

ARE CHENEY AND BUSH IN A LOVER'S QUARREL?

Via TP, the Telegraph reports that Cheney's in a snit over North Korea being taken off the Axis of Evil list.

Vice President Dick Cheney fought furiously to block efforts by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to strike a controversial US compromise deal with North Korea over the communist state's nuclear programme, the Telegraph has learned.

"The exchanges between Cheney's office and Rice's people at State got very testy. But ultimately Condi had the President's ear and persuaded him that his legacy would be stronger if they reached a deal with Pyongyang," said a Pentagon adviser who was briefed on the battle.

Mr Cheney's office is believed to have played a key role in the release two months ago of documents and photographs linking North Korea to a suspected nuclear site in Syria that was bombed by Israeli jets last year.

[snip]

Mr Cheney was so angry about the decision to remove North Korea from the terrorism blacklist and lift some sanctions that he abruptly curtailed a meeting with visiting US foreign experts when asked about it in the White House last week, according to the New York Times "I'm not going to be the one to announce this decision. You need to address your interest in this to the State Department," he reportedly said before leaving the room.

I'm not surprised that Cheney's pissed, mind you. One of the reasons he planted John Bolton at State, after all, was to scuttle any attempts at diplomacy with North Korea. Rather, I'm interested that Condi, not Dick, won this battle to influence the President. While Bush has allowed Condi some leeway in the Middle East, he has not backed Condi's diplomacy over Dick's belligerence on such a big issue thus far (though, you might consider the fact that we haven't nuked Iran yet to be a sign of Condi's influence).

It made me think of two details about Addington's testimony the other day. First, when asked by Nadler at one point why the fuck the Barnacle Branch is represented in torture meetings, Addington noted that it was the practice of the Administration to include the Barnacle Branch in such meetings.

Nadler: You stated to WS earlier that your involvement in CIA program greater than military program?

ADD: A number of meetings. Participating in legal meetings.

Nadler: You just said you're not a member of executive branch. Why was lawyer for VP in such a meeting?

ADD: VP's provide advice.

Nadler: And participate in various agencies business.

ADD: Modern VPs provide assistance and they provide staff. When the President's staff wishes to have us participate?

Nadler: President asked?

ADD: We were included because it's the practice.

The crappy liveblogger didn't catch it, but after describing that the President's practice was to include the Barnacle Branch in such

meetings, he noted that the level of inclusion the President gives the Barnacle Branch changes at times. It's the kind of off-hand comment Addington makes which tend to be pregnant with meaning (and also tend to be really surly). So I wondered whether Addington wasn't publicly tweaking Bush about leaving the Barnacle Branch out of something.

And then there's the puzzle of why Addington had to testify Thursday at all—why he wasn't able to invoke privilege, but instead had to wave around the letter Harriet got, but he didn't. It would be just like the petulant President to refuse to allow Addington to invoke privilege, when he had helped Miers and everyone else avoid testifying, if he was pissed about something. (Though note, thus far, Rove has not been allowed to invoke privilege on the Siegelman stuff).

At this point, these are just a bunch of data points. But boy, if Cheney and Bush were getting in a tiff, we might have some real fun. After all, Cheney made sure to record Bush's involvement in "asking Libby to stick his neck in a meat-grinder" when he felt Bush was hanging Libby out to dry. And given the fact that Addington included the three pieces of evidence that tie George Bush personally to the nation's torture policies, it seems like Cheney and Addington would be prepared to threaten Bush on some other counts, as well.