

“QUIET LOBBYING CAMPAIGN” FOR SOCOM: HOLLYWOOD MOVIE, PRESIDENT’S CAMPAIGN SLOGAN

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Coming so quickly on the heels of Lt. Col. Daniel Davis documenting the depraved level of lying that characterizes the primary mode of action for many at the top levels in our military, it’s galling that Admiral William McRaven would take to the front page of today’s New York Times to advance his efforts—hilariously and tragically labeled by the Times as a “quiet lobbying campaign”—to gain an even freer hand for the Special Operations Command, which he heads.

Never forget that it was from within Special Operations that Stanley McChrystal shielded Camp NAMA, where torture occurred, from the International Committee of the Red Cross. Never forget that it was Special Operations who instituted the dark side of the COIN (counterinsurgency) campaign in Afghanistan that relied on poorly targeted night raids that imprisoned and tortured many innocent civilians. Never forget that Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld bypassed the normal chain of command to work directly with Stanley McChrystal when he headed JSOC, sending McChrystal on missions not reported to area command. This relationship with Cheney and Rumsfeld had a strong effect on JSOC, as noted by Jeremy Scahill:

Wilkerson said that almost immediately after assuming his role at the State Department under Colin Powell, he saw JSOC being politicized and developing a close relationship with the executive

branch.

Among the military commanders being bypassed by Cheney and Rumsfeld was the head of SOCOM, the position that McRaven (who was McChrystal's deputy when most of McChrystal's war crimes were carried out) now occupies, but this same attitude of teaming with the executive branch to bypass the regular defense chain of command has survived intact.

Today's article in the Times opens this way:

As the United States turns increasingly to Special Operations forces to confront developing threats scattered around the world, the nation's top Special Operations officer, a member of the Navy Seals who oversaw the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, is seeking new authority to move his forces faster and outside of normal Pentagon deployment channels.

The officer, Adm. William H. McRaven, who leads the Special Operations Command, is pushing for a larger role for his elite units who have traditionally operated in the dark corners of American foreign policy. The plan would give him more autonomy to position his forces and their war-fighting equipment where intelligence and global events indicate they are most needed.

At least the Times does pay a short homage to the quaint, old way of the chain of command as it currently exists:

While President Obama and his Pentagon's leadership have increasingly made Special Operations forces their military tool of choice, similar plans in the past have foundered because of opposition from regional commanders and the State Department. The military's

regional combatant commanders have feared a decrease of their authority, and some ambassadors in crisis zones have voiced concerns that commandos may carry out missions that are perceived to tread on a host country's sovereignty, like the rift in ties with Pakistan after the Bin Laden raid.

See that? We're only four paragraphs into the story, and we have two Osama bin Laden references and an admission that the Obama administration has decided that Special Operations comprises their "tool of choice".

But in the end, the real reason that dark JSOC missions are now favored is that they are not subject to Congressional oversight. Going back to the Scahill article linked above:

The military intelligence source said that when Rumsfeld was defense secretary, JSOC was deployed to commit some of the "darkest acts" in part to keep them concealed from Congress. "Everything can be justified as a military operation versus a clandestine intelligence performed by the CIA, which has to be informed to Congress," said the source. "They were aware of that and they knew that, and they would exploit it at every turn and they took full advantage of it. They knew they could act extra-legally and nothing would happen because A, it was sanctioned by DoD at the highest levels, and B, who was going to stop them? They were preparing the battlefield, which was on all of the PowerPoints: 'Preparing the Battlefield.'"

The significance of the flexibility of JSOC's operations inside Pakistan versus the CIA's is best summed up by Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "Every single intelligence operation and covert

action must be briefed to the Congress,” she said. “If they are not, that is a violation of the law.”

So make no mistake that in asking for a freer hand, McRaven is seeking to institutionalize within SOCOM the free-wheeling, law-free sort of action that has characterized JSOC since McChrystal ran it as Cheney and Rumsfelds’ secret dark army.

With all that as background, now we can see how tragically funny the description from the Times of McRaven’s lobbying campaign is. Yeah, a “quiet” campaign relies on a Hollywood movie (opening in only 11 days!) starring active duty Special Operations forces. When I tweeted about that point last night, Marcy added that one of the Obama campaign’s re-election slogans also will rely on Special Operations:

Vice President Joe Biden today told a crowd of re-election campaign donors in Ft. Worth, Texas, that the best way to sum up President Obama’s first term in “shorthand” is with nine succinct words: “Osama bin Laden is dead and General Motors is alive.”

There can be no doubt that this quiet little campaign will succeed. The Obama administration and Congress have both demonstrated that the last thing they want is public oversight of the darkest missions in our Great War on Terror. What’s probably the most remarkable thing here is that there is even any public notice of giving SOCOM a freer hand. Move along, the public has no part in this discussion.