

The Great Dick Cheney Psyche Out

Contributed by Albert Bates
19 May 2009

"Enhanced interrogation was reverse-engineered to create a false linkage between Iraq, Al Qaeda and the events of 9/11. Just ask yourself — why would anyone want to do that?"

In a recent interview with the C-realm, petrocollapse author James Howard Kunstler said he was allergic to conspiracy theories. While we are sympathetic, we find it hard to draw a firm line between conspiracy rants, news shows, and intelligence briefings these days.

Maybe it is the effect Wikipedia has had on the study of history, or perhaps it is the blurring of the line between popular culture infotainment and the more serious work of running countries, economies, and wars.

Just now the talking heads in the mediasphere are all abuzz: why hasn't Dick Cheney clammed up and disappeared into the woodwork like Bush? He is expending great energy to psyche us all out. Why? To what end?

The popular storyline from the left (The Nation, Slate, MSNBC, Air America, Sirius-Left) is that Cheney is filling the void on the Republican right wing and vying with Limbaugh for party boss. That nearly 60% of Republicans wish he would just disappear for a couple of years makes it fun fodder for Saturday Night Live.

The bobblehead thread on the right, when it can be coalesced for longer than one news cycle, is that (a) Cheney is right, Obama is undermining national security, torture works, waterboarding is not torture, and extremism in defense of liberty is ... whatever; or (b) Cheney is wrong, but well-reasoned, and good people can disagree, nothing amiss here, these are not the ones we are looking for, move along.

But there is a darker side here, and it traces to 9/11, the quest for control of oil, and the New American Century and Empire Strikes Back meta-goals involving dominance and hegemony.

What we know from the Congressional hearings this week and from other sources contradicts Dick's talking points pretty definitively. To paraphrase George Washington's blog:

Torture doesn't work. It can't provide reliable information that could keep us safe. It provides whatever confessions the torturers want it to.

Torture actually reduces our national security. It is just a different form of terrorism, and it begets more terrorism by example and reprisal.

Most of those we have tortured since 2001 were innocent, and a untold number -- at least 99 that we know of so far -- died, the most recent this past week of post-traumatic "suicide."

HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATOR JOHN SIFTON: These aggressive techniques were not just limited to the high-value detainee program in the CIA. They spread to the military with disastrous results. They led to the deaths of human beings. And when there's a corpse involved, when there's a dead body involved, you can't just have a debate about policy differences and looking forward or looking backward.

Sleep and sensory deprivation and other techniques can cause permanent brain damage. There are US torture victims still imprisoned who have been reduced to zombies, and who can never be tried because they lack mental capacity. They are consigned to vegetable wards. If we close Gitmo, they will have to be root cellared in Kansas, Missouri, or other federal fruit baskets.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of victims were not tortured in order to prevent terrorist attacks, but in order to do precisely what "enhanced interrogation" was reverse-engineered to do: create a false justification for the war in Iraq (by creating a false linkage between Iraq and Al Qaeda) and to conceal and obfuscate the events of 9/11. The first victims singled out for torture were used to create a narrative story-line for 9/11 — and other justifications for invasion of the oil-rich Middle East came later.

Torture, historically, is a form of intimidation, to terrorize people into obedience. The English aristocracy were especially good at it, which may have something to do with its appeal to Republicans (both in the US and Ireland). It is continued, even though ineffective, according to the FBI interrogation specialist who just testified to Congress, because it is easy, not because it works. It is used to coerce false confessions, or lay false rabbit trails, not to gain intelligence.

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, the Vice President's suggesting that there was good information obtained, and I'd like the committee to get that information. Let's have both sides of the story here. I mean, one of the reasons these techniques have survived for about 500 years is apparently they work.

FBI SPECIAL AGENT ALI SOUFAN: Because, sir, there's a lot of people who don't know how to interrogate—

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM: Right.

ALI SOUFAN: —and it's easier to hit someone than outsmart them.

The 9/11 Commission report was primarily based upon confessions from those who were excessively waterboarded. Some who survived have since recanted. None of the 9/11 information obtained this way is credible. Did Al Qaeda hijack the jetliners? Was Osama Bin Laden involved? We simply do not know. We know more about Marvin Bush or Prince Bandar's involvement in 9/11 than we know about Osama Bin Laden's.

If we really want to reduce attacks against the U.S. and against NATO troops, than the way forward is to prosecute those who created the torture program and to understand what the purpose for that program really was. Cheney knows, but is not telling.

Or was Cheney a dummy? Is he being proactive in defense (of torture prosecution/extradition), while not understanding the full crime being exposed (9/11)? We don't know.

Is he setting himself up as the fall guy, making it embarrassing to prosecute him because it would seem like a political reprisal? Hard to say. We just observe that the Kabuki is getting very interesting.

JOHN SIFTON: Yeah, well, I don't know if it's successful yet, but I certainly think that his methodology is one in which he thinks he will be covered if there is ever, God forbid, a terrorist attack on US territory again, and then he will be vindicated, in his mind. I hope Americans are intelligent enough to see through that and realize that it's not that simple.

We do know Dick is smart, just maybe not as smart as he thinks he is. This is a high stakes enterprise. If Bush Sr., James Baker and the rest of that cabal begin to feel the heat, they may have more tools at their disposal than Dick foresees. Squirring is not what they do. He is vulnerable, even with a waning Secret Service protection cordon.

You are on a pacemaker, old man, after all.

Seeing Cheney as a patsy, or patsy-to-be, is a reach, but not entirely impossible. Bush is laying low, building a presidential library, giving a non-controversial speech or two in safe venues, like Canada. Keeping his head down. That is what a guilty party would do. Cheney is out making noise, trying to pre-empt or politicize the investigations. It is also what a guilty party might do, but the risks are much higher. He is tickling the dragon's tail.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Did President Bush know everything you knew?

DICK CHENEY: I certainly, yeah, have every reason to believe he knew—he knew a great deal about the program. He basically authorized it. I mean, this was a presidential-level decision, and the decision went to the President, and he signed off on it.

The spin from the Republican inner circle is that Cheney is hawking a memoirs deal. Bull. He doesn't need the money.

No, he is casting himself as a victim, making it impolitic to arrest and deport him. It is also a (presumably futile) attempt to derail the torture investigation, before it leads back up the 9/11 trail. Maybe he thought he had nailed that deal with President Obama and Speaker Pelosi before he left Washington, but now it seems to be unraveling, so he is doing darning.

Or maybe he is falling on his sword, taking one for the team, a la Ollie North or E. Gordon Liddy. With all eyes on Darth, no-one seems to look around and notice the expanding Drone Wars to hold back the oil famine.

As Will Ferrell's George Bush told Darrell Hammond's Dick Cheney on last night's Saturday Night Live, "Just stick to our plan. Let's let history be the judge, okay? It's an awesome plan because history takes forever."

Whether you buy into the conspiracies or are allergic like Mr. Kunstler, it makes great theater. So will the trials.

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