

NYT KISSES DAVID PETRAEUS' BOO BOOS TO MAKE THEM BETTER

I'm going to spoil this blowjob masquerading as profile for you. Here are the last three sentences of Scott Shane's 1,500 word "news" piece on how David Petraeus' image has taken a hit because his agency 1) missed that the militias we're partnering with in Libya were trying to kill us 2) gave poor intelligence that made the Administration look bad 3) asked for drones in response to this massive HUMINT failure.

Mr. Petraeus's future has inevitably been the subject of rumors: that he would be Mitt Romney's running mate, or, more plausibly, that he was interested in the presidency of Princeton. In a statement in late September, he did not rule that out for the future, but said that for the time being he was "living the dream here at C.I.A." That was before the recriminations this week over Benghazi.

So in the interest of rehabilitating Petraeus' image so he can run for President of Princeton or America, Shane explains,

- Petraeus' "deliberately low profile" is what created the void that in turn created the media firestorm, not the CIA failures themselves
- Petraeus "abruptly abandoned" his media star role when he became Director of the CIA
- Petraeus' trip to Turkey to

consult on Syria—which was covered by the press—“went all but unnoticed by the news media” (no word on whether Petraeus is responsible for a suspect in the Libya attack expecting he could use Turkey as a gateway to join jihadists in Syria)

In short, the whole thing seems designed to prove that Petraeus hasn't been the media hog his aides proved him to be yesterday (Shane points out Petraeus was out of the country when his aides orchestrated this media blitz) ... in a profile about his image in the Paper of Record.

And nowhere does Shane, a national security reporter by trade, deal with whether the underlying issues—the HUMINT failures and the problematic response—themselves constitute failures. This is a report about image, completely ignoring that underneath that image there are real questions of performance that should be what drives the image, not fluff pieces in the NYT.

David Petraeus cannot fail, you see. He can only have his image failed by his own silence.

And to top off the substanceless image, all this is peppered with quotes from—among others—Michael O'Hanlon, described as a friend and an advisor.

“He thinks he has to be very discreet and let others in the government do the talking,” said Michael E. O'Hanlon, a Brookings Institution scholar who is a friend of Mr. Petraeus's and a member of the C.I.A.'s advisory board.

[snip]

Whatever the challenges of his first

year, said Mr. O'Hanlon, his friend,
"I'm confident in saying that he loves
this job."

"He may miss the military at an
emotional level," he added, "but he
loves this work."

Wait! David Petraeus has appointed "his friend"
Michael O'Hanlon to advise him about
"Intelligence"? And Shane now turns to "his
friend" to ... what? Reassure Americans David
Petraeus loves his job even if four people are
dead and we have gaping holes in HUMINT?

We are a democracy. Citizens should expect that
our news media report facts so we can assess the
performance of those who wield tremendous power
in our name. Maybe Petraeus failed. Maybe he did
not. But that is the question before us. Not
whether Benghazi makes it less likely he'll be
President of Princeton one day.

It is not, however, the role of our news media
to kiss top officials' boo boos publicly when
they've experienced setbacks.