

IS CHENEY BEHIND THE ATTACK ON OBAMA'S PLANS TO WITHDRAW FROM IRAQ?

✘ A number of people have pointed to this important Gareth Porter article describing an insubordinate attack on Obama's plan to withdraw from Iraq in 16 months.

A network of senior military officers is also reported to be preparing to support Petraeus and Odierno by mobilizing public opinion against Obama's decision.

[snip]

The source says the network, which includes senior active-duty officers in the Pentagon, will begin making the argument to journalists covering the Pentagon that Obama's withdrawal policy risks an eventual collapse in Iraq. That would raise the political cost to Obama of sticking to his withdrawal policy.

If Obama does not change the policy, according to the source, they hope to have planted the seeds of a future political narrative blaming his withdrawal policy for the "collapse" they expect in an Iraq without US troops.

One aspect of the article has been underplayed in coverage of this insubordination: the centrality in this plot of Jack Keane.

The opening argument by the Petraeus-Odierno faction against Obama's withdrawal policy was revealed the evening of the January 21 meeting when retired army General Jack Keane, one of the authors of the Bush troop-surge

policy and a close political ally and mentor of Petraeus, appeared on the "Lehrer News Hour" to comment on Obama's pledge on Iraq combat troop withdrawal.

[snip]

Keane, the army vice chief of staff from 1999-03, has ties to a network of active and retired four-star army generals, and since Obama's January 21 order on the 16-month withdrawal plan, some of the retired four-star generals in that network have begun discussing a campaign to blame Obama's troop withdrawal from Iraq for the ultimate collapse of the political "stability" that they expect to follow the US withdrawal, according to a military source familiar with the network's plans.

But what really hasn't gotten enough attention, IMO, are the ties between Keane and Dick Cheney.

Ever since he began working on the troop surge, Keane has been the central figure manipulating policy in order to keep as many US troops in Iraq as possible. It was Keane who got Vice President Dick Cheney to push for Petraeus as top commander in Iraq in late 2006 when the existing commander, General George W. Casey, did not support the troop surge.

Now, as Porter suggests, Keane's role in the surge and his relationship with Cheney is best chronicled in Woodward's most recent book. As I have shown, that chronicle ignores Cheney's role in the formulation of the Iraq policy. So it presents Keane as getting involved in the surge first in his role as a member of the Defense Policy Board—where he served with a bunch of other Neocons. Woodward then depicts Keane joining the push for the surge at AEI, too, which mysteriously got a bunch of information that even Keane appears to have suspected had

been leaked to AEI. And only after three months of involvement (according to Woodward's story), does Keane first brief Cheney and Bush on December 11; this is after Cheney had been summoned to Saudi Arabia and ordered to undercut the Iraq Survey Group report, and after the report itself was released on December 6. Yet suddenly—again, according to Woodward's narrative—Cheney embraced Keane's plan and Keane himself. From that point forward, when Keane wanted to undercut plans at the Pentagon, he had to do no more than call Cheney's then-National Security Advisor, John Hannah, to put words challenging opposing plans into Cheney's mouth. Every time Petraeus wanted to bypass the chain of command, Keane went back-channel through Cheney.

Keane briefed Vice President Cheney on his trip, establishing a secret backchannel line of communication—Petraeus to Keane to Cheney to Bush—around the chain of command.

And that chain of command Keane and Petraeus were bypassing was often—according to Woodward—Bob Gates, particularly at times when Gates endorsed policies closer to those Obama now espouses, including gradual withdrawal. Cheney also followed Keane's bidding to thwart others—Admiral Fallon, the Joint Chiefs, Condi Rice—perceived to be insufficiently supportive of Petraeus. When Admiral Mullen tried to cut off Keane's clearance to travel to Iraq, Cheney's office reinstated it. And, as recently as April, Keane worked with Cheney in promoting Petraeus to CentCom and replacing him with Odierno, all in the context of trying to tie a Democratic administration to their—Keane's and Cheney's—intransigence in Iraq.

Let's be frank about what's happening here. We are going to have a new administration. Do we want these policies continued or not? Do we want the best guys in there who were involved

in these policies, who were advocates for them? Let's assume we have a Democratic administration and they want to pull this thing out quickly, and now they have to deal with General Petraeus and General Odierno. There will be a price to be paid to override them.

Now, Woodward's book (which crafts Keane as the hero that saved our efforts in Iraq) suggests Keane's efforts to keep us in Iraq came first, only later followed by Cheney's championing of those efforts. There are reasons to believe that is nothing more than craft, the latest narrative Woodward got paid to tell. And even pretending that Woodward's suppression of Cheney's role in crafting the surge strategy is accurate, Woodward clearly shows that Keane's efforts to tie us down in Iraq were a joint effort conducted with Dick Cheney.

So what is Dick Cheney's role in publicly undercutting the current President of the United States? Is Cheney still doing the oil companies' bidding to make sure our military protects their investments in Iraq?

Sure, perhaps this attack on Obama is no more than Petraeus' god-father, Keane, making sure Petraeus' project in Iraq is either successful—or blamed on a Democrat. But given the fact that Cheney and Keane have spent the better part of the last two years working to ensure we remain stuck in Iraq, I'd suggest we ought to look closely at Keane's role and even further than that to find the source of this insubordination.