

ABOUT KSM'S LIES

I've been meaning to return to this post for some time. But with the torture apologists teeing up for another attempt at self-justification and with Ali Soufan's recent op-ed, now is as good a time as any.

As I suggested in that earlier post, in March 2003, the CIA subjected Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to brutal torture, including waterboarding him 183 times. Then, after that month of torture concluded, they did an assessment of what he had told him.

And the CIA itself, after torturing KSM for a month, concluded he had lied (this is from footnote 4, Chapter 7 of the 9/11 Report).

In an assessment of KSM's reporting, the CIA concluded that protecting operatives in the United States appeared to be a "major part" of KSM's resistance efforts. For example, in response to questions about U.S. zip codes found in his notebooks, KSM provided the less than satisfactory explanation that he was planning to use the zip code to open new email accounts. CIA report, Intelligence Community Terrorist Threat Assessment, "Khalid Shaykh Muhammed's Threat Reporting—Precious Truths, Surrounded by a Bodyguard of Lies," April 3, 2003, pp 4-5.[my emphasis]

Compare that to what Cheney's hagiographer's source now claims:

"Almost all of the good information came from waterboarding and the other EITs," says a former senior U.S. intelligence official. "Once they broke, they broke for good. And then they talked forever."

Hayes' article is (plausibly or not) entirely sourced to former and current CIA officials;

presumably, they've seen this report. They know that as soon as CIA finished waterboarding KSM, they judged that he was lying particularly about anything that would expose US operations. Yet they are out still trying to claim information KSM gave them after that point—in July and September and the following years—was tied directly to the waterboarding they did before they concluded KSM was lying to them.

And while we're on the subject of lying, let's return to what KSM has said he lied about while being tortured during his 2007 Combatant Status Review Tribunal.

... I make up stories just location UBL. Where is he? I don't know. Then he torture me. Then I said yes, he is in this area of this is al Qaida which I don't him.

So in addition to the information about US operatives that CIA believed KSM was lying about while he was being tortured, KSM himself maintains he lied about where Osama bin Laden was.

With that in mind, recall Ali Soufan's accusation from this weekend.

Mr. Mohammed knew the location of most, if not all, of the members of Al Qaeda's leadership council, and possibly of every covert cell around the world. One can only imagine who else we could have captured, or what attacks we might have disrupted, if Mr. Mohammed had been questioned by the experts who knew the most about him.

I'm not sure, but it appears that Soufan may have believed KSM knew all this information based on his knowledge of what a colleague of his—one who was prohibited from speaking with KSM—knew.

Because the bureau would not employ

these problematic techniques, our agents who knew the most about the terrorists could have no part in the investigation. An F.B.I. colleague of mine who knew more about Khalid Shaikh Mohammed than anyone in the government was not allowed to speak to him.

Now, Soufan clearly has an agenda here, so there's good reason to be skeptical about what he says. But as to the exclusion of the best suited expert on KSM, Phillip Zelikow (who would have still been a neutral observer when he made the observation—reading the interrogations reports is what made him a skeptic about the efficacy of these interrogations) raised concerns about the same thing.

Among the many hidden costs to intelligence collection are ones like this point, which Soufan makes: "An F.B.I. colleague of mine who knew more about Khalid Shaikh Mohammed than anyone in the government was not allowed to speak to him." At the 9/11 Commission, we noticed this too. At the time (late 2003), my commission colleagues and I could not understand why this agent was not helping to question KSM. This was part of broader concerns we had about the substantive quality of the interrogations. I raised the issue in writing with the CIA's General Counsel in our efforts to dig deeper into the way the interrogations were being conducted — a point that I mentioned in this previously disclosed memo.

Understand, according to that memo, even from the limited information the 9/11 Commission was getting, it was clear the people doing the KSM interrogations didn't know stuff about KSM they should have.

So go back and compare what KSM said at his CSRT in 2007 with what Soufan claims. KSM says he was

asked about Osama bin Laden's location and—after first claiming he didn't know—later (after torture) lied about it. Soufan—presumably drawing on the knowledge of FBI's best KSM expert—claims KSM did know locations of top leaders.

Now, I'm not sure who to believe on this point, but it suggests the possibility that when KSM was lying about where OBL was, he actually did know his location.

Like I said, where the truth is on this point, I have no way of judging. One thing is clear, though. None of the apologists are claiming that torturing KSM helped them to find OBL.