

CIA DIRECTOR ENTRY

NUMBER 2: MIKE MORELL, FABULIST

As Eli Lake wrote the other day, there are three men angling to be CIA Director under President Hillary: John Brennan, Mike Morell, and Mike Vickers.

I've already explained what is terrifying about Vickers' audition to be CIA Director: after laying out the Hillary as Commander-in-Chief case (which appears to be mandatory for these things), Vickers then talks about how we need to escalate our wars and belligerence.

To be sure, we will need more aggressive counterterrorism strategies, stronger support for the Syrian opposition as the only plausible counterweight to authoritarianism and extremism within Syria, more effective counters to Iranian and Russian expansion, and better strategies for deterring and competing with China over the long term.

Henceforth, I will refer to Vickers as The Escalationist.

Today, Mike Morell submitted his audition to be CIA Director.

As Vickers did (these do seem to be formulaic), Morell lays out his extensive bipartisan past (Vickers claims service under 4 Republican and 2 Democratic Presidents, Morell claims 3 of each), then talks about how serving with Hillary convinced him she has the temperament to be Commander-in-Chief.

I spent four years working with Mrs. Clinton when she was secretary of state, most often in the White House Situation Room. In these critically important meetings, I found her to be prepared, detail-oriented, thoughtful, inquisitive

and willing to change her mind if presented with a compelling argument.

Like Vickers, Morell lauds Hillary's courage in pushing for the raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

Mrs. Clinton was an early advocate of the raid that brought Bin Laden to justice, in opposition to some of her most important colleagues on the National Security Council.

[snip]

I never saw her bring politics into the Situation Room. In fact, I saw the opposite. When some wanted to delay the Bin Laden raid by one day because the White House Correspondents Dinner might be disrupted, she said, "Screw the White House Correspondents Dinner."

Disrupting White House Correspondents Dinner to kill someone would count as politics? Really?

Also like Vickers, Morell then lays out Trump's lack of qualification for the job, both in terms of background and temperament.

But Morell's gimmick – the brand that sets him apart on this quest to be CIA Director – is not an explicit call for escalation, but instead the specific gloss he puts on Trump's soft spot for Putin. After portraying Trump's careless claims as full endorsements of Putin, Morell claims Trump has been recruited by the old KGB officer, albeit unwittingly.

Mr. Putin is a great leader, Mr. Trump says, ignoring that he has killed and jailed journalists and political opponents, has invaded two of his neighbors and is driving his economy to ruin. Mr. Trump has also taken policy positions consistent with Russian, not American, interests – endorsing Russian espionage against the United States,

supporting Russia's annexation of Crimea and giving a green light to a possible Russian invasion of the Baltic States.

In the intelligence business, we would say that Mr. Putin had recruited Mr. Trump as an unwitting agent of the Russian Federation.

Don't get me wrong. I'm all in favor in making political hay out of Trump's call on Putin to hack Hillary, especially coming as it does from someone (unlike Jake Sullivan and Leon Panetta) without a known history of mishandling classified information.

But that line? "recruited Mr. Trump as an unwitting agent of the Russian Federation"? That's all about the clicks, and it has been serving splendidly. Just like "Slam Dunk" was a nifty line.

In a piece auditioning to be CIA Director, I'd prefer someone stick more rigorously to the truth. Trump is an apologist for Putin, undoubtedly, but there's no more evidence Putin has recruited Trump (unwittingly) than there is, say, the Saudis have recruited Hillary. They're all just picking the assholes they champion, with Hillary picking the assholes we've long championed.

Then again, this is not the first time Morell has stretched the truth a bit – up to and including on torture, so we shouldn't be surprised by the tactic.

So there you have it: The Escalationist versus The Fabulist, your first two contestants on ~~the Price is Right~~ CIA nomination competition.

Sadly, we probably won't see something quite so explicit from Brennan (though it would be amusing to see if a third endorsement hewed so closely to the same script as the other two), so we'll just have to accept Lake's "drone warrior" brand for him.