

BUSH'S EMPIRE: MAKING HIS OWN REALITY, NIE EDITION

I'm interested in Michael Hirsh's report that Bush trashed the key judgments of the NIE while in Israel for two reasons. First, WTF was the SA0 who leaked the story trying to accomplish?

That NIE, made public Dec. 3, embarrassed the administration by concluding that Tehran had halted its weapons program in 2003, which seemed to undermine years of bellicose rhetoric from Bush and other senior officials about Iran's nuclear ambitions. But in private conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert last week, the president all but disowned the document, **said a senior administration official who accompanied Bush on his six-nation trip to the Mideast.** "He told the Israelis that he can't control what the intelligence community says, but that [the NIE's] conclusions don't reflect his own views" about Iran's nuclear-weapons program, said the official, who would discuss intelligence matters only on the condition of anonymity. [my emphasis]

The same article quotes Stephen Hadley, one of a limited number of Senior Administration Officials accompanying Bush on the trip, as saying that Bush said only that Iran remains a threat, regardless of what the NIE says.

Bush's national-security adviser, Stephen Hadley, told reporters in Jerusalem that Bush had only said to Olmert privately what he's already said publicly, which is that he believes Iran remains "a threat" no matter what the NIE says.

Was Hadley's on the record quote a continuation of the earlier anonymous comment to Hirsh or, more likely, a response to the earlier leak, an alternate view of what the anonymous SAO was spinning to Hirsh? That is, did some SAO spin Bush's fairly innocuous comment (at least as Hadley interpreted it) as a repudiation of the NIE, contrary to the official stance of the Administration? And if so, to what end? To support Dick Cheney's campaign for war (Stephen Hadley is often considered a Cheney operative, though he was stuck playing the interlocutor between Cheney and the CIA leading up to the Plame leak)?

But I'm also struck by the timing of this quote. If I were one of the analysts who worked on this NIE—or even, say, one of the senior intelligence officers who threatened to go public with the key judgments of the NIE—I'd be pretty peeved to know that Bush was bad-mouthing my handiwork to allies, particularly after the apparent confrontation to get it declassified in the first place. And, as luck would have it, at least one or two of those senior intelligence officers are going to be called before Congress and questioned by DOJ in the inquiry into the terror tape destruction in the next several weeks (Steven Kappes comes to mind).

Particularly given the centrality of David Addington in discussions of whether or not to destroy the terror tapes, I wonder whether it's really a good idea for the war-mongers to piss off the intelligence community, just as this thing begins to escalate.

But then, I guess I would cry no tears if the CIA happened to implicate David Addington in the destruction of evidence of torture.