

# DAVID IGNATIUS: CHENEY CAN'T EVEN GET POTENTIALLY ILLEGAL COVERT OPS RIGHT

To be fair "serious person" Ignatius would never be so dismissive of so "serious" a person as Dick Cheney. But in his response to Hersh's Sunday article, he pretty much agrees that covert stuff is going on, even while he points out that that—like our Iranian policy more generally—is amateurish and ineffective (h/t Laura).

In the new cold war between America and Iran, the United States appears to be running some limited covert operations across the Iranian border. But according to knowledgeable sources, this effort shares the defect of broader U.S. policy toward Iran — it is tentative and ill-coordinated, and it undermines diplomacy without bringing serious pressure on the regime.

"Tell us what's your policy with Iran," says one Arab official familiar with the covert program. "Are you going to talk to them or go to war with them?" This official describes U.S. operations this way: "There are attempts to cause mischief inside Iran and go after the Quds Force. Some things are being done, but not with the seriousness that's needed."

Argues a former intelligence official, "It's a PowerPoint covert-action program. It looks aggressive, but it's not a tied-together, long-term strategy that would make Iran change its policy."

Looks like they're potentially illegal covert ops just for the sake of potentially illegal

covert ops, then, I guess. Huzzah to Dick Cheney and his willingness to flout Congressional oversight all in the interest of playing some big boy games!

I can't help but think we're hearing the same kind of report—well, worse, really—from that other area of our foreign policy that Dick is in charge of: our Pakistan policy.

Late last year, top Bush administration officials decided to take a step they had long resisted. They drafted a secret plan to make it easier for the Pentagon's Special Operations forces to launch missions into the snow-capped mountains of Pakistan to capture or kill top leaders of Al Qaeda.

[snip]

But more than six months later, the Special Operations forces are still waiting for the green light. The plan has been held up in Washington by the very disagreements it was meant to eliminate. A senior Defense Department official said there was "mounting frustration" in the Pentagon at the continued delay.

[snip]

The story of how Al Qaeda, whose name is Arabic for "the base," has gained a new haven is in part a story of American accommodation to President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, whose advisers played down the terrorist threat. It is also a story of how the White House shifted its sights, beginning in 2002, from counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan to preparations for the war in Iraq.

[snip]

"We're just kind of drifting," said Richard L. Armitage, who as deputy

secretary of state from 2001 to 2005 was the administration's point person for Pakistan.

In case you don't believe Armitage (who I'm sure takes some perverse pleasure out of being quoted as labeling Dick's Pakistan policy as "drifting"), here's some details on why we're drifting.

The roots of the crisis go back to the blind bargain Washington made after 9/11 with the regime that had heretofore been the Taliban's main patron: ignoring Musharraf's despotism in return for his promises to crack down on al-Qaeda and cut the Taliban loose. Today, despite \$10 billion in U.S. aid to Pakistan since 2001, that bargain is in tatters; the Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda's senior leadership has set up another haven inside Pakistan's chaotic border regions.

The problem is exacerbated by a dramatic drop-off in U.S. expertise on Pakistan. Retired American officials say that, for the first time in U.S. history, nobody with serious Pakistan experience is working in the South Asia bureau of the State Department, on State's policy planning staff, on the National Security Council staff or even in Vice President Cheney's office. Anne W. Patterson, the new U.S. ambassador to Islamabad, is an expert on Latin American "drugs and thugs"; Richard A. Boucher, the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, is a former department spokesman who served three tours in Hong Kong and China but never was posted in South Asia. "They know nothing of Pakistan," a former senior U.S. diplomat said.

Current and past U.S. officials tell me that Pakistan policy is essentially

being run from Cheney's office. The vice president, they say, is close to Musharraf and refuses to brook any U.S. criticism of him. This all fits; in recent months, I'm told, Pakistani opposition politicians visiting Washington have been ushered in to meet Cheney's aides, rather than taken to the State Department.

Hello!! Don't you guys get it?!?!?!? Every foreign policy issue that Dick Cheney touches turns to shit!!! Even "serious person" David Ignatius thinks so. Get him away from our foreign policy—all of it—as soon as you can, and put him in charge of diplomatic funerals and boat christenings, the kind of stuff the Barnacle Branch is supposed to manage. Because this rank incompetence is getting downright dangerous.