

CIA CONTINUES TO COVER UP DICK CHENEY'S WAR-MONGERING

10 years ago today, George Bush gave his final warning to Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq or face war. While the first half of Bush's speech cited Saddam's purported refusal to give up his WMD program, the second half of the speech was littered with insinuations about Saddam's terrorist allies.

If Saddam Hussein attempts to cling to power, he will remain a deadly foe until the end. In desperation, he and terrorists groups might try to conduct terrorist operations against the American people and our friends. These attacks are not inevitable. They are, however, possible. And this very fact underscores the reason we cannot live under the threat of blackmail. The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed.

[snip]

We are now acting because the risks of inaction would be far greater. In one year, or five years, the power of Iraq to inflict harm on all free nations would be multiplied many times over. With these capabilities, Saddam Hussein and his terrorist allies could choose the moment of deadly conflict when they are strongest. We choose to meet that threat now, where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities.

[snip]

Terrorists and terror states do not

reveal these threats with fair notice, in formal declarations – and responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense, it is suicide. The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now.

[my emphasis]

We know that Dick Cheney tried, in the days leading up to this speech and an earlier March 14 one, to boost these vague allegations in part by resuscitating the claim that Mohammed Atta met with Iraqi diplomat-spook Ahmad Khalil Ibrahim Samir al-Ani in April 2001. The CIA pushed back hard on the claim. An account of that fight is one of the most significant redactions in the Senate Intelligence Committee's 2006 assessment of the bullshit lies told to get us into Iraq (see numbered page 96), as explained by Mark Hosenball.

According to two sources familiar with the blacked-out portions of the Senate report that discuss the CIA cable's contents, the document indicates that White House officials had proposed mentioning the supposed Atta-Prague meeting in a Bush speech scheduled for March 14, 2003. Originated by Czech intelligence shortly after 9/11, the tendentious claim was that in April 2001, Atta, the 9/11 hijack leader, had met in Prague with the local station chief for Iraqi intelligence. The sources said that upon learning of the proposed White House speech, **the CIA station in Prague sent back a cable explaining in detail why the agency believed the anecdote was ill-founded.**

According to one of the sources familiar with the Senate report's censored portions, who asked for anonymity due to the sensitivity of the subject, **the tone of the CIA cable was "strident" and expressed dismay that the White House was trying to shoehorn the Atta anecdote**

into the Bush speech to be delivered only days before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The source said the cable also suggested that policymakers had tried to insert the same anecdote into other speeches by top administration officials. [my emphasis]

And yet here we are, 10 years after Cheney made that last ditch attempt to claim Iraq had a tie to al Qaeda, and the CIA is still trying to keep the cable classified.

CARL LEVIN: Now, there's one final point, and that has to do with a very famous document. My – my time is not quite yet up. And that has to do with a – a cable that came in that relates to the so called "Atta" matter. Are you familiar with that issue?

BRENNAN: Yes I am, Senator.

LEVIN: The issue here is whether or not there ever was a meeting in Prague between Mohammed Atta who is one of the people who attacked the Trade Center and the Iraqi intelligence.

The cable that came in has been classified by the CIA even though the report of – this is what the CIA did to the cable. Now, will you check with the checks for the source of this cable and see if they have any objection to the release of this cable relative to the report of that meeting?

BRENNAN: Yes, Senator. And since our courtesy call, I have looked into this issue, and I know that you and Director Petraeus were involved in – in a discussion on this. And I would be happy to – to follow-up on it. **But there does seem to be some concerns about release of that – the cable.**

LEVIN: Well, the report of the CIA, by

the way – excuse me – the unclassified report of the intelligence committee, which was not classified, it was not redacted by the CIA, it made at least four references to the Czech intelligence service providing the CIA with reporting based on a single source about this alleged meeting which never took place.

LEVIN: We knew it never took place. And yet repeatedly, particularly the vice president, made reference to there was a report of a meeting between these two.

Now, it's very significant to the historical record here. We went to war based on allegations that there was a relationship between Iraq and the attackers, the 9/11 attacks. **It's very important that this cable be declassified. The only reason to keep it redacted and classified, frankly, is to protect the administration.** Not to protect sources and methods, because the sources and methods, if you will check with the Czechs, I'm sure will tell you they have no objection to the release of that cable.

My question to you is: Will you check with the Czechs, if you're confirmed, and determine whether they have any objection to the release of the cable which makes reference to them?

BRENNAN: Absolutely, Senator, I will.

LEVIN: Thank you. My time is up. [my emphasis]

Now, it's not entirely clear from this exchange (which took place at Brennan's confirmation hearing in February) whether Carl Levin is trying to get the original intelligence or the March 2003 cable declassified (there are aspects of what Levin says that support both).

But one thing's clear. CIA is still hiding the evidence of how persistently Cheney tried to recycle debunked intelligence claims to get us into the Iraq War – and to do so as part of the fight against al Qaeda.

I have a gut feeling that even under John Brennan, the CIA will continue to hide proof of Cheney's deceit.