

Senior White House officials played a central role in deliberations in the spring of 2002 about whether the Central Intelligence Agency could legally use harsh interrogation techniques while questioning an operative of Al Qaeda, Abu Zubaydah, according to newly released documents.

In meetings during that period, the officials debated specific interrogation methods that the C.I.A. had proposed to use on Qaeda operatives held at secret C.I.A. prisons overseas, the documents show. The meetings were led by Condoleezza Rice, then the national security adviser, and attended by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, Attorney General John Ashcroft and other top administration officials.

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