

New revelation regarding CIA destruction of torture tapes

Former CIA agent acknowledges use of water-boarding in interrogations

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A former CIA agent who was involved in the capture of Al Qaeda leader Abu Zubaydah in 2002 said on Monday that US personnel used “enhanced interrogation techniques” against Zubaydah, including water-boarding. The former agent indicated he now believed these methods constituted torture.

His statement followed revelations that in 2005, the CIA destroyed videotapes showing hundreds of hours of interrogations involving two prisoners, one of whom was Zubaydah.

The statements of the former CIA operative, John Kiriakou, provide further substantiation that in destroying the tapes, the CIA was deliberately eliminating evidence of illegal actions ordered by the Bush administration. All the methods used on Zubaydah—including water-boarding, which simulates drowning—were approved by administration officials.

Kiriakou was interviewed by Brian Ross of ABC News. Excerpts of the interview were aired on ABC Nightly News, while the full interview was shown later Monday evening on the “Nightline” program.

When asked by Ross if he thought water-boarding was torture, the former CIA agent replied, “At the time, no. At the time I thought this was something that we really needed to do... I think I’ve changed my mind.”

Kiriakou also said, “We had a group of folks at the agency trained in what came to be called in the press ‘enhanced techniques.’” These included everything from shaking a person, to slapping him, to water-boarding. Kiriakou added that Zubaydah was able to withstand water-boarding for “quite some time, and by that I mean probably 30 to 35 seconds.”

Kiriakou’s interview—both Ross’ questions and his answers—while including damning admissions,

appeared to have the character of damage control. The former agent indicated he believed the use of water-boarding “should not be a secret,” but should be discussed openly. He repeated the standard rationale given by defenders of such illegal and brutal methods—that they are useful in obtaining information from terrorists to prevent new attacks and “save lives.”

Kiriakou made clear that all the techniques used had explicit approval from top government officials. “I remember being told when the president had signed the authorities [to use the techniques] that they had been approved not just by the National Security Council, but by the Justice Department as well. I remember people being surprised that the authorities had been granted.”

He said that each one of the interrogation methods was directly approved by the deputy director of operations of the CIA during the course of the interrogation.

Kiriakou ended his interview by saying it was necessary to weigh “the idea that water-boarding may be torture versus the quality of information we may get using water-boarding.”

Despite Kiriakou’s rationalizations, his interview confirms that the CIA was using this technique—which has been prosecuted as torture for decades and was a staple of regimes employing torture going back to the Spanish Inquisition.

His comments came as the Bush administration, in collaboration with the Democratic Party leadership, scrambled to contain the political damage and possible legal fallout from the revelation that the CIA destroyed tapes showing water-boarding and other abusive practices.

Both the 9/11 Commission and the judge in the trial

of Zacarias Moussaoui, who was convicted in May 2006 of having participated in planning for the September 11 attacks, had requested that the CIA turn over any such evidence. The CIA denied that it had videotapes of Al Qaeda interrogations, and then destroyed at least two tapes it was holding. This clearly leaves top CIA officials and possibly other high-ranking government officials open to potential prosecution for obstruction of justice.

The White House has instructed its spokesperson, Dana Perino, not to answer any specific questions on the tapes and their destruction on the grounds that there is an ongoing investigation. "Until that process [a CIA and Justice Department inquiry] works itself out, I'm going to adhere to their request," Perino said at a Monday press briefing.

Perino repeated her earlier assertion that President Bush had "no recollection" of the tapes or the decision to destroy them. Over the weekend, there were reports that former White House counsel Harriet Miers knew of the tapes and advised the CIA not to destroy them.

Last Thursday, CIA head Michael Hayden insisted that the decision to destroy the videotapes was made internally by the CIA. The official line that is being developed by the White House is that the decision to destroy the tapes was made by the CIA alone. In fact, both Democratic and Republican leaders of the congressional intelligence committees and the White House knew about the tapes and the plans of the CIA to destroy them as early as 2003.

The Senate Intelligence Committee is holding a hearing today on the matter, at which CIA Director Hayden is scheduled to appear. The committee is chaired by John D. (Jay) Rockefeller of West Virginia. Rockefeller was among those Democrats who were informed of the secret CIA interrogation program in 2002 and did not raise any objections.

Democratic Senator Joseph Biden has called for a special investigator to look into the tapes, but has to date received no support from the rest of the Democratic Party leadership.



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