

Torturers in the White House: Why Is This Story Being Ignored?

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The biggest news of the last week went virtually uncovered by the mainstream, print media. ABC News first reported last Wednesday that top Bush Administration officials, including Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, John Ashcroft, and George Tenet, Colin Powell, and Donald Rumsfeld met to discuss which particular torture techniques should be used against Al Qaeda suspects in U.S. custody.

The group signed off on specific techniques, including sleep deprivation, slapping, pushing, and waterboarding, and gave instruction “so detailed ... some of the interrogation sessions were almost choreographed, down to the number of times CIA agents could use a specific tactic.”

If John McCain is seriously considering Condoleezza Rice as a running mate, the former POW should keep in mind that Rice not only condoned torture, but chaired the National Security Council’s “Principals Committee” meetings to plan the details of torture of prisoners in U.S. custody.

Then-Attorney General John Ashcroft was so troubled by the meetings, he was moved to object: “Why are we discussing this in the White House?” he asked, according to ABC. “History will not judge this kindly.”

On Friday, ABC added this blockbuster: Bush himself was aware of the meetings. Unlike Ashcroft, he had no compunctions. There was nothing “startling” about the revelations that his top advisers were directing the waterboarding of individual prisoners, Bush told ABC’s Martha Raddatz. “And yes, I’m aware our national security team met on this issue and I approved,” Bush said.

Why is this not bigger news?

Remember when the nation was brought to a virtual standstill over Bill Clinton’s affair with a White House intern?

We now have confirmation that the President of the United States gave the OK for his national security team to violate international law and plot the sordid details of torture. The Democrats in Congress should be raising the roof.

House Judiciary Committee Chair John Conyers, to his credit, has suggested subpoenaing the members of the Principals Committee, calling their actions “a stain on our democracy.”

Conyers also threatened last week to subpoena John Yoo, the former Justice Department lawyer whose recently declassified 2003 torture memos attempted to give legal cover to practices such as waterboarding.

Such techniques, as long as their sole purpose wasn't sadism, were acceptable, Yoo wrote. Being a sadist was presumably necessary but not sufficient qualification for employment in the Bush White House.

In his new book *The Terror Presidency*, Yoo's colleague Jack Goldsmith writes about his evolution from friend and supporter of the officials who brought us to this pass to a conscientious objector to their illegal and morally corrupt practices.

Back when he worked for Rumsfeld at the Pentagon, Goldsmith wrote a memo warning that Bush Administration officials could be indicted by the International Criminal Court for their actions in the war on terror.

After he went to work for Justice, Goldsmith began standing up to the torture cabal at the White House — to his enduring discomfort. In one incident, recounted in his book and in a September profile by Jeffrey Rosen of the New York Times Magazine, he knocked heads with Dick Cheney's advisor (now his chief of staff) David Addington. Goldsmith delivered the bad news that terror suspects were, in fact, covered by the Fourth Geneva Convention against torture of civilians: "The president has already decided that terrorists do not receive Geneva Convention protections," Addington replied angrily, according to Goldsmith. "You cannot question his decision."

Goldsmith also criticized the torture memos for their "extremely broad and unnecessary analysis of the President's Commander-in-Chief power" and for their extremely loose definition of torture as limited to causing a level of pain akin to organ failure.

Pointing out that the Administration was violating the War Crimes Act of 1996, the Geneva Conventions, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Goldsmith withdrew Yoo's torture memos — and promptly resigned his post.

Even after losing that flimsy legal cover, Bush and the other members of the Principals Committee appear unrepentant and undeterred.

Goldsmith, who now teaches law at Harvard, is no civil libertarian, but like John Ashcroft and John McCain, he has spoken out against executive lawlessness. No doubt he would have plenty to tell the House Judiciary Committee.

And perhaps the International Criminal Court as well.

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