

Obama convened torture memo debate

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- U.S. President Barack Obama convened a high-level, contentious debate in the White House over whether to release Bush administration torture memos, sources say.

In the April 15 meeting, CIA Director Leon Panetta and four former CIA heads argued against releasing interrogation details contained in four "top secret" memos in which Bush administration lawyers sanctioned what many have called torture against terrorism suspects, and Attorney General Eric Holder, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair and White House counsel Gregory Craig spoke in favor of their release, unnamed sources told Friday's Washington Post.

When the heated debate ended, Obama decided he would release the documents and dictated a draft of his announcement on the spot while most of the officials watched, the sources said.

The contentiousness of the meeting reflected concerns among some administration officials -- since borne out -- that a public airing of the harsh interrogation techniques approved by the Bush White House would spark an intense debate with conservatives, the newspaper said.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who supported the documents' release, told reporters much of the information within them had already been leaked, but he regretted a possible "negative impact on our troops."

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