nothing wrong." But he warned that Rodriguez may refuse to cooperate with investigators if he concludes that the probes are a "witch hunt." "I don't want him to become a scapegoat."

In case you missed it, Bennett uses the same phrase Monica Goodling's lawyer, John Dowd, used, "witch hunts," just before he snookered Congress into offering her immunity for a bunch of stuff that Congress already had evidence she was doing. As a reminder, Monica said almost

nothing that incriminated Rove or Harriet and only sort of incriminated AGAG. But she managed to get herself immunity for "crossing the line" and politicizing DOJ's hiring practices. Bennett's use of precisely same language as Monica's lawyer may be no accident.

Now, as I said, Bennett is clearly sending a message that Rodriguez will invoke the Fifth pretty readily. Is it possible, though, that Rodriguez knows about this memo, too? That is, is it possible that Bennett (who has been using leaks as a primary legal tool since at least Iran-Contra) is trying to trade the Negroponte memo—or at least a description of it—for immunity for his client?

Which is, frankly, about the only reason Michael Mukasey is correct in asking the House Intelligence Committee to back off. Crazy Pete Hoekstra is pretty close to Porter Goss, who appears to know more about the destruction of the torture tapes than he is letting on. And I could see Hoekstra doing the same favors—of impeding an investigation by manipulating the less than crafty chair of the House Intelligence Committee—that Dick Cheney did when he was in the same position during Iran-Contra. In other words, I'm not sure we can trust Crazy Pete to want to get to the bottom of this, and if HPSCI starts offering immunity as incautiously as they did with Monica, then I worry their investigation will stall any real investigation by DOJ—if it exists.

Update: Rodriguez' first name corrected per rxbusa.