

JON KIRIAKOU: LIBBY KNEW PLAME WAS COVERT

☒ Jason Leopold has a long article and videotape of an interview with Jon Kiriakou that you should check out in full. I'll discuss their conversation about Abu Zubaydah's torture (and, more interestingly, Kiriakou's knowledge about who Abu Zubaydah is) later. But I wanted to look more closely at Kiriakou's description of a June 10, 2003 meeting at which (Kiriakou says) Scooter Libby made it clear that he knew of Plame's identity.

Kiriakou said he was the "note taker" at this meeting, which took place on June 10, 2003, when I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, "entered the room furious, putting on a big show, arms flailing around, swearing and demanding to know why nobody at the CIA told him that Valerie Plame was married to Joe Wilson."

Kiriakou said it was clear to him that when Libby "entered the room" on June 10, 2003, he had already known that Plame was an undercover operative.

Now, it always pays to approach Kiriakou's statements with some skepticism. And his description certainly doesn't accord with what Grenier testified to at the Libby trial. But for the moment, let's look at what Kiriakou's description would mean for the chronology of the week of June 8, 2003.

After a break of several weeks after Nicholas Kristof first reported Joe Wilson's allegations, the allegations returned again on June 8, 2003, when George Stephanopoulos asked Condi Rice about the allegations. Apparently first thing on the following day, June 9, 2003, President Bush

expressed to Libby in some way his concern about the allegations. And that seems to have been what set OVP into overdrive trying to learn about the source of the allegations. Later that same afternoon, John Hannah had already completed a briefing for Cheney on the issue.

According to Kiriakou's story, Libby had his furious outburst on June 10. That would probably mean it happened at the 12:45 NSC DC [Deputies Committee] meeting, four hours before Kiriakou wrote his email requesting more information. Though note, the content of the Kiriakou email we have—which asks for very specific information for John McLaughlin in anticipation of a meeting with Cheney the following day and doesn't mention the meeting itself—doesn't match the description he gave Jason:

After Libby's outburst, Kiriakou said he "went back to headquarters and I wrote an email to all of the executive assistants of all the top leaders in the agency saying, this meeting took place, Libby is furious, we believe that he was conveying a message from the vice president. I wanted to know when did we know that Valerie was married to Joe Wilson, sent it around, nobody ever responded to my email."

That says, if Kiriakou's narrative is correct, Libby probably learned of the tie between Plame and Wilson between June 9 and June 10, if not earlier. Which might explain why the date on Libby's note record learning of Plame's tie to Wilson appears to be written over. One possibility, for example, is that the note originally read June 9, not June 12.

This is where Kiriakou's story begins to conflict with Robert Grenier's and Marc Grossman's. Marc Grossman testified he told Libby, probably at a DC meeting on June 11 or 12, that Wilson's wife worked at the CIA (based on the INR memo). And Grenier testified that Libby asked him for information on a phone call

on June 11, at which point, Grenier claimed, he "had never heard of [Wilson's trip] before." Both claims would be false if Libby had blown up in the June 10 meeting.

Now, both Grossman and Grenier's testimony is problematic on a number of other levels, so we can't use their testimony to dismiss Kiriakou's story out of hand.

But Kiriakou's story is interesting for two reasons. First, Cheney claimed the following in his interview with Patrick Fitzgerald:

The Vice President also had no recollection of discussing this matter at a meeting on 6/10/03 he attended with Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) George Tenet and CIA Counter Proliferation Division Manager [redacted]

When asked about the Administrations efforts to research Wilsons mission, the Vice President advised that around the time of the initial media reports, exact date not recalled, he spoke to DCI Tenet directly on the secure telephone line (MLP) from his office

[redacted; snip]

Vice President Cheney believed that all of this discussion occurred during a single telephone convseration that he had with DCI Tenet. The Vice President described the tone of his conversation with DCI Tenet as cordial, however, he had a sense that the DCI was defensive and embarrassed about the issue and had not known what was going on with regards to this mission. The Vice President based this latter assertion on the tone and temperament used by the DCI in the conversation, which was uncharacteristic for Tenet.

The Vice President cannot recall if he mentioned the content of his

conversation with DCI Tenet to Libby, but he stated that if would have shared it with anyone, it would have been Libby. He probably would not have shared this information with Cathie Martin or anyone else from the OVP staff.

That is, Cheney claims he learned of Plame's identity not at a meeting with Tenet and Plame's boss on June 10, the same day Libby allegedly blew up at a Deputies Committee meeting, but on a phone conversation that—at least in the unredacted interview report—lacks a date. Of course, if it came up at that meeting with Tenet and Plame's boss, it might be more likely to include Plame's name and covert status.

Then there's the phone call to Grenier on June 11. As I have noted before, the call to Grenier (the first he ever received from Libby, Grenier testified) was almost certainly not a request for new information, but a request that would have elicited information that Libby and Cheney already knew, but which Martin did not know.

But we know that Libby called Robert Grenier for more information at 1:15 PM that day—precisely halfway into the meeting. Presuming the calendar is accurate, Libby called Robert Grenier in the presence of Cheney and Martin, looking for information he likely already knew (from Grossman and almost certainly from Cheney).

That is, regardless of whether or not Kiriakou's story is true, Libby and Cheney were almost certainly trying to get someone from the CIA to tell their press person what they already knew about Plame (but, at least according to Martin's testimony, that she didn't know they knew). Libby and Cheney were trying to get CIA to tell their press person information so she could pass it onto journalists (notably, Walter Pincus, who had an active request in with OVP for information). And, in fact, that ploy worked;

either that day or the next Bill Harlow passed on the Plame information to Martin, though she claims that she never passed it onto reporters.

But consider how this story changes if, the day before this ploy, Libby stormed into a meeting bitching that CIA never told him that Plame was married to Joe Wilson. While that would mean Grenier's testimony is incorrect on a number of levels, it would add one more level of duplicity on Libby's part, given that he effectively had already made it clear that Grenier knew who Plame was before he called for information on June 11.

In any case, at the very least the story means that someone—in addition to Scooter Libby—is lying (though if it's Kiriakou, thanks to the work of now-Criminal Division head Lanny Breuer, he didn't do so under oath). But given the number of things that happened on June 10, 2003, Kiriakou's story does add an interesting wrinkle.