

Torture, Iraq and 9/11

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By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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5 hours after the 9/11 attacks, Donald Rumsfeld said ["my interest is to hit Saddam"](#).

He also said ["Go massive . . . Sweep it all up. Things related and not."](#)

And at 2:40 p.m. on September 11th, in a memorandum of discussions between top administration officials, several lines below the statement "judge whether good enough [to] hit S.H. [that is, Saddam Hussein] at same time", is the statement ["Hard to get a good case."](#) In other words, top officials knew that there wasn't a good case that Hussein was behind 9/11, but they wanted to use the 9/11 attacks as an excuse to justify war with Iraq anyway.

And yet, the government knew that Al Qaeda and Iraq were not linked. For example, "Ten days after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, [President Bush was told in a highly classified briefing that the U.S. intelligence community had no evidence linking the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein to the \[9/11\] attacks and that there was scant credible evidence that Iraq had any significant collaborative ties with Al Qaeda](#)".

And a Defense Intelligence Terrorism Summary issued in February 2002 by the United States Defense Intelligence Agency [cast significant doubt on the possibility of a Saddam Hussein-al-Qaeda conspiracy](#).

And yet Bush, Cheney and other top administration officials claimed and *continue* to claim that Saddam was behind 9/11. See [this analysis](#). Indeed, [Bush administration officials apparently swore in a lawsuit that Saddam was behind 9/11](#).

Indeed, President Bush's [March 18, 2003 letter to Congress authorizing the use of force against Iraq](#), includes the following paragraph:

(2) acting pursuant to the Constitution and Public Law 107-243 is consistent with the United States and other countries continuing to take the necessary actions against international terrorists and terrorist organizations, **including those nations, organizations, or persons who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.**

Therefore, the Bush administration expressly justified the Iraq war to Congress by representing that Iraq planned, authorized, committed, or aided the 9/11 attacks. See [this](#).

Tortured Logic

Yesterday, Senator Levin revealed that [the U.S. used torture techniques aimed at extracting false confessions](#).

Today, McClatchy [fills in](#) some of the details:

Former senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the interrogation issue said that Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld demanded that the interrogators find evidence of al Qaida-Iraq collaboration...

For most of 2002 and into 2003, Cheney and Rumsfeld, especially, were also demanding proof of the links between al Qaida and Iraq that (former Iraqi exile leader Ahmed) Chalabi and others had told them were there."

It was during this period that CIA interrogators waterboarded two alleged top al Qaida detainees repeatedly — Abu Zubaydah at least 83 times in August 2002 and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed 183 times in March 2003 — according to a newly released Justice Department document...

When people kept coming up empty, they were told by Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people to push harder," he continued. "Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people were told repeatedly, by CIA . . . and by others, that there wasn't any reliable intelligence that pointed to operational ties between bin Laden and Saddam . . .

A former U.S. Army psychiatrist, Maj. Charles Burney, told Army investigators in 2006 that interrogators at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention facility were under "pressure" to produce evidence of ties between al Qaida and Iraq.

"While we were there a large part of the time we were focused on trying to establish a link between al Qaida and Iraq and we were not successful in establishing a link between al Qaida and Iraq," Burney told staff of the Army Inspector General. "The more frustrated people got in not being able to establish that link . . . there was more and more pressure to resort to measures that might produce more immediate results."

"I think it's obvious that the administration was scrambling then to try to find a connection, a link (between al Qaida and Iraq)," [Senator] Levin said in a conference call with reporters. "They made out links where they didn't exist."

Levin recalled Cheney's assertions that a senior Iraqi intelligence officer had met Mohammad Atta, the leader of the 9/11 hijackers, in the Czech Republic capital of Prague just months before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The FBI and CIA found that no such meeting occurred.

In other words, top Bush administration officials not only knowingly lied about a non-existent connection between Al Qaida and Iraq, but they pushed and insisted that interrogators use special torture methods aimed at extracting false confessions to attempt to create such a false linkage.

What Does That Say About the Persuasiveness of the 9/11 Commission Report?

As noted by [Newsweek](#):

The commission appears to have ignored obvious clues throughout 2003 and 2004 that its account of the 9/11 plot and Al Qaeda's history relied heavily on information obtained from detainees who had been subjected to torture, or something not far from it.

The panel raised no public protest over the CIA's interrogation methods, even though news reports at the time suggested how brutal those methods were. In fact, the commission demanded that the CIA carry out new rounds of interrogations in 2004 to get answers to its questions.

That has troubling implications for the credibility of the commission's final report. In intelligence circles, testimony obtained through torture is typically discredited; research shows that people will say anything under threat of intense physical pain.

And yet it is a distinct possibility that Al Qaeda suspects who were the exclusive source of information for long passages of the commission's report may have been subjected to "enhanced" interrogation techniques, or at least threatened with them, because of the 9/11 Commission....

Information from CIA interrogations of two of the three—KSM and Abu Zubaydah—is cited throughout two key chapters of the panel's report focusing on the planning and execution of the attacks and on the history of Al Qaeda.

Footnotes in the panel's report indicate when information was obtained from detainees interrogated by the CIA. An analysis by NBC News found that more than a quarter of the report's footnotes—441 of some 1,700—referred to detainees who were subjected to the CIA's "enhanced" interrogation program, including the trio who were waterboarded.

Commission members note that they repeatedly pressed the Bush White House and CIA for direct access to the detainees, but the administration refused. So the commission forwarded questions to the CIA, whose interrogators posed them on the panel's behalf.

The commission's report gave no hint that harsh interrogation methods were used in gathering information, stating that the panel had "no control" over how the CIA did its job; the authors also said they had attempted to corroborate the information "with documents and statements of others."

But how could the commission corroborate information known only to a handful of people in a shadowy terrorist network, most of whom were either dead or still at large?

Former senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, a Democrat on the commission, told me last year he had long feared that the investigation depended too heavily on the accounts of Al Qaeda detainees who were physically coerced into talking.
...

Kerrey said it might take "a permanent 9/11 commission" to end the remaining mysteries of September 11. Those now calling for more 9/11-style panels would be wise to heed his words.

Indeed, as I have repeatedly noted, the [9/11 Commission Report was largely based on a third-hand account of what tortured detainees said](#), with two of the three parties in the communication being government employees.

The 9/11 Commission itself is complaining that the government lied to – and hid evidence from – the Commission. See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).

Now that we know that the interrogators used [torture techniques aimed at extracting false confessions](#) , does the 9/11 Commission Report carry any weight whatsoever?

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