

BUT THE TAPES WEREN'T IN WASHINGTON

Jeff points to an LAT article that tries to portray the clandestine services officer at CIA as no longer bound by Porter Goss when the torture tapes were destroyed. The insinuation is that Jose Rodriguez destroyed the tapes, in contravention of Goss' wishes, to protect the clandestine officers who tortured Abu Zubaydah.

Goss had been sharply critical of the clandestine service while in Congress and came to the agency promising sweeping changes. But within months of his arrival, a series of CIA veterans – including three top officers in the clandestine service – resigned in protest of Goss' leadership.

By the time the tapes were destroyed, "they weren't in the business of listening to him," said a former senior U.S. intelligence official who observed the friction first-hand.

Rodriguez had been Goss' pick to lead the clandestine service. Pushing him aside after the tapes were destroyed would have meant another embarrassing departure from the agency's senior spy ranks. [my emphasis]

But then read these passages and tell me what the logical implication of them is:

Shortly after he arrived as CIA director in 2004, Porter J. Goss met with the agency's top spies and general counsel to discuss a range of issues, including what to do with videotapes showing harsh interrogations of Al Qaeda detainees, according to current and former officials familiar with the matter.

"Getting rid of tapes in Washington," Goss said, according to an official involved in the discussions, "is an extremely bad idea."

[snip]

Officials who worked with Rodriguez said that he was never ordered by Goss or any other official to keep the tapes, and that he had obtained advice from agency lawyers saying there was no legal requirement to preserve them.

Former officials said Goss and other CIA leaders were stunned when Rodriguez informed them in November 2005 that the tapes had been destroyed. But Goss did not reprimand or fire Rodriguez, the former officials said, largely because the director, who had previously been bruised by battles with the clandestine service, did not feel he could afford another fight. [my emphasis]

This article provides what purports to be a near-exact quote from Goss saying, "getting rid of the tapes in Washington is an extremely bad idea." It goes on to note that Goss never ordered Rodriguez to keep the tapes.

Of course, the tapes weren't in Washington. As the NYT noted in an important article,

Until their destruction, the tapes were stored in a safe in the C.I.A. station in the country where the interrogations took place, current and former officials said. According to one former senior intelligence official, the tapes were never sent back to C.I.A. headquarters, despite what the official described as concern about keeping such highly classified material overseas. [my emphasis]

A detail this LAT article repeats in significant

form.

The tapes, which were made in 2002, were kept for three years in overseas vaults where secret CIA detention facilities were located.

Given the fact that the tapes never came into this country (except in digital form), this advice to Rodriguez against destroying the tapes, then, seems targeted more toward where Rodriguez should have them destroyed than whether he ought to destroy them. Indeed, I rather take the exact quote as a direction to clean up the matter without letting the evidence enter the US.

This whole story reports on the reputed "tribalism" of the clandestine services, talking about clandestine officers sticking together at all costs. But in the entire article, it never once reports that Goss was a CIA clandestine officer for roughly eleven years. You think maybe that ought to invite reconsideration of whether and how Greg Miller was being spun by Goss' folks?