

LEON PANETTA: SHEEP DIPPING SECRETS

POGO has a story that adds a new twist to an old story.

The old story is Leon Panetta, leaking classified info, in this case, leaking info on the Osama bin Laden raid to a Zero Dark Thirty executive.

In June 2011, when he was director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Panetta discussed the information at a CIA headquarters event honoring participants in the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, according to an unreleased report drafted by the Inspector General's office and obtained by the Project On Government Oversight (POGO).

"During this awards ceremony, Director Panetta specifically recognized the unit that conducted the raid and identified the ground commander by name," the draft report says. "According to the DoD Office of Security Review, the individual's name is protected from public release" under federal law, the report says.

"Director Panetta also provided DoD information, identified by relevant Original Classification Authorities as TOP SECRET//SI//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR, NZL, as well as, SECRET/ACCM," the report says.

This is the investigation Peter King requested in 2011.

The new, but predictable, twist, is that when DOD's Inspector General tried to investigate this, it apparently got no cooperation from Panetta himself, who had subsequently moved over to head DOD itself. More importantly, the IG

stalled the report, apparently until Panetta retired.

The unknown fate of the IG report was the subject of a December 2012 email exchange—obtained by POGO—between a congressional staff member and an employee in the IG’s office. The congressional aide mentions having heard that someone in the IG’s office was “sitting on it until Secretary Panetta retires” and asks the IG employee for any information about it.

The IG employee replies: “That effort . . . has been controlled and manipulated since inception by the IG Front Office.” The employee adds: “There is a version ready to hit the street, been long time ready to hit the street...but we will see if that happens anytime soon. Highly unusual tight controls and tactical involvement from senior leadership on this project.”

The employee says the matter reflects broader problems within the IG’s office.

“I have grave concerns that the message and findings are now controlled and subject to undue influence across the board at DoD IG. I have never experienced or seen so much influence or involvement by outsiders now in developing and issuing oversight reports.”

The IG employee invokes whistleblower status.

“I consider this protected communications on alleged wrong-doings within the Government.”

While it doesn’t say so directly, POGO suggests the Obama Administration may have pulled this off by withholding the nomination for the Acting Inspector General to become its permanent IG.

The Defense Department IG's job has been vacant since December 2011, and the office has been headed on a temporary basis by Lynne M. Halbrooks, who is now the principal deputy inspector general. She has sought support to be named permanent inspector general, a presidential appointment that traditionally involves the approval of the secretary.

In short, Panetta exposed a classified identity to a movie maker, as well as SIGINT pertaining to the Osama bin Laden raid (perhaps reports on the intercepts the government used to identify the courier?). But rather than being treated like John Kiriakou, for example, Panetta got moved into a position to prevent any release of this information.

The term "sheep dip" has been adopted to refer to the practice of having Special Forces operate under CIA guise, as they did on this OBL raid, to operate under CIA's covert authorities. It turns out the institutional shell game with the OBL raid served not to keep secrets, nor even to sustain deniability from the Pakistanis (particularly after Panetta identified Shakeel Afridi), but rather to allow the Administration to treat this covert operation just like they do covert operations like drones (Joby Warrick's book, *The Triple Agent*, includes a lot on drones that obviously comes from Panetta's office too), to make them selectively public.