

IS JOHN BRENNAN CONFESSING HIS (PETRAEUS') COVERT OPS IN SYRIA BACKFIRED?

Both Michah Zenko and Jon Schwarz noted John Brennan making a remarkable admission on Face the Nation back on May 31: that sometimes US involvement in events exacerbates things.

But both seem to interpret Brennan's comment as a general comment on US's big foot stepping in shit around the world (my description, not theirs). Zenko reads this as "an unprecedented recognition by a senior official about how U.S. counterterrorism activities can increase direct threats to the United States and its 'national security interests.'" And Schwarz interprets Brennan to be "acknowledg[ing] that U.S. foreign policy might sometimes cause terrorism."

It may well be such a generalized admission.

But I wonder whether it's not something more: a specific admission that the US fostered the rise of ISIS with its covert role in Syria in 2012 – a topic that has discussed of late because of documents released via a Judicial Watch FOIA on briefings to Congress about Benghazi (here's the post I did on the documents).

Here's the full exchange between Bob Schieffer and Brennan.

SCHIEFFER: Another question I asked Jeb Bush, some of the critics of this administration and some of them are within the government. The ones in the government are not saying these things publicly but saying that the president seems to be just trying to buy time here, that he's not ready to make a full commitment here in this war on terrorism

and basically is just trying to keep things together well enough that he can leave it to the next president to resolve it.

Do you see that?

BRENNAN: I don't see anything like that. I've been involved in this administration in different capacities for the last six and a half years and there has been a full court effort to try to keep this country safe.

Dealing with some of these problems in the Middle East, whether you're talking about Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Libya, others, these are some of the most complex and complicated issues that I've seen in my 35 years, working on national security issues. So there are no easy solutions.

I think the president has tried to make sure that we're able to push the envelope when we can to protect this country. But we have to recognize that sometimes our engagement and direct involvement will stimulate and spur additional threats to our national security interests.

Brennan's response comes – as Schieffer made clear – after Schieffer had already posed the question to Jeb!, and in that context, it specifically addressed ISIS.

SCHIEFFER: Some of the administration's critics, even some people in the Pentagon, are saying privately that the administration is sort of just buying time and is trying to leave this for the next president to deal with.

BUSH: It looks that way, because you don't have a clear strategy.

And I think the strategy is both military, as well as political. We need

to make sure that Iraq is stable for the region and to create – narrowing the influence of ISIS not just in Iraq, but in Syria. So, it doesn't appear that they have a strategy.

Then they put – every time that they talk about a strategy, they put conditions on that strategy to make it harder to actually implement it. So, I think the first thing you need to do is take advice of military leaders that know a lot about this than folks in the White House. Take their input. Create a strategy. Express what the strategy is.

And the strategy ought to be take out ISIS in coordinated way and do it over the long haul. This is not something that is going to happen overnight.

And while Brennan mentions two other places – Yemen and Iran – that may not (but they actually might!) be part of the covert operations in which CIA tried to arm “moderates” to oppose Syria but instead helped their buddies energize ISIS, the others were all part of the plan to deal Libyan weapons to the “moderate” liver-eaters in Syria.

The administration is still carefully protecting the details about what they did in Syria in 2012, even from Congress. But they have, in fact, been doing a lot in the Middle East, only most of it has been making things worse.