

PETRAEUS KNEW OF FBI INVESTIGATION DURING BENGHAZI PUSHBACK

I'm supposed to be packing to move today, so I may not get to my post on how Big Brother and the Obama Administration's assault on leakers doomed Petraeus' career (though Josh Gerstein and Jesselyn Raddack hit on some of the issues).

For now, though, I'd like to make a very narrow point. According to the NYT's reporting, the FBI spoke to Petraeus about their investigation of his mistress Paula Broadwell—and other issues—two weeks ago.

Government officials said that the F.B.I. began an investigation into a “potential criminal matter” several months ago that was not focused on Mr. Petraeus. In the course of their inquiry into whether a computer used by Mr. Petraeus had been compromised, agents discovered evidence of the relationship as well as other security concerns. **About two weeks ago, F.B.I. agents met with Mr. Petraeus to discuss the investigation.** [my emphasis]

So while the White House purportedly didn't find out about this until Wednesday, Petraeus found out about it around October 25 or 26. That would put it well before the CIA's pushback campaign on Benghazi—both the CIA rebuttal to Fox's reporting that CIA security people at the annex did not respond right away to the attack on the mission, and, more interestingly, the 1,500 word requiem for Petraeus' untainted image in the NYT. And while Petraeus' aides seem to have orchestrated that media barrage, what are probably the same aides have been chatting freely albeit anonymously in the last day.

To be clear, I'm not saying that means Petraeus' resignation was about Benghazi. I think it's

possible, but some reporters I trust insist it's not.

But consider how different this passage from the NYT reads when you understand that Petraeus had already learned the FBI had discovered his former mistress may have been snooping through his emails—not to mention months of his emailed pleas to her to get back together.

Mr. Petraeus's future has inevitably been the subject of rumors: that he would be Mitt Romney's running mate, or, more plausibly, that he was interested in the presidency of Princeton. In a statement in late September, he did not rule that out for the future, but said that for the time being he was "living the dream here at C.I.A." That was before the recriminations this week over Benghazi.

In late September—after Benghazi, mind you, but before he realized this affair had been exposed—Petraeus was still thinking about leading Princeton. But then "recriminations" jeopardized that hope.

The CIA blitz was certainly an attempt to minimize Petraeus' and CIA's role in getting an Ambassador killed. But it also reads, now, like an effort to preempt the damage from this.

One more note: the timing appears to be that the affair lasted for some of the period when Petraeus was in Afghanistan—so June 2010 to June 2011. It's unclear whether the affair continued after Petraeus started at CIA in June 2011—though he did keep emailing Broadwell to try to get her to get back together. The NYT says the investigation started only several months ago.

While that suggests the investigation may have been a counter-cyber investigation rather than a counter-intelligence investigation—an investigation into whether the Chinese had hacked his computer rather than an investigation

targeting Broadwell from the start—the timing would coincide with the leak witch hunts launched by Congress. I would laugh my ass off if the same members of Congress who are bemoaning the loss of Petraeus now somehow led to this investigation with their earlier demands for leak investigations targeted at top Administration officials. Imagine how funny it'd be if in their search for blood, Congress ended up killing the career of the one person they all believed was above reproach?

Update: WSJ provides a different timeline, saying the affair started after he left the military and ended months ago, while the investigation started in the spring.