

CAN HILLARY TURN ON ELECTRICITY IN YEMEN BETTER THAN AQAP?

Due to the vagaries of smart phone RSS feeds, I re-read this story over the weekend. In addition to describing Secretary of State Clinton's speech before the Special Operations Forces Industry Conference—in which she described how special ops fit into her idea of really smart power—it also aired JSOC complaints about Hillary's proposed closer ties between diplomacy and special ops.

But rumor has it Clinton's vision has its detractors — and that its implementation in hotspots such as Yemen and Congo has made some Special Operations Forces officers very unhappy. In Yemen, in particular, some commando officers look upon the State Department's expanding shadow-war powers as a bureaucratic intrusion on what should be military territory. A source tells Danger Room that in Yemen State has effectively hijacked all U.S. counter-terrorism funding, requiring a labyrinthine approval process for even small expenditures. According to detractors, the funding control is a way of cementing State's expansion into the Special Operations Forces traditional remit.

McRaven does not share the officers' objections. The admiral has enthusiastically widened and deepened his command's alliances with commando forces from allied nations — all in a bid to build what he calls the "global SOF partnership." The Army 10th Special Forces Group's ongoing deployment to Afghanistan is a perfect example: 10th Group's Afghanistan task force includes commandos from Poland, Romania and

several other countries. In a sense, McRaven is becoming more of a diplomat as Clinton becomes more of a warrior. Meeting in the middle, they've apparently chosen to be allies instead of rivals.

In that context, Clinton's appearance at an otherwise minor military trade show is an important signal. McRaven is showing his officers that if he and America's top diplomat can get along, then they can get along with their own State Department counterparts, as well. An evolving vision of American warfare is counting on it.

This story came out on May 24, just a few days after this largely unnoticed AP story described John Brennan seizing control over targeting. One reason for Brennan to do so, it seemed, was to give State more direct influence over targeting.

The move concentrates power over the use of lethal U.S. force outside war zones at the White House.

The process, which is about a month old, means **Brennan's staff consults the Pentagon, the State Department and other agencies as to who should go on the list, making a previous military-run review process in place since 2009 less relevant**, according to two current and three former U.S. officials aware of the evolution in how the government targets terrorists.

[snip]

But some of the officials carrying out the policy are equally leery of "how easy it has become to kill someone," one said. The U.S. is targeting al-Qaida operatives for reasons such as being heard in an intercepted conversation plotting to attack a U.S. ambassador overseas, the official said.[my

emphasis]

That is, it seems like this process—which the AP dates to sometime in mid-April—allowed State to bypass DOD’s vetting process by submitting targeting suggestions directly to Brennan. And the AP story appeared to arise out of the same disgruntlement within JSOC as Wired’s story.

Now, I actually support Hillary’s efforts to strengthen State’s soft power efforts; we won the Cold War as much with soft power and oil price manipulation as we did by bankrupting Russia with an arms race. But we’ve sucked at it ever since. And while I maintain my grave concerns about running an unannounced counterinsurgency from within NSC, I admit that today the news from Yemen is good. Whoever’s leading this campaign, US and Saudi-backed Yemeni forces just took back two key cities that AQAP has held for more than a year.

Which brings us to the tricky part: providing not just security, but basic services at least as well as AQAP has been doing for the last year.

Travelling from Sana’a to the Tihama, Abyan to Hajjah, the one thing every Yemeni (and one grumbling foreign journalist) has repeatedly demanded is water and electricity. These two most basic services are severely lacking across most of the country, something Ansar al-Sharia benefited from as they set out to provide electricity, water and food for residents in towns across Abyan, where out-governing the state isn’t a tough challenge.

In Lawder the local power station was destroyed in the fighting. When asked what they’d do for electricity one of the commanders gave me a knowing look and smirked: “we wait for the government?”

As most of the country continues to

‘wait’ for regular electricity he and I joked about how ‘the men down the road’ [Ansar al-Sharia] could solve the problem, probably in a matter of days. But really this is no joke.

If Lawder is going to be held up as a shining example of how to crush the insurgency then the state has to step in immediately and provide or renew basic services in order to convince people government rule is the better option. At the moment for many people across Yemen it’s not.

See also this story, which suggests how much tougher this problem is going to be in Yemen than in Iraq and probably even in Afghanistan. In Iraq, we threw money at the problem, which promptly went into US contractors’ bank accounts. In Afghanistan, we threw money at the problem, which promptly went into banks in Dubai and even to Taliban warlords.

We can match AQAP in propaganda volume, if not efficacy. But where we continue to lose is in our ability—exercised through a government with a least a shred of legitimacy—to improve people’s lives, which is the field on which we’re now fighting.

**AT WHAT POINT WILL
THE ADMINISTRATION
ADMIT “AMERICAN
INTERESTS” EQUAL
“WHAT THE SAUDIS**

WANT”?

There are a couple of stories this weekend on our undeclared war in Yemen that deserve some close focus.

As I pointed out in the wake of the NYT and Daily Beast stories on drone targeting, the Administration had been successfully distracting attention from Obama’s embrace of signature strikes directed out of John Brennan’s office by focusing on the vetting that goes (or went) into the Kill List.

With that in mind, compare how Greg Miller reports on those issues in this story. A key source or sources for the story are one or more former US official who describe a liberalization of the Kill List.

Targets still have to pose a “direct threat” to U.S. interests, said a former high-ranking U.S. counterterrorism official. “But the elasticity of that has grown over time.”

[snip]

One of the U.S. objectives in Yemen has been “identifying who those leaders were in those districts that were al-Qaeda and also in charge of the rebellion,” said a former senior U.S. official who was involved in overseeing the campaign before leaving the government. “There was a little liberalization that went on in the kill lists that allowed us to go after them.”

[snip]

The effort nearly ground to a halt last year amid a political crisis that finally forced Yemen’s leader for three decades, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to step down. As he fought to cling to power, U.S. officials said they became concerned that he was trying to direct

U.S. strikes against his adversaries under the guise of providing locations of supposed terrorist groups.

"There were times when we were intentionally misled, presumably by Saleh, to get rid of people he wanted to get rid of," said the former U.S. official involved in overseeing the campaign.

Now, as I noted, both the AP and Daily Beast emphasized the importance of Mike Mullen (who left on September 30, the day we killed Anwar al-Awlaki) and James Cartwright (who left on August 3) to Kill List vetting. That was an aeon ago in our war on Yemen, though the discussion of pulling back on targeting because we finally admitted to ourselves that Ali Abdulllah Saleh was playing a double game with us did happen while they were still around. And, for the moment, I can't think of any other similarly high-ranking people who have left.

Now compare what these former officials said with what current officials are telling Miller (well, ignore Tommy Vietor, because he's obviously blowing smoke).

"We're pursuing a focused counterterrorism campaign in Yemen designed to prevent and deter terrorist plots that directly threaten U.S. interests at home and abroad," said Tommy Vietor, spokesman for the National Security Council. "We have not and will not get involved in a broader counterinsurgency effort."

But other U.S. officials said that the administration's emphasis on threats to interests "abroad" has provided latitude for expanding attacks on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), as the Yemen affiliate is known. In early May, a U.S. attack killed an operative, Fahd al-Quso, tied to the latest AQAP plot to

smuggle explosives-laden underwear onto a flight to the United States. But officials said the campaign is now also aimed at wiping out a layer of lower-ranking operatives through strikes that can be justified because of threats they pose to the mix of U.S. Embassy workers, military trainers, intelligence operatives and contractors scattered across Yemen.

[snip]

U.S. officials said the pace has accelerated even though there has not been a proliferation in the number of plots, or evidence of a significantly expanded migration of militants to join AQAP.

That is, we seem to have lowered the bar to targeting, based on general threats to US personnel in Yemen, not any increase in operatives joining AQAP for operations targeting the US.

Remember when, in April, I noted that by putting more “trainers” in Yemen, we were effectively providing more Americans that AQAP and insurgents could target? Well, it seems to have worked. And this Reuters story—which I’ll get to in a moment—puts the number of “military advisors” at “several hundred,” which is higher than other estimates I’ve seen.

Curiously, Miller’s story separates his discussion of the approval of signature strikes from the discussion of this expanded targeting. Equally curiously, he chooses to focus on the targeting of Kaid and Nabil al-Dhahab—he calls them members of the “al-Qaeda insurgency” rather than the killing of up to eight civilians in Jaar; that is, he focuses on killings pursuant to a liberalized Kill List rather than signature strikes. Finally, Miller makes no mention of the centralization of targeting—such as it still exists—within the White House.

Which brings me to the Reuters article. On

Twitter (in this tweet and following), Gregory Johnsen refuted a number of points it makes: that Saleh had refused to leave, that protests had ended, that promises for humanitarian funding made by the Friends of Yemen can be taken seriously, and that the US has any kind of strategy in Yemen.

Given those problems, perhaps all of it should be dismissed. But I'm rather interested in the focus on the Houthis and Saudi interests.

The aim, foreign powers say, is to help the Yemeni government stand on its own feet and avoid the country becoming a Somalia-style failed state.

That means not just ousting AQAP from territory it seized last year in southern Yemen but also tackling a separate northern Shi'ite tribal revolt. There is also an urgent need to address other longer-term problems including widespread corruption and growing food and water shortages.

[snip]

For Yemen and its Saudi neighbors in particular, the northern uprising is seen as at least as much of a concern. Allegations it might in part be backed by Iran have attracted some U.S. attention, but conclusive evidence has proved largely elusive.

Experts say there is little or no sign of AQAP involvement in the northern revolt, with the largely Sunni militant group periodically attacking Shi'ite leaders in some of their bloodiest attacks so far.

Miller's article makes it clear that the definition of "American interest abroad" has been vastly expanded. The oil-producing regions of the Persian Gulf have been included in our formal definition of US vital interests since 1980. So it is really not even an expansion of

definition to include “what Saudi Arabia wants” in our treatment of what national interests might justify US presence (including, Greg Miller confirms what two other sources have already reported, manned planes).

Sure, by placing more targets to be attacked in Yemen, by having the Saudis create another UndieBomb plot (given that—as US officials admit—“there has not been a proliferation in the number of plots,” the Saudis had to provide their own), we have “US interests” to point to to justify entering a war to shore up Yemen’s unpopular government. But at some point, they’re just serving as cover.

TRADING RENDITIONS FOR OIL CONTRACTS

In September, Libyan rebels found a collection of documents that seemed as if they had been specially packaged to cause the US and—especially—the Brits a great deal of embarrassment. They detailed the rendition to Libyan torture of one of the leaders of the anti-Qaddafi uprising, Adul Hakim Belhaj. Today, the Guardian has a long, important article detailing the story behind that package of documents. Go read the whole thing—but here’s the chronology it lays out.

1. In the lead-up to efforts to make friends with Qaddafi in 2002 and 2003, the Brits reversed their long-standing tolerance of members of the anti-Qaddafi Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)
2. As part of this effort, they tried to expel “M” in an

immigration proceeding protected by their version of State Secrets (the form of tribunal the Cameron government is trying to expand)

3. At the same time, they started working to deliver Belhaj to Qaddafi; in November 2003, the British assured Libya they were working with Chinese intelligence to capture him
4. In March 2004, the secret court rejected "M's" deportation from the UK, accusing the Home Office of deliberately exaggerating ties between LIFG and al Qaeda
5. Also in March 2004, Belhaj and his four months pregnant wife, Fatima Bouchar, were held in a facility on or near the Thai airport for five days; Belhaj was tortured
6. On March 8, they were then rendered to Libya; the rendition flight stopped for refueling in Diego Garcia (the plane would proceed from Libya to Iraq to render Yunus Rahmatullah—the US prisoner who won a habeas petition in the UK—to Afghanistan)

7. Two weeks after Belhaj and Bouchar arrived in Libya, Tony Blair visited Libya and Shell announced a £110m deal for oil exploration off Libya's coast
8. Bouchar was released after four months—just before she delivered her first child; Belhaj and another LIFG leader, Abu Munthir al-Saadi, were held six years
9. In early sessions with British interrogators, Belhaj and al-Saadi were told they would receive better treatment if they claimed LIFG had ties to al Qaeda [Note this was in a period when we had reason to want to have good reason to hold a bunch of Libyans we had captured in Afghanistan]
10. In 2005 the British declared LIFG a terrorist organization and expelled members, including "M"; presumably they used intelligence gathered in Libya using torture

In short, the British appear to have traded a handful of LIFG members to lay the groundwork for an expanded oil relationship with Qaddafi—a relationship that would culminate, in 2009, with the exchange of Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset al-Megrahi for some BP contracts [see chetnolian's correction on this point].

And along the way, in a process that parallels what has happened as we've killed off Taliban leaders with drone strikes, LIFG grew more extreme.

By early 2005, the British government had been forced to conclude that the capture of the more moderate elements among the LIFG leadership, such as Belhaj and al-Saadi, had resulted in a power vacuum that was being filled by men with pan-Islamist ambitions. Among a number of documents found in a second Tripoli cache, at the British ambassador's abandoned residence, was a secret 58-page MI5 briefing paper that said "the extremists are now in the ascendancy," and that they were "pushing the group towards a more pan-Islamic agenda inspired by AQ [al-Qaida]".

Well then, if Libya ends up going sour or chaos continues to leach into Mali, I guess we'll only have ourselves and Obama's celebrated Libyan intervention to blame.

That and the crimes we committed 8 years ago all so the Brits could get Libyan oil.

One final comment. As it becomes increasingly clear how our former partners in crime can make life difficult if they lose their power, I wonder if it changes US willingness to back our old partner in torture in Egypt?

ON STRATEGY, DRONES, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

[illegible]

Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations. In the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States will emphasize non-military means and military-to-military cooperation to address instability and reduce the demand for significant U.S. force commitments to stability operations. U.S. forces will nevertheless be ready to conduct limited counterinsurgency and

other stability operations if required, operating alongside coalition forces wherever possible. Accordingly, U.S. forces will retain and continue to refine the lessons learned, expertise, and specialized capabilities that have been developed over the past ten years of counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.

Mind you, the defense strategy doesn't ignore stability—which it mentions ten more times than it does drones or climate change. But in a thoroughly Rumsfeldian manner, it seems to just believe stability ... happens.

All in a time when America's neoliberal economic policies ("commerce," "prosperity," and "economic growth"—at 2, 4, and 1—also show up more times than drones or climate change) also contribute to instability and where more and more countries seem to be falling as states.

Now, partly, the defense strategy forswears large scale stability operations, because this entire strategy is an effort to pretend it's cutting \$487 billion over ten years when it's really just ending two expensive wars, refocusing from Europe to Asia, and assuming we'll make do with things like Special Forces and those drones the strategy doesn't mention. To a significant degree, this new defense strategy is a pre-emptive (and thoroughly successful, from the looks of things) attempt to convince the press that DOD is suffering under the same rules of austerity the rest of us are, while really only moving some shells around on a card table.

I suspect the defense strategy also forswears large scale stability operations—AKA nation building—because we suck at it, and no President wants to embrace something we've failed at for ten years straight, no matter how important for

our security. (Note, it does say it will retain the ability to “regenerate”—like a lizard’s limb—stability operations if the need arises. How we’re going to regenerate something we never had, I don’t know.)

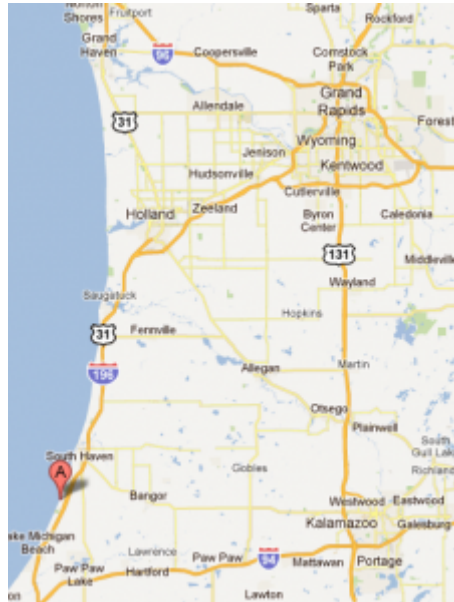
So rather than explaining what we’re going to do with all the countries we destabilize with drone campaigns (AKA Pakistan) or what we’re going to do as Bangladesh and North Africa and the Horn of Africa and much of Southeast Asia increasingly suffer from droughts or floods, setting off catastrophe and migration and more failing central governments, we’re just going to assume stability ... happens.

It’s a nice strategy (and an even neater trick, convincing journalists that an increase in defense spending equates to a cut). I’m all in favor of ending these big land wars. But the whole thing also seems to be a strategy for fostering instability as much as one to prevent it. And it doesn’t even consider two of the most destabilizing forces on the horizon in the next 8 years.

Update: Bill Michtom had to remind me that 2020 is 8, not 18, years away.

SUCKING TRITIUM

That would be me, sucking tritium, living as I do about 70 miles away from a nuclear plant in South Haven, MI, that just released some radioactive steam. (h/t wizardkitten)



Entergy's Palisades nuclear plant near South Haven is venting radioactive steam into the environment as part of an unplanned shutdown triggered by an electrical accident.

This shutdown, which began Sunday evening, came just five days after the plant restarted from a shutdown that was caused by a leak in the plant's cooling system.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokeswoman Prema Chandrithal said that the current shutdown happened because an object slipped during work on a circuit breaker and caused an arc that took out power for one of two DC electrical systems that power safety valves and other devices.

So last week, they shut down because of a leak in the cooling system.

The Palisades nuclear power plant was shut down Friday afternoon after a water leak of more than 10 gallons per minute was detected in the system that cools the plant's nuclear reactor.

The plant was shut down shortly before 3 p.m. because the leak exceeded the plant's technical specifications, spokesman Mark Savage said. The plant filed a notification of an "unusual event" with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The likely cause of the problem is a leak on a valve in the primary cooling system, but that won't be known for certain until workers can get in and do a thorough evaluation, Savage said.

So as part of their attempt to fix that problem, they dropped something (I'm envisioning Homer Simpson dropping a wrench and knocking out power), which cut off power to some safety valves, which resulted in radioactive steam upwind (but also south) from me.

Um, isn't this **power plant** supposed to have redundant backup electrical systems? You know? The ones we checked after Fukushima reminded us this stuff isn't child's play?

OUR COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES WILL MAKE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE WORSE

What place does this sound like?

Ruling elites ... do not see climate change as an immediate threat to their authority. They therefore feel free to take an opportunistic attitude toward climate change, supporting climate change mitigation policies that have collateral economic or political benefits to their particular interests.

Though it could be, it is not an indictment of our own country's refusal to do anything about climate change. Rather, it's one of a series of climate change studies and conferences the National Intelligence Council contracted to have done. This one describes the self-serving

actions of the pre-Arab Spring authoritarian elite of North Africa.

As Steven Aftergood reported, the CIA is hiding the climate change analysis they're doing. They just rejected a FOIA for their climate change reports based on a claim that everything they have done is classified. So these reports, prominently labeled, "This paper does not represent US Government views," are one of the only public reads about what the intelligence community is doing with climate change.

Those contractor studies are interesting for several reasons. First, check out how they define their regions:

- China
- India
- Russia
- Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands
- North Africa
- Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America

The impact of climate change on the US, Europe, much of the Middle East, and most of Africa are all missing (or, at least, not public).

Shouldn't someone (not the CIA, which can't, but perhaps DOE) start thinking about how climate change will affect security in the US? How do you rationalize not including the Middle East (where water is already is source of conflict between Israel and its neighbors) or the Horn of Africa (where climate-related issues discussed in the North Africa studies have presented predictably catastrophic problems in countries that already pose other national security challenges to the US)? Why study India rather than South Asia as a whole, particularly given that Bangladesh will be one of the most impacted countries and (as reflected in the India report) will present India with a serious refugee problem. In short, there are real, critical gaps

in the way the intelligence community at least publicly thinks of the potential impact of climate change.

I checked out the North Africa reports (commissioned report, conference report) to see how the intelligence community viewed the region two years before the Arab Spring. True, these reports analyze the impact of things like drought on agriculture and the impact of that on stability, but such analysis largely parallels the impact of neoliberal economic policies on agriculture and therefore on stability. Here's what the NIC was hearing about climate change and Ag and stability two years before the Arab Spring (these quotes come from the conference report):

An acute state failure to address climate change that results in intolerable conditions for significant segments of the population may constitute a sociopolitical tipping point, in essence a breaking of the social compact between North African states and civil society. At that point, civil actors may determine that fundamental systemic change is necessary. The results of such a situation will depend on the specific reactions by state elites and by the public; reform, repression, or revolution are all possibilities. A combination of climatic stress and inadequate state responses over the next two decades could prove the catalyst for a major sociopolitical shift in North Africa. On the other hand, North Africans tend to hold a religiously based view that "what will be, will be." Owing to this fatalistic mindset, North Africans are unlikely to blame the state for climate related stresses, making it more difficult to attain the aforementioned tipping point.

Much later, the report predicts that the ancillary effects of climate change will be the cause of social stress.

The implications of climate change in North Africa—notably migration, stress on both

rural and urban areas, unemployment, and increased resource competition—are likely to generate volatile sociopolitical conditions that will pose significant threats to the existing political structure. The responses of North African states to these threats may be more decisive for the fate of the region than their direct responses to climate change impacts. North African states have robust capacity to maintain social control in the face of domestic challenges and destabilization. **Regimes depend on a combination of entrenched patronage systems, robust *mukhabarat* (security) apparatuses, and the support of external allies**—a combination that has proven highly effective at maintaining political control. They have a track record of effectively suppressing dissent and unrest or remaining resilient where unrest has persisted, such as the civil conflict in Algeria.

States in the region may seek to suppress or distort information on climate change-related challenges. They seek to control access to any information that could provide a basis for opposition to the state, even information as seemingly innocuous as census data. **The proliferation of new media and alternative information sources, however, will make it difficult to maintain such censorship.** [my emphasis]

Particularly given our own IC's failure to take the warnings of unrest expressed via social media social media seriously, I find the warning that North African regimes would find it hard to censor this social unrest prescient.

And I find it richly ironic that the IC notes other countries would "seek to suppress or distort information on climate change-related challenges" when the CIA is doing just that in the US.

But I also find the description of these regimes' reliance on their allies chilling. This report always describes these regimes, several

of them key allies of ours, as badly repressive regimes.

Although the level of repression varies between states, with Tunisia and Libya the most extreme, and has varied cyclically over time, authoritarian regimes are well entrenched in every state in the region.

The conference report acknowledges that the US focus on terrorism has narrowed its diplomatic focus with these countries, which in turn has strengthened the security apparatuses in the region—precisely the source of the repressive strength of the countries.

Security issues are the primary focus of US relations with North African states. The predominance of security and military concerns has led to disproportionate US engagement with security apparatuses in the region, strengthening regimes in ways that may damage long-term prospects to meet the challenges of climate change. US policy in the region has become even more security-centric as a result of the continuing struggle against radical Islamic terrorism. While terrorism has deepened US security ties with states in the region, it has also narrowed the scope of US engagement, which may not be in the long-term interests of either party.

And then the report incorrectly suggests that the only likely challenge to these regimes if they fail to respond adequately to climate change would be Islamists.

Islamist groups have emerged as the only viable opposition force because they have resisted state cooptation and because the state has blocked other avenues for social mobilization. In addition, they have established a track record of effective humanitarian responses to mudslides, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, often providing immediate medical, shelter, and food aid that are normally the

responsibilities of the state. In many cases Islamist groups may fill the void left by inadequate state responses or the weakness of other types of potential civil responders. Moderate Islamist groups could play a constructive role, providing highly visible humanitarian assistance that empowers autonomous civil actors and contrasts with ineffectual state responses, thus pressuring state actors to respond more effectively. Moderate Islamists could use the climate change mitigation issue to bolster their argument that existing North African governments are illegitimate and exploitative, creating momentum for political reform.

On the other hand, Islamic extremists across the region may exploit climate change's destabilizing impacts and ineffective state responses to promote the spread of militancy and anti-regime violence. Indeed, Islamist militants could point to climate-induced catastrophes as evidence of God's wrath against "apostate regimes" whose un-Islamic behavior has plunged the region into desperate circumstances.

In other words, while the report doesn't lay out the the logical case it makes explicitly, it nevertheless argues that:

- The repressive nature of these regimes may make them less likely to respond adequately to climate change
- Our single-minded focus on terrorism tends to make these countries even more repressive
- If these countries don't respond to climate change, it may provide an opportunity for precisely the Islamists our single-

minded counter-terrorism focus is designed to combat

In other words, this conference report suggests (though does not say so explicitly, perhaps because it was written by contractors intent on getting paid) that in the presence of a stress like climate change, our counter-terrorism approach may be self-defeating.

Now, again, this report wasn't written by our spooks and it "does not represent US Government views." Our policy makers may not agree with this report's analysis, or they may be ignoring it (seeing no "collateral political or economic benefits to their particular interests"). And if you buy my premise that the stress of climate change is similar to the stress caused by an embrace of neoliberalism, then the report badly underestimated both the success of those challenging these regimes and the centrality of Islamists in these countries.

There's a lot else that could be said about these reports (such as their too-narrow focus on the Ag in each particular country, when recent food price shocks make it clear such stress will play out at broader levels).

But more generally, the report suggests that our counterterrorism policies are making countries around the world less resilient to climate change (and so presumably to a range of other stresses as well).

TRUE "RESILIENCE" WOULD HELP PREVENT THE NEXT 3,420

CLIMATE-RELATED DEATHS, TOO

This article—showing how many stupid projects have been funded in the name of homeland security in the last decade—has been making the rounds. Everyone has been pointing to its details on how few people have died in terrorist attacks.

“The number of people worldwide who are killed by Muslim-type terrorists, Al Qaeda wannabes, is maybe a few hundred outside of war zones. It’s basically the same number of people who die drowning in the bathtub each year,” said John Mueller, an Ohio State University professor who has written extensively about the balance between threat and expenditures in fighting terrorism.

“So if your chance of being killed by a terrorist in the United States is 1 in 3.5 million, the question is, how much do you want to spend to get that down to 1 in 4.5 million?” he said.

[snip]

Only 14 Americans have died in about three dozen instances of Islamic extremist terrorist plots targeted at the U.S. outside war zones since 2001 – most of them involving one or two home-grown plotters.

Returning to the National Climatic Data Center data I was looking at the other day, 3,420 people have died since 9/11 in big weather disasters:

2002: 28
2003: 131
2004: 168
2005: 2,002
2006: 95
2007: 22
2008: 296
2009: 26

2010: 46

2011 634 (counting 40 thus far in Irene)

Total: 3,420

Now I raise this not just to make the obvious point that we would be better off dumping some of this money into dealing with climate change, but also to make a point about the theme Obama is pushing for this year's commemoration of 9/11: resilience.

The White House has issued detailed guidelines to government officials on how to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, with instructions to honor the memory of those who died on American soil but also to recall that Al Qaeda and other extremist groups have since carried out attacks elsewhere in the world, from Mumbai to Manila.

The White House in recent days has quietly disseminated two sets of documents. One is framed for overseas allies and their citizens and was sent to American embassies and consulates around the globe. The other includes themes for Americans here and underscores the importance of national service and what the government has done to prevent another major attack in the United States.

[snip]

One significant new theme is in both sets of documents: Government officials are to warn that Americans must be prepared for another attack – and must, in response, be resilient in recovering from the loss.

“Resilience takes many forms, including the dedication and courage to move forward,” according to the guidelines for foreign audiences. “While we must never forget those who we lost, we must do more than simply remember them –we must sustain our resilience and remain united to prevent new attacks and new victims.”

[snip]

Resilience is a repeated theme of the communications. "We celebrate the resilience of communities across the globe," the foreign guidelines state.

I applaud the appeal to "resilience" in the scope of terrorism. True resilience would do far more in the event of an attack than the Zodiac dive boat, cattle nose leads and electric prods, and \$750,000 terrorism fences described by the LAT.

But it's not clear the deficit cutting obsessed Administration is talking about resilience. It's not talking about maintaining existing bridges and building redundant ones close to key trucking routes; it's not addressing our decrepit drinking and waste water infrastructure; it's not done anything to fix the 1,819 high hazard potential dams in this country; it's not addressing even the shoddy electrical grid supplying the nation's capital.

Granted, Obama is pushing a highway bill, though early reports say it'll be a mere fraction of the 2.2 trillion needed to shore up our nation's infrastructure.

Not only would investing in our country's infrastructure make us truly resilient in the event of another attack (and create jobs), but it would also help localities better withstand—or at least recover from—many (though not all) severe weather events, which will likely become more frequent in the next decade.

Given that more people have died from severe weather in this country over the last decade than terrorism (even including 9/11), we really ought to be dumping the money we have been investing in fancy dive boats in climate change instead. But barring that, we at least ought to be doing the kinds of things that will make us more resilient—to both terrorist attacks and climate disasters.

JEFF IMMELT: EPA SHOULD SAY FRACKING, GULF DRILLING, AND TRANS-CANDIAN PIPELINE ARE SAFE IN ONE WEEK

[youtube]Df_XSkDz418[/youtube]

I wanted to return to Jeff Immelt's Dartmouth talk to focus on what he means by regulatory reform. It's newsworthy not just for the way Immelt creates straw men to try to claim the energy industry is overregulated. But given that he's such a key Obama advisor, and given that Obama is also claiming that regulatory reform will create jobs, Immelt's worrisome claims—such as that regulatory agencies should approve applications in a week—deserve some attention and publicity.

In response to a question posed indirectly by Hank Paulson about what he would do to create jobs (after 35:00), Immelt put regulatory reform as the first thing on his list (the others are infrastructure investment, retraining, and small business financing). (All transcriptions and errors therein in this post are my own.)

You'd look at regulation permitting cycles; you'd look at some regulatory schemes that are retarding growth. And as important, you'd just look at cycle time. Cycle time. You'd say, okay instead of three years, I'm gonna give you a week.

Later (after 46:30), an audience member asks him how to make us more efficient while still being

environmentally safe. Rather than answering that question, he returns to the idea of regulatory reform.

I think that there are permitting cycle times that just are purely bureaucratic. The fact is, if you're doing a cross-state line gas it takes four years, if you're doing electricity grid it takes seven years. That seems a bit tardy, to me.

And then, I think, let's pick three. Let's pick drilling off the Gulf of Mexico, let's take the Trans-Canada pipeline that goes from the oil sands in Canada down to the United States, and let's pick shale gas.

Now, I think there should be rules for all of those. I don't think people should be able to just do whatever they want to do. There should be rules for all of those. But we should be doing them all.

In other words, the role of a regulator, be it the FDA or the EPA or anybody else is how to make it safe. It's not to switch an on or an off switch.

Now, this country could be an exporter of natural gas. We have more natural gas than almost any other country in the world. Why not celebrate that?

You know, we've been doing shale gas in Pennsylvania for a decade. There's a 150 environmental laws that you have to adhere to if you want to shale gas discovery in Pennsylvania today. Do we need 300?

Look, I'm not anti-EPA, I'm not. I think in some ways the EPA drives good standards. And those standards are important for competitiveness and those standards create an equal playing field.

But I think today, we've let some agencies to run with no accountability at all. None. And I think that might have been okay when unemployment was 5%; it may have been okay at some other time. But I think if we're making everybody else accountable, the FDA and EPA should be as well.

Aside from the straw men Immelt constructs here (after all, it's not actually the case that the EPA is preventing most kinds of Gulf drilling from going forward; and legitimate political opposition is holding these issues up as much as regulatory reform), the passage is stunning for the way it spins real regulatory review as a lack of accountability. After all, FDA regulatory capture and accelerated review has led directly to problems with drugs and medical devices (some of the latter in GE market segments). And the same factors—EPA and DOI regulatory capture and speedy approval processes—led directly to what is probably the biggest energy disaster in the history of the country, the BP oil spill. Both of those cost lives and, because of the damage, business efficiency, and (in the case of the BP spill) jobs.

If anything, we need to hold regulators accountable for these **failures**, not give them a green light to go make more of them, on a larger scale.

But Jeff Immelt, the Chair of Obama's jobs council, says instead of that kind of accountability, we need to approve things like fracking in one week's time.

JEFF IMMELT CLAIMS

GOVERNMENT CAN'T MAKE HIM INVEST-IGNORING IT ALREADY DID

[youtube]Df_XSkDz418[/youtube]

Jeff “China China China” Immelt spoke at Dartmouth yesterday, ostensibly about energy. But as it happens, he had the opportunity (in question period) to pressure SuperCongress to “reform” taxes rather than raise them on people like Immelt (while later saying he didn’t think SuperCongress should also look at job creation). He claimed GE would embrace the elimination of loopholes, so long as the corporate tax rate was also lowered.

The largest U.S. conglomerate would accept the elimination of loopholes “in a heartbeat” if it was coupled with a lowering of the statutory 35 percent rate, Jeff Immelt told a group of students on Thursday.

Right. We’re to take Immelt’s word that GE will stop taking advantage of any means to evade taxes based on its own history of evading taxes.

Which, in combination with Immelt’s comments about investing are all the more interesting. Here’s how Reuters described it.

Immelt, who leads a panel advising the Obama administration on job creation, said **he puts little stock in talk that the government could do more to encourage companies to invest and lower the nation’s persistently high unemployment rate.**

“A lot has been said that business isn’t investing because of uncertainty. I think that’s rubbish,” the 55-year-old CEO said. **“The government couldn’t do**

anything to make me invest and believe me the rest of the world isn't that stable either. We've made our own choices that we're going to keep investing regardless of what happens in Washington."

But in an uncharacteristically animated moment, he blasted critics who contend that companies like GE that do much of their sales outside the United States are hurting the economy. He noted that GE sells 90 percent of its jet engines abroad but manufactures all of them in U.S. factories.

"That's not taking jobs out of the United States, that's what we have to do," Immelt said. "We've gotten this psychotic thing that anybody that does business outside the United States is a heathen, anti-American ... I don't understand why we're rooting against companies that are out there competing because we're creating good jobs here."
[my emphasis]

Now there's actually more than this going on. First, in response to a question (around 42:10) about allegations that GE doesn't pay taxes, Immelt shifted the answer to claim, incorrectly, that people were beating up on GE for exporting, rather than beating up on GE for not paying taxes. So rather than talking about tax evasion, he instead talked about how many jet engines GE exports from the US. And when, later (around 52:00), he was asked whether all the energy products GE sells in India and China were made in the US, he again focused on jet engines (energy products?) and gas turbines.

In other words, he avoided talking about taxes by pretending all GE does does export large manufactured goods. (More interesting, too, though probably worth another post, is his exhortation—around 50:00—that you shouldn't watch TV or read the news, said in the context

of the crash, “everybody had to wake up and realize you gotta change,” without admitting that GE’s financial games were a huge part of the crash.)

And yes, Immelt says that the government can’t do anything to make GE invest—though in context it appeared to say the government can’t make GE invest here (as opposed to other countries—he noted that investments in energy are primarily happening in Europe and China).

I find that claim, in particular, interesting given how GE is claiming credit for creating a greater proportion of jobs in the US. But the big headline item—a tech center in the Detroit area—happened precisely because of government intervention.

Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Immelt has said GE will add more than 15,000 jobs in the three years through December. About 1,100 will be just outside Detroit in a center for information technology, a field emblematic of outsourcing. So far, GE has hired about 660 people in Michigan, a state that led the nation in jobless rates, making it a symbol of U.S. industrial decline.

[snip]

GE took advantage of incentives such as Michigan’s tax benefits and skilled workforce. Immelt said in announcing the Michigan site in 2009 that GE would invest \$100 million, while state officials offered more than \$60 million over 12 years in incentives.

“The change in approach is critical, and it comes right from the top,” said Harley Shaiken, a labor professor at the University of California at Berkeley. “He’s addressed it both from the context of GE and in the importance of the U.S. having a vibrant, high-tech manufacturing base.”

So I guess the government can do something to make Jeff Immelt's company invest in the US. But for some reason he didn't want to talk about it.

In a recent op-ed, Alliance for American Manufacturing head Scott Paul offered a number of suggestions to rebuild manufacturing in the US. Among other worthy suggestions, he suggested what might be called the "Immelt Rule"—banishing CEOs from federal advisory boards (like Obama's job's council) if they're outsourcing faster than they're creating jobs here in the US.

Kick any CEO off of federal advisory boards or jobs councils who has: (1) not created net new American jobs over the past five years, or (2) is expanding the company's foreign workforce at a faster rate than its domestic workforce. Replace them with CEOs who are committed to investing in America. Shame is a good motivator.

I guess Immelt would rather just talk about exporting jet engines and be done with it.

APPARENTLY, "FREEDOM" IS THE NEW EUPHEMISM FOR "GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT"

There's something really disturbing about Obama's speech at Johnson Controls today: he barely claimed credit for the government's involvement in it.

Understand, I think the opening of factories like Johnson Controls the single biggest piece

of good news in our economy today. It's good news because we're investing in new manufacturing jobs. It's good news because it helps us move away from our dependence on fossil fuels. And it's good news because the technologies will help us do something about climate change. Obama's investment in energy technology jobs may well be the single best thing he has done as President.

So I've been waiting for Obama to come claim credit for the factories in Holland since they were built. Since then, Rick Snyder and Crazy Pete Hoekstra have hailed these new factories, all the while pretending that capitalists did the work all by themselves, with nothing more than a tax cut from the government. I've been waiting for Obama to correct the record and explain how important government investment can be—particularly at a time when no one else is investing.

But it took him 1095 words—over a third of the speech—before he offered the following vague explanation for what made the factory possible.

But what also made this possible are the actions that we took together, as a nation, through our government -- the fact that we were willing to invest in the research and the technology that holds so much promise for jobs and growth; the fact that we helped create together the conditions where businesses like this can prosper.

No mention of precisely what the government did or how it invested. No mention of how many jobs that investment created (JCI's CEO made some of that case).

And Obama's weak claim of credit came long after Obama's first explanation (coming 210 words in) for what created these jobs,

The reason a plant like this exists is because we are a country of unmatched freedom, where groundbreaking ideas

flourish.

And it came in the paragraph after Obama's second explanation for what created these jobs,

So let's think about it – what made this possible? The most important part is you: your drive, your work ethic, your ingenuity, your management. The grit and optimism that says, "We've got an idea for a new battery technology or a new manufacturing process, and we're going to take that leap and we're going to make an investment. And we're going to hire some folks and we're going to see it through." That's what made it possible.

It seems that Obama would rather push a Milton Friedmanesque notion of capitalism—arguing freedom creates jobs—than take clear, proud credit for the government's role in creating them.

Obama had no problem claiming credit for the government's role in creating jobs when he broke ground on a different battery factory (the LG Chem one) in Holland a year ago. After first invoking the auto bailout (and admitting it was an unpopular decision), Obama described clearly that the factory relied, in part, on a government grant for funding.

And through small business loans, a focus on research and development and investments in high-tech, fast-growing sectors like clean energy, we've aimed to grow our economy by harnessing the innovative spirit of the American people.

Because we did, shovels will soon be moving earth and trucks will soon be pouring concrete where we are standing. **Because of a grant to this company, a grant that's leveraging more than 150 million private dollars, as many as 300**

people will be put to work doing construction and another 300 will eventually be hired to operate this plant when it's fully up and running.

And this is going to lead to growth at local businesses like parts suppliers and restaurants. It will be a boost to the economy of the entire region. [my emphasis]

And he went on to boast about all the additional benefits of the investment in related jobs and increasing efficiency. That language—the language Obama used last year—is the kind of language we need to hear now that people owe their employment to such government support. It's the kind of language that would not only support his own re-election (his approval levels in MI are barely where they need to be to win the state, particularly if Romney's on the ballot), but it'd also help downticket Dems (Granholm had a big role in this investment), and correct the false claims made by Snyder and others.

Obama's failure to boast loudly about the government's role in this plant is all the more troubling given the rest of the speech.

The larger speech, after all, was about what we can do now to stimulate the economy.

Now, there are more steps that we can take to help this economy growing faster. There are things we can do right now that will put more money in your pockets; will help businesses sell more products around the world; will put people to work in Michigan and across the country.

He went on to rehearse a bunch of ideas that really won't stimulate the economy all that much: the payroll tax cut, the trade deals, new patent law, and a veteran jobs program. And (second in the list of things we could do), as

part of his call for a highway construction bill, he admitted “we’re slipping behind because we’re not investing.”

America used to have the best stuff – best roads, best airports, best seaports. We’re slipping behind because we’re not investing in it, because of politics and gridlock. Do you want to put people to work right now rebuilding America? You’ve got to send that message to Congress.

But if it’s true (and it is) that America’s falling behind because the government is not investing, if Obama’s going to try to mobilize voters to pressure Congress to do something about jobs, if what made this factory and these jobs possible was government investment, why not make a broader call for more of it?

The evidence was all there today in the form of the shiny new battery factory and the engineers running around in blue lab coats that government investment can be critically important to creating jobs. But rather than make that argument, Obama pretended that grit and freedom are all it takes to create jobs