

CONDI CLAIMS US WAS AT WAR WHEN SHE IGNORED AUGUST 6, 2001 PDB

Condi Rice is, of all Bush's top aides, the best at managing her reputation. Which is why her interview with Fareed Zakaria yesterday is so interesting.

Sure, there are some examples of Condi's signature lies, such as when she claims the dedicated group to hunt Osama bin Laden—which was shut down between 2005 and 2009, after which Obama reinstated it—proves the Bush Administration's focus on capturing OBL.

ZAKARIA: President Obama did say that he felt that the capture or killing of Bin Laden was not a top priority when he took office and he moved it to a top priority. What's your reaction?

RICE: Oh, it was a top priority. We wanted to get Osama Bin Laden every single day. And there was a unit at the — the agency that worked on nothing else.

More interesting, though, is Condi's confusion about how many Presidents have hunted OBL. At the beginning of her interview, she suggests that the hunt for OBL has spanned just two presidencies.

ZAKARIA: When you first heard the news about Bin Laden's assassination, what — what did you think?

RICE: Well, I was incredibly gratified and, frankly, relieved. It been a long hunt for him. I was proud that over two presidencies we were persistent enough and patient enough to put together the picture that ultimately led to him. You

don't just stumble upon Osama Bin Laden.
It takes a lot of work to get there.

But then there's this remarkable exchange.

ZAKARIA: And you're hearing some Republicans, people like Rush Limbaugh, say Obama really doesn't deserve much credit for this. You know, the – the operation was a routine operation.

You've been in the White House. Do you think that the president at key moments had to make difficult calls whether to use a drone, whether to use a special operations?

RICE: I've been in the White House, and I've seen a president make difficult decisions. And there were difficult decisions in this. What – what President Obama has done, indeed, it was a – it was a brave decision.

Now, it is absolutely the case that the United States of America has been fighting this war for at least 10 years, and really a bit longer. And so this is a victory across presidencies. It's a – it's a victory for having learned more how to fight the counterterrorism fight.
[my emphasis]

Now, I presume the reference to a war that pre-dates 9/11 and even May 2011 is Condi's claim that when she was demoting Richard Clarke in the early days of 2001 and when Bush was saying "I'm tired of swatting at flies ... I'm tired of playing defense. I want to play offense. I want to take the fight to the terrorists" in March 2001, that was part of an already-engaged war with al Qaeda. Her reference to the hunt for OBL across two, not three, presidencies would seem to discount Clinton's efforts to capture or kill him.

But that would presumably also mean Condi and

Bush were at war when they dismissed the urgency of the August 6, 2001 PDB, titled "Bin Laden determined to strike in US" and discussing preparations for plane hijackings.

Or maybe the reference to a longer war refers to the efforts Clinton made to neutralize OBL after OBL declared war on the US in 1996. If so, it'd sure be nice if Condi said that explicitly, given how many times the Bush Administration claimed Clinton did nothing to hunt down OBL.

Which raises the next question. I agree we've spent much of the last 10 years learning how to fight terrorism. Aside from obvious stupid, easily avoidable mistakes like the Iraq War and torture, there's nothing wrong with admitting that we had to learn to do this right (though we often ignored the lessons that the UK and Israel, as well as other European countries, learned in their earlier counterterrorist fights).

But is Condi admitting that Obama has learned things that the Bush Administration didn't know?