

IS MUKASEY SUGGESTING WE IGNORED INFORMATION MOHAMMED AL- QAHTANI GAVE US?

I've been having difficulty finding the time to get through the entire AEI torture extravaganza that took place yesterday ("Moderated" by John Yoo). But by the time I read this Greg Sargent piece, I had gotten through the point at about 3 minutes in where Michael Mukasey said,

Was there a memo in the file beforehand [before KSM uttered the name of courier Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti] that contained that name? Yes, but it was disregarded because it came from somebody insignificant and it was not regarded as significant.

Which in and of itself seems an admission (one reflected in the CIA IG Report) that CIA wasn't accrediting intelligence from more minor figures adequately in their assessments of efficacy.

But there may be another problem with Mukasey's statement. According to the NYT, KSM was reported to have been asked about al-Kuwaiti months after his waterboarding, in fall 2003.

And as you may have seen in reporting, al-Kuwaiti's name comes up in a curious reference in Mohammed al-Qahtani's Gitmo file. Note I'm showing the quotes themselves and the sources. And as you read this, remember that KU-10024 is KSM's detainee number, so the email training described involves KSM, al-Kuwaiti, and al-Qahtani.

(S//NF) Detainee received computer training from al-Qaida member Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti in preparation for his

mission to the US.

(S//NF) Detainee stated while at Abu Shem's house in Karachi in July 2001, KU-10024 had al-Kuwaiti teach detainee to send email. KU-10024 informed detainee when someone went on a mission, he would need to know how to send messages and email was safer than talking on the phone. Al-Kuwaiti took detainee to a local internet cafe for his training.⁴²

(S//NF) Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti was a senior al-Qaida facilitator and subordinate of KU-10024. Al-Kuwaiti worked in the al-Qaida media house operated by KU-10024 in Kandahar and served as a courier.⁴³

(S//NF) Al-Qaida facilitator Hassan Ghul stated al-Kuwaiti, Hamza al-Ghamdi and Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi traveled with UBL.⁴⁴ (Analyst Note: Al-Kuwaiti was seen in Tora Bora and it is possible al-Kuwaiti was one of the individuals detainee reported accompanying UBL in Tora Bora prior to UBL's disappearance.)

(S//NF) Detainee stated he was not very skilled in the use of email and al-Kuwaiti told KU-10024 it would be difficult for the detainee to fully understand computers or how to use the internet for the purpose of emailing. (Analyst Note: Detainee attended a computer course in Saudi Arabia and received a certificate upon graduating. It is doubtful detainee would not be able to grasp the concept and procedures necessary for internet email, especially with Arabic websites that offered the service. Detainee stated KU-10024 provided him with a code to use when he reported success obtaining his visa.)⁴⁵

⁴² IIR 6 034 1194 03

⁴³ IIR 6 034 0226 05, TD-314/04398-05,

TD-314/39130-02

44 TD-314/29012-04, TD-314/30205-04,
Analyst Note: For additional information
see TD-314/05730-05, IIR 6 034 0226 05,
TD-314/45991-05, TD-314/63199-04,
TD-314/04398-05, TD-314/56328-04,
TD-314/55744-04, TD- 314/49162-04,
TD-314/45296-04, TD-314/24351-04,
TD-314/04950-04, TD-314/39130-02, IIR 6
034 0760 03

45 IIR 6 034 1194 03, 000063 SIR 30-
MAY-2003, IIR 6 034 1205 03 [my
emphasis]

First, note the argument they're making here. To support the claim that Mohammed al-Qahtani must be an important al Qaeda figure, they use his own description of being trained on using email by Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti, and then link that up with all the information the folks at Gitmo knew about al-Kuwaiti in 2008, thereby showing associatively that al-Qahtani was being trained by people—KSM and al-Kuwaiti—who had close ties to OBL.

Some of this information to support this argument was obviously collected after al-Qahtani's earlier interrogations (and notably, after the most intense part of his torture, which lasted from November 23, 2002 to January 15, 2003) and from other detainees. The information about al-Kuwait's role as a facilitator and courier (see footnote 43) is sourced to two intelligence reports from 2005, and one from 2002. Given that there's nothing that says al-Qahtani explained this detail himself, that 2002 report might be the report from the detainee held by another country.

Then there's the intelligence given by Hassan Ghul, dated 2004 (see footnote 44), stating that al-Kuwaiti traveled with OBL. One of the two 2005 reports also cited is one of the same reports named in footnote 45.

It's the information that came from al-Qahtani

himself—which takes the form, “detainee stated”—that’s more interesting. The three pieces of intelligence that appear to come from al-Qahtani (see footnotes 42 and 45) are all dated 2003. More interesting, one of them is named 000063 SIR 30-MAY-2003. The appearance of al-Qahtani’s detainee number, 063, seems confirmation this intelligence came from him. And the report is dated May 30, 2003, at least three months before KSM is reported to have talked about al-Kuwaiti, but more than five months after his torture ended.

Now, it’s possible that al-Qahtani didn’t use al-Kuwaiti’s nickname. But it at least appears that al-Qahtani was using it several months before KSM was. Mind you, he didn’t say anything about al-Kuwaiti traveling with OBL (which came two years later from Hassan Ghul) or being a courier (which may have come from that detainee in another country). Just that some guy with ties to KSM tried to teach him to use email.

Of course, this doesn’t clear up the torture debate at all (aside from the fact that torture is illegal and immoral and, in the case of al-Qahtani, has made it impossible to try him for his presumed role in 9/11). After all, it appears that, like KSM, al-Qahtani started to talk about al-Kuwaiti five months after being tortured. And note, it appears, though is not certain, that al-Qahtani did not give this information to the FBI or DOD before he was tortured, when they didn’t know who he was.

But it does appear to be fatal for Mukasey’s story. It’s one thing to claim that a detainee in some other country is so minor no one paid attention to the intelligence he offered. But you can’t make the claim al-Qahtani—the assumed 20th hijacker—was insignificant.

Which leads to the bigger question: why did it take CIA at least three months after al-Qahtani talked about being trained for 9/11 by al-Kuwaiti before they asked KSM about him?