

MORE INSANE RANTINGS FROM THE CRAZY MAN IN THE ATTIC

Someone let Dick “PapaDick” Cheney out of his undisclosed location last night—they even gave him an award for being a “keeper of the flame.” In spite of the fact that the press is covering it as another serious attack from Cheney, I find it pretty laughable.

How else to treat a speech, for example, in which PapaDick boasts that Rummy got this “flame-keeper” award before him?

I’m told that among those you’ve recognized before me was my friend Don Rumsfeld. I don’t mind that a bit. It fits something of a pattern. In a career that includes being chief of staff, congressman, and secretary of defense, I haven’t had much that Don didn’t get first. But truth be told, any award once conferred on Donald Rumsfeld carries extra luster, and I am very proud to see my name added to such a distinguished list.

From that auspicious start, Cheney launches into a screed against Obama for shutting down missile defense in Czech Republic and Poland—he complains that Obama did not stand by the agreements that Cheney and Bush made.

Most anyone who is given responsibility in matters of national security quickly comes to appreciate the commitments and structures put in place by others who came before. You deploy a military force that was planned and funded by your predecessors. You inherit relationships with partners and obligations to allies that were first undertaken years and even generations earlier. With the authority you hold for a little while,

you have great freedom of action. And whatever course you follow, the essential thing is always to keep commitments, and to leave no doubts about the credibility of your country's word. So among my other concerns about the drift of events under the present administration, I consider the abandonment of missile defense in Eastern Europe to be a strategic blunder and a breach of good faith.

It is certainly not a model of diplomacy when the leaders of Poland and the Czech Republic are informed of such a decision at the last minute in midnight phone calls. It took a long time and lot of political courage in those countries to arrange for our interceptor system in Poland and the radar system in the Czech Republic. Our Polish and Czech friends are entitled to wonder how strategic plans and promises years in the making could be dissolved, just like that – with apparently little, if any, consultation.

But he moves directly from that complaint to complaining that Obama is honoring the commitment Bush made to withdraw our troops from Iraq.

Next door in Iraq, it is vitally important that President Obama, in his rush to withdraw troops, not undermine the progress we've made in recent years. Prime Minister Maliki met yesterday with President Obama, who began his press availability with an extended comment about Afghanistan. When he finally got around to talking about Iraq, he told the media that he reiterated to Maliki his intention to remove all U.S. troops from Iraq. Former President Bush's bold decision to change strategy in Iraq and surge U.S. forces there set the stage for success in that country. Iraq has

the potential to be a strong, democratic ally in the war on terrorism, and an example of economic and democratic reform in the heart of the Middle East. The Obama Administration has an obligation to protect this young democracy and build on the strategic success we have achieved in Iraq.

Don't worry. I wasn't really expecting any intellectual consistency from Dick Cheney.

Cheney's complaints about Obama's Afghanistan policy in this speech are getting a lot of press. What no one else wants to mention, though, is Cheney's refutation of Obama's complaint that the Bush Administration never really had a real Afghan strategy. Cheney refutes that, you see, by noting that they conducted a strategic assessment of Afghanistan in Fall 2008, seven years after committing troops to Afghanistan.

Recently, President Obama's advisors have decided that it's easier to blame the Bush Administration than support our troops. This weekend they leveled a charge that cannot go unanswered. The President's chief of staff claimed that the Bush Administration hadn't asked any tough questions about Afghanistan, and he complained that the Obama Administration had to start from scratch to put together a strategy.

In the fall of 2008, fully aware of the need to meet new challenges being posed by the Taliban, we dug into every aspect of Afghanistan policy, assembling a team that repeatedly went into the country, reviewing options and recommendations, and briefing President-elect Obama's team.

Hahahaha!! Cheney believes that developing an Afghan strategy in an attempt to force Obama's

hand can make up for the seven years during which he oversaw the complete neglect of the war against the people who actually hit us on 9/11.

I also note that Cheney neglected to mention—not even once, not even in a speech talking about “new challenges” from the Taliban–Pakistan. Perhaps that’s because Cheney was personally in charge of our Pakistan policy for the last three years of the Bush Administration, during which period that country became the source of the real instability in the region.

And, in case you’re wondering, Cheney also doesn’t mention the number of arrests of alleged terrorists, including Najibullah Zazi. I guess that’s because doing so would have made it hard to argue—as PapaDick does—that you can’t fight terrorists using a law enforcement approach. And Dick has to make that argument, of course, so as to justify his long screed in favor of torture. Note how closely this screed matches that which has shown up anonymously in the press.

Then there’s the matter of how to handle the terrorists we capture in this ongoing war. Some of them know things that, if shared, can save a good many innocent lives. When we faced that problem in the days and years after 9/11, we made some basic decisions. We understood that organized terrorism is not just a law-enforcement issue, but a strategic threat to the United States.

At every turn, we understood as well that the safety of the country required collecting information known only to the worst of the terrorists. We had a lot of blind spots – and that’s an awful thing, especially in wartime. With many thousands of lives potentially in the balance, we didn’t think it made sense to let the terrorists answer questions in their own good time, if they answered them at all.

The intelligence professionals who got

the answers we needed from terrorists had limited time, limited options, and careful legal guidance. They got the baddest actors we picked up to reveal things they really didn't want to share.

There's the conflation of the information collected from KSM using torture (which KSM has said included a number of lies) with the information collected using rapport-based intelligence.

In the case of Khalid Sheik Muhammed, by the time it was over he was not only talking, he was practically conducting a seminar, complete with chalkboards and charts. It turned out he had a professorial side, and our guys didn't mind at all if classes ran long. At some point, the mastermind of 9/11 became an expansive briefer on the operations and plans of al-Qaeda. It happened in the course of enhanced interrogations. All the evidence, and common sense as well, tells us why he started to talk.

There's the insistence that Cheney kept us safe—ignoring, of course, all the attacks on our allies.

Eight years into the effort, one thing we know is that the enemy has spent most of this time on the defensive – and every attempt to strike inside the United States has failed. So you would think that our successors would be going to the intelligence community saying, "How did you do it? What were the keys to preventing another attack over that period of time?"

Instead, they've chosen a different path entirely – giving in to the angry left, slandering people who did a hard job well, and demagoguing an issue more

serious than any other they'll face in these four years. No one knows just where that path will lead, but I can promise you this: There will always be plenty of us willing to stand up for the policies and the people that have kept this country safe.

On the political left, it will still be asserted that tough interrogations did no good, because this is an article of faith for them, and actual evidence is unwelcome and disregarded. President Obama himself has ruled these methods out, and when he last addressed the subject he filled the air with vague and useless platitudes. His preferred device is to suggest that we could have gotten the same information by other means. We're invited to think so. But this ignores the hard, inconvenient truth that we did try other means and techniques to elicit information from Khalid Sheikh Muhammed and other al-Qaeda operatives, only turning to enhanced techniques when we failed to produce the actionable intelligence we knew they were withholding. In fact, our intelligence professionals, in urgent circumstances with the highest of stakes, obtained specific information, prevented specific attacks, and saved American lives.

I'm most fascinated, though, by the desperation of this passage: the appeal to the "legal underpinnings and safeguards" and the claim to "moral bearings."

In short, to call enhanced interrogation a program of torture is not only to disregard the program's legal underpinnings and safeguards. Such accusations are a libel against dedicated professionals who acted honorably and well, in our country's

name and in our country's cause. What's more, to completely rule out enhanced interrogation in the future, in favor of half-measures, is unwise in the extreme. In the fight against terrorism, there is no middle ground, and half-measures keep you half exposed.

For all that we've lost in this conflict, the United States has never lost its moral bearings – and least of all can that be said of our armed forces and intelligence personnel.

Is it possible the crazy man in the attic realizes his attempts to convince others that he is anything but a torture-hungry monster just sound crazier and crazier as he babbles on?