

# WHO “WE” INCLUDED IN THE TORTURE BRIEFINGS

rincewind made an important point in my post on the torture briefings. At least one of the sources for the story must be one of the briefees, not a briefer. rincewind points to these two quotes that come from someone within the committee.

“It kept coming up. CIA wanted us to sign off on each one every time,” said one high-ranking official who asked not to be identified. “They’d say, ‘We’ve got so and so. This is the plan.’”

[snip]

“These discussions weren’t adding value,” a source said. “Once you make a policy decision to go beyond what you used to do and conclude it’s legal, (you should) just tell them to implement it.”

This source obviously considers himself as one of the people receiving the briefing, which further suggests this source is not in the CIA.

As luck would have it, via Troutfishing’s diary and this McGovern piece, I checked out this February 7, 2002 memo in which Bush declares that Al Qaeda will not be entitled to Geneva Convention protections. The memo seems to indicate that it is addressed to all the people who have participated—at least thus far—in discussions on torture; it refers to “our recent extensive discussions regarding the status of Al Qaeda and Taliban detainees.” Now check out the list of addressees:

Dick Cheney  
Colin Powell  
Rummy  
John Ashcroft  
Andy Card

George Tenet  
Condi Rice  
Richard Myers

In other words, two of the people whom Bush noted as being involved in "extensive discussions regarding the status of Al Qaeda and Taliban detainees" are not included in the list ABC News gave of the attendees of the meetings that took place slightly later in 2002: Andy Card and Richard Myers. Either is a possibility to be the "high-ranking official" who objected to the repeated discussions of what techniques to use. Certainly, Myers is on the record as having opposed the decision not to extend Geneva Convention protections to Al Qaeda (most recently in reports from Feith's book). And he would count as "high-ranking" in more than one sense (though neither he, nor Card, is still an official, after all).

So it is possible that, in addition to the CIA briefers trying to protect the CIA in the torture tape investigation, Richard Myers (or Andy Card, but I suspect Myers is more likely, particularly given the way this puts Condi in a bad light) is one of the people making sure that Bush and Cheney and Condi don't escape blame for turning our country into a country of torture.

Update: bmaz sent me this, which confirms that one of the people blabbing about this is a "former senior intelligence official."

Bush administration officials from Vice President Dick Cheney on down signed off on using harsh interrogation techniques against suspected terrorists after asking the Justice Department to endorse their legality, The Associated Press has learned.

The officials also took care to insulate President Bush from a series of meetings where CIA interrogation methods, including waterboarding, which simulates drowning, were discussed and ultimately

approved.

A former senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the meetings described them Thursday to the AP to confirm details first reported by ABC News on Wednesday. The intelligence official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to publicly discuss the issue.

Between 2002 and 2003, the Justice Department issued several memos from its Office of Legal Counsel that justified using the interrogation tactics, including ones that critics call torture.

"If you looked at the timing of the meetings and the memos you'd see a correlation," the former intelligence official said. Those who attended the dozens of meetings agreed that "there'd need to be a legal opinion on the legality of these tactics" before using them on al-Qaida detainees, the former official said.

[snip]

The White House, Justice and State departments and the CIA refused comment Thursday, as did a spokesman for Tenet.

So a former senior US intelligence official who is presumably not Tenet who was involved in 2002 and 2003. Could well be Muller, or McLaughlin (though I still think Muller is likely). Who would want to insulate Bush more, Muller or McLaughlin?

Also note, this article also does not mention Myers and Card. It's possible they were excluded, but by the time Bush signed the February 7 memo, there had already been the first OLC memo (stating Al Qaeda did not qualify for Geneva).