

LEAKY LEON DOES MORE DAMAGE



Even in his official photos Panetta can't keep his lips closed.

Marcy pointed out even before it aired that Defense Secretary (and former CIA Director) Leon Panetta's televised confirmation that Dr. Shakeel Afridi worked for the CIA in the effort to find and kill Osama bin Laden was a breach of security. Since then, both Marcy and I have documented the damage resulting from this disclosure, which includes Afridi being jailed instead of quietly slipping out of Pakistan and a UN doctor being shot while hundreds of thousands of Pakistani children have been denied vaccines. In further damage from Panetta's improper disclosure, Pakistan is now in the process of expelling the aid group Save the Children over concerns that they may have a CIA tie through a link with Afridi.

But that is not the only time Panetta has disclosed secret information that he should have kept quiet. In this post where I was discussing what looked like signs of increasing cooperation between the US and Pakistan, I included video from an AP interview of Panetta. The segment I

chose to post turns out to be very significant. Here is my description of the video clip and its significance:

The absence of drone strikes continued and then on August 13 Defense Secretary Leon Panetta was interviewed by Lolita Baldor and Robert Burns of AP. As seen in the video excerpt above, Panetta said that he expected Pakistan to launch military operations soon against Taliban militants in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. As Bill Roggio noted at Long War Journal, this was a shocking development. After opening with "This is absolutely stunning", Roggio went on to list his reasoning for why the announcement didn't make much sense.

Panetta's claim that Pakistan was about to launch military action in the FATA stunned those who watch the area closely. By publicly announcing such an unexpected action before it started, Panetta put Pakistan into an untenable position. Today's Express Tribune details the damage arising from Panetta's disclosure:

Pakistan has quietly conveyed to the United States to not make any public statement on its planned operation against militants in the restive North Waziristan Agency bordering Afghanistan.

The advice stems from the fact that any remarks by American officials may complicate the Pakistani authorities' plan to create the 'necessary environment' for the Waziristan offensive, a senior government official said.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the official told The Express Tribune that the military does not want to be seen as aligned with the US on the issue

of launching a fresh operation in the rugged tribal belt because of growing anti-American sentiments in the country.

Pakistan protested directly to the US about Panetta's leak:

Islamabad voiced concerns when US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta disclosed last month that the Pakistani military was planning to start an operation against militants in North Waziristan.

/snip/

"It was inappropriate for Panetta to make that statement. There was no need for that ... it really complicated the situation," a military official commented.

Why does Leaky Leon still hold a security clearance? The Haqqani network, operating now with virtual impunity from Pakistan's FATA, is seen as one of the largest barriers to a stable Afghanistan. By delaying Pakistan's action against them, Panetta has made himself directly responsible for additional harm to NATO troops and innocent Afghan civilians who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.