

ONE WAY TO MAKE SENDING FRANK WISNER TO “NEGOTIATE” WITH MUBARAK LOOK SMART

CNN is reporting that Curt Weldon, the ethically and legally challenged former Congressman with ties to Manucher Ghorbanifar, has gone to Libya to try to negotiate with Muammar Qaddafi. In a NYT op-ed, Weldon makes the case for why he's the guy to persuade Qaddafi to step aside.

Seven years later I am back in Libya, this time on a much different mission, as the leader of a small private delegation, at the invitation of Colonel Qaddafi's chief of staff and **with the knowledge of the Obama administration** and members of Congress from both parties. Our purpose is to meet with Colonel Qaddafi today and persuade him to step aside.

[snip]

First, we must engage face-to-face with Colonel Qaddafi and persuade him to leave, as my delegation hopes to do. I've met him enough times to know that it will be very hard to simply bomb him into submission.

Simultaneously, we must obtain an immediate United Nations-monitored cease-fire, with the Libyan Army withdrawing from contested cities and rebel forces ending attempts to advance.

Then we must identify and engage with those leaders who, if not perfect, are pragmatic and reform-minded and thus best positioned to lead the country.

[snip]

The world agrees that Colonel Qaddafi

must go, even though no one has a plan, a foundation for civil society has not been constructed and we are not even sure whom we should trust. But in the meantime, the people of Libya deserve more than bombs. [my emphasis]

Noah Shachtman elaborates on the history Weldon and Qaddafi have in common. The short version? At a time when Weldon served on Qaddafi's "foundation," he was pitching selling arms to him.

It wasn't long ago – April, 2008, to be exact – that Weldon was boasting in a report that he had become the "1st non-Libyan Board Member of the Ghadaffi Foundation." During a trip to Tripoli the month before, the self-proclaimed "friend of Libya" carried "a personal letter from Libyan Chamber [of Commerce] President to U.S. Chamber President." Weldon also visited with with the country's "Nuclear Ministry Leadership and agreed to reinforce U.S. nuclear cooperation/collaboration."

Finally, Weldon agreed "to quickly return to Libya for meetings with [Gadhafi's] son Morti regarding defense and security cooperation."

Two weeks later, Defense Solutions – a company which, at the time, counted Weldon as a key executive and adviser – drew up a proposal to refurbish the country's fleet of armored vehicles, including its T-72 tanks, BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles and BTR-60 armored personnel carriers.

Now, granted, Weldon says he is undertaking this trip with the knowledge—not the endorsement—of the Obama Administration. Still, I can't help but wondering whether this is an elaborate plot (with Weldon, there's always a plot) to make

Obama's decision to send Frank Wisner—also a business associate—to negotiate with Hosni Mubarak look remarkably smart by comparison. After all, both Wisner and Weldon have troubling conflicts that make them poor choices to represent our country's interests. But Wisner, at least, is diplomatic and sane. Weldon? I'm not so sure.