

Petraeus at the Head of the CIA: Business as Usual?

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Nowhere in his discussion of how General David Petraeus will fare when he takes over the CIA in August does Washington Post columnist David Ignatius challenge the basic operation of the Agency itself. His article of July 8th asks what sort of agenda Petraeus will pursue and concludes, "America needs a great intelligence service, and it will soon have a director whose ambition matches the agency's mission."

Within the parameters of his vision, Ignatius's article makes perfect sense. He is right on the mark when he writes, "This is a bruised organization, wounded by so many years of public criticism, and it needs a leader, not a martinet." Where The *Post* columnist errs, however, is that "the many years of public criticism" does not cause him to reflect on whether the Agency is worth salvaging. This lack of questioning, much less exposing, what are essentially massive and ongoing criminal activities by the CIA directed from the White House typifies how far The *Post* has slipped since the days it refreshed the practice of journalism by exposing the Watergate scandal.

Ignatius writes that Petraeus will be a Director who told the Senators that confirmed his nomination he will listen to the dissenters and grumblers in the Agency and answer his own e-mail and that on some days he would even eat in the employee cafeteria. (Wow, what a guy, huh?)

Ignatius wrote his column after "spending a week with Patraeus's entourage in Kabul," and being the good reporter he is we may be rightly distressed by his observation that the CIA post, among other things, will allow Petraeus to stay with the fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, *which are likely to shift to paramilitary-intelligence missions, once the uniformed troops leave.* (*Italics added.*)

This means these wars are liable to be continued just as the Obama regime is waging wars in Pakistan, Yemen, Sudan, and Libya, keeping them secret when it can and denying that they are wars when it can't. It suggests the U.S. will keep up its deadly drone assassinations being waged without even the flimsiest pretext of legal authority and in spite of hundreds or thousands of innocent civilians who are being butchered. Not to be ignored, either, is incoming "Defense" head Leon Panetta's remark July 9th in Kabul that the U.S. will keep 70,000 troops in Afghanistan until the end of 2014—a higher figure than announced by President Obama. According to The *Washington Post* of July 12, Panetta's aides "scurried afterward to say he misspoke."

Why the U.S. today needs one soldier stationed in the Middle East, where we are now widely reviled, confounds me. By now substantial majorities the American public, like their European cousins, want all their troops *out* of Afghanistan and Iraq, yet their elected officials

betray the sound instincts of their citizenry.

“The best CIA directors,” Ignatius writes, “have cut through the mediocrity that can develop in a closed bureaucracy and demanded excellence. I hope Petraeus can do that, too.” The question Ignatius ignores is “excellence at what?” Bribing politicians and buying voters in foreign countries with U.S. tax dollars? Engineering the violent overthrow of governments? Arming one nation to fight another? Tracking down pro-democracy activists so totalitarian rulers can imprison them? Teaching torture techniques? Kidnapping suspects off the streets and flying them to other countries for torture and assassination in secret prisons concealed from the Red Cross? Creating killer drone attacks against suspects who turn out to be innocent? By the testimony of several former CIA officials, the Agency has been responsible, directly or indirectly, for causing *millions* of deaths.

We ignore, too, at our peril the enormous influence of this criminal Agency on the shaping of American foreign policy. Just retired “Defense” secretary Robert Gates was a former Director of the CIA. President Obama is a former CIA payroller of slavish allegiance to the Agency, who conveniently decided not to prosecute Bush era officials even when presented with allegations of their crimes—in violation of the U.S. Constitution. His predecessor George W. Bush also spent time on the CIA payroll and Bush’s father, George H.W. Bush, was Director of the CIA before becoming President. What’s more, numerous former CIA officials hold positions of influence in the Federal bureaucracy.

The real issues concerning the CIA are not the management issues about which David Ignatius writes. They are the life-and-death issues about the CIA’s toxic poisoning of American values. The Agency has become precisely what President Harry Truman feared when he signed its enabling legislation: “an American Gestapo.” Its abolition would evoke cheers in scores of nations whose inhabitants have suffered dreadful punishments at its hands.

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