CHENEY'S WAR PLAN FOR AFGHANISTAN? DENY SAFE HAVEN TO–BUT NOT DESTROY–AL QAEDA

[youtube]ywIqvCojtsQ[/youtube]

According to Dick Cheney, our objective in Afghanistan was, from the very beginning, not about defeating al Qaeda, but rather, defeating the Taliban, while denying al Qaeda a safe haven in Afghanistan.

At least that's what he says in a passage explaining why he was talking about Iraq in the days after 9/11. He says,

> Although we had discussed Iraq earlier in the day [on September 14], I also took time now to say that Afghanistan, where the 9/11 terrorists had trained and plotted, should be first. I believed it was important to deal with the threat Iraq posed, but not until we had an effective plan for taking down the Taliban and denying al Qaeda safe haven in Afghanistan. (334)

Note what he describes the goal as being: "taking down the Taliban," not "taking out al Qaeda." The al Qaeda-related goal Cheney describes for Afghanistan is simply denying them a safe haven.

And thus—in the context of this discussion about why the Bush Administration focused on Iraq so quickly after 9/11, at least—he excuses himself for letting Osama bin Laden escape at Tora Bora, for letting OBL find a haven in Pakistan that would keep him safe for a decade, and for drawing troops away for use in Iraq before actually beating al Qaeda. It was all in the plan, according to Cheney.

Tellingly, his sole discussion of anything

relating to Tora Bora (actually, a strategy discussion that happened a month before the December 2001 battle there) doesn't call it Tora Bora, doesn't mention that OBL was holed up there (even though Cheney all-but acknowledged we knew he was at the time), and didn't admit Bush Administration blunders let OBL get away.

> [General Tommy] Franks also reported on the campaign under way to destroy the massive cave complexes in which the Taliban lived and hid. He had about 150 caves on a target list, he said, and estimated the count would go to 1,000. (345)

Cheney separates the discussion of bombing caves in Afghanistan from that describing General Franks making plans for Iraq by 24 pages, obscuring the fact that Franks was focused on developing an Iraq plan at the time he refused to send in American troops to trap OBL in Tora Bora.

Admittedly, Cheney **does** remember to include taking out al Qaeda among the objectives a few pages after his initial description of US goals in Afghanistan.

> Our objective was to take out al Qaeda, take down the Taliban, and prevent Afghanistan from being used as a base for further operations. (340)

But it feels so contrived, particularly coming just before this passage insisting that the government remained focused on OBL.

> We were also very focused on getting Osama bin Laden. None of us believed that capturing or killing him would end the terrorist threat, but he was the leader of the organization that had launched the 9/11 attacks, and having him in custody—or dead—would be a powerful symbol of our determination. Tracking him down was certainly one of our top priorities. I was gratified that after years of diligent and dedicated work, our nation's intelligence community and our special operations forces

> were able on May 1, 2011, to find and kill bin Laden. (341)

If you're so petty you can't even mention President Obama's name in the list of those who managed to finally get OBL, clearly you have either some insecurity that Obama succeeded where you failed, or that first formulation—basically, a whack-a-mole forever war that "denies safe haven" for terrorists in one after another country, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, but never ends the war—was always the plan.