

IS THE HARMAN STORY AN ATTEMPT TO SILENCE HER ABOUT TORTURE?

Laura Rozen has been reporting an angle of the Jane Harman story that has been largely neglected elsewhere—the possibility that this story is coming out now as a way to hit Harman, the fiercest critic of the torture program.

A former senior U.S. intelligence officer said he heard during work on the Hill in the 2004 time period of whispers among members of the intelligence committees and their staffs that Harman was allegedly caught up in some Israel-related case that would likely prevent her from getting the chairmanship of the committee she sought. He also said that it was clear that Goss and Harman (and their staffs) fiercely disliked each other.

But he wondered if the timing of this story was about changing the subject, from what Bush-era officials had authorized, to what the Congress was complicit in. "Is this about taking pressure off the revelations of waterboarding and the memos?" he speculated. "And the fact," he added, "that no real intelligence came out of this whole effort?" referring to the enhanced interrogation/torture regime revealed in the memos, which he said produced no actionable intelligence.

(For his part, Stein said in an online chat Monday afternoon that he had had the story for a while, and only decided to move on it now.)

But the former intelligence official familiar with the matter noted that Goss has given only one on-the-record interview on these CIA controversies

since leaving the CIA director job. In the December 2007 interview, he said that Congressional leaders, including Representatives Pelosi and Goss himself, Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL) and Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL), and later Rep. Harman, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) and Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS), had been briefed on CIA waterboarding back in 2002 and 2003.

"Among those being briefed, there was a pretty full understanding of what the CIA was doing," Goss told the *Washington Post*. "And the reaction in the room was not just approval, but encouragement."

Who was the lone lawmaker the article identified as objecting to the program?

Jane Harman.

The story is plausible not just because Porter Goss—both a former Congressman and former DCI—might fit as one of the sources for all the intelligence reporters covering this story. But also because we know Porter Goss was doing a masterful job working the press to distract from his role in the torture tape destruction (that's what his on-the-record interview was all about). In addition, Porter Goss is deeply implicated in the Bradbury torture memos and the torture tape destruction (and is one potential candidate to be the "senior agency official [who] failed to provide a full account of the CIA's detainee-treatment policy at a closed hearing of the House intelligence committee in February 2005, under questioning by California Rep. Jane Harman"). And it's quite likely that Jane Harman knows quite a bit about just how implicated he is.

With Laura's reporting in mind, take a look at the NYT's latest on Harman, written by intelligence reporter Mark Mazetti and a courts reporter Neil Lewis (with assistance from DOJ reporter Eric Lichtblau). The article serves as a vehicle for Alberto Gonzales' excuse for talking to Porter Goss about the wiretap on

Harman.

A person who is familiar with Mr. Gonzales's account of the events said that the former attorney general had acknowledged having raised with Mr. Goss the idea that Ms. Harman was playing a helpful role in dealing with The Times.

But Mr. Gonzales's principal motive in delaying a briefing for Congressional leaders, the person said, was to keep Ms. Harman from learning of the investigation before she could be interviewed by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Of course, Gonzales' excuse makes no sense, since Harman was apparently never interviewed by the FBI.

A spokesman for Ms. Harman said the congresswoman had never been interviewed by the bureau.

In addition to serving as a vehicle for Gonzales' unconvincing excuse, however, the article also serves as a vehicle for two men implicated in the torture program—John McLaughlin and Michael Hayden—to pile on the evidence that Jane Harman actually did intervene formally with the NYT.

One former official said Thursday that Michael V. Hayden, then the director of the security agency, and John E. McLaughlin, then the acting director of the C.I.A., prepared talking points for Ms. Harman to use in her discussion with Mr. Taubman.

Ms. Harman's spokesman said she "has absolutely no recollection of any talking points for a phone call that took place five years ago."

Pile on, gentlemen! Everyone's doing it!

Look, there are no good guys in this story. Both Harman's story and those of the torture apologists are full of contradictions and obvious holes. But it does seem increasingly likely that this story is designed to try to silence one of the people—Harman—who knows who said and did what with regards to torture.

Update: This post makes this case much more persuasively than I have.