

THE TIMING OF CIA'S DISCOVERY ITS PARAMILITARY OPS FAIL

Mark Mazzetti reports that in 2012 and 2013, CIA did a study that one of its favorite means of covert intervention – arming rebels – pretty much doesn't work.

An internal C.I.A. study has found that it rarely works.

The still-classified review, one of several C.I.A. studies commissioned in 2012 and 2013 in the midst of the Obama administration's protracted debate about whether to wade into the Syrian civil war, concluded that many past attempts by the agency to arm foreign forces covertly had a minimal impact on the long-term outcome of a conflict. They were even less effective, the report found, when the militias fought without any direct American support on the ground.

The findings of the study, described in recent weeks by current and former American government officials, were presented in the White House Situation Room and led to deep skepticism among some senior Obama administration officials about the wisdom of arming and training members of a fractured Syrian opposition.

But in April 2013, President Obama authorized the C.I.A. to begin a program to arm the rebels at a base in Jordan, and more recently the administration decided to expand the training mission with a larger parallel Pentagon program in Saudi Arabia to train "vetted" rebels to battle fighters of the Islamic State, with the aim of training approximately 5,000 rebel

troops per year.

The only “success” CIA could find was the *mujahadeen* ousting the Russians in Afghanistan.

Goodie.

I’m particularly interested in the timing of all this.

Mazzetti says there were multiple studies done in 2012 – at which point David Petraeus was CIA Director, and was pushing to arm rebels in Syria – and 2013 – by which point John Brennan had replaced Petraeus.

So the timing looks something like this:

2012: CIA starts doing studies on how crappy their covert ops have been

2012: Hillary and Petraeus both push Obama to arm Syrians

2012: Benghazi attack targets CIA officers ostensibly working to reclaim weapons used to oust Qaddafi but reportedly to send them on to Syria

2012: Petraeus ousted for reasons that probably aren’t primarily that he fucked his biographer

2013: John Brennan nominated to serve as CIA Director. As part of his confirmation process, the follow exchange takes place (Bark Mikulski asked a similar question in the hearing itself).

Question 7: What role do you see for the CIA in paramilitary-style intelligence activities or covert action?

The CIA, a successor to the Office of Strategic Services, has a long history of carrying out paramilitary-style intelligence activities and must continue to be able to provide the President with this option should he want to employ it to accomplish critical national security objectives.

[snip]

Question 8: What are your views on what some have described as the increased “militarization” of the CIA mission following the September 11, 2001 attacks?

In my view, the CIA is the nation’s premier “intelligence” agency, and needs to remain so. While CIA needs to maintain a paramilitary capability to be able to carry out covert action as directed by the President, the CIA should not be used, in my view, to carry out traditional military activities.

April 2013: Obama signs finding authorizing an op CIA knew wouldn’t work

June 2013: Covert op begins, per Chuck Hagel confirmation of it in August

As Mazzetti explains, the amazing discovery that CIA’s covert ops are often useless was one reason Obama delayed so long before he authorized one anyway (and his close confidante Brennan implemented it).

But I think two other things are likely (in addition to Assad’s alleged use of chemical weapons in both April and August 2013). One, it wasn’t so much Obama was opposed to such an op; he was just opposed to the way Petraeus (who oversaw the latter part of the Libya op) and Hillary implemented it. (Note, Mazzetti specifically notes both Hillary and Leon Panetta’s claims they warned Obama to respond earlier in Syria, so Mazzetti’s piece may be a response to that.) And just as likely, the Saudi-tied rising strength in ISIL forced our hand, requiring us to be able to offer a legitimate competitor to their paid terrorists.

Particularly given the *mujadadeen* “success” apparently cited in the CIA study, I find that rather ominous.