

PETRAEUS RULES

While the Beltway is slowly coming around to the logic that it's not a good thing if the CIA Director has a pseudonymous Gmail account he uses to conduct an affair, it has yet to consider some other factors that may have forced David Petraeus to quit.

As a threshold matter, it appears that both Petraeus and Paula Broadwell did things that have gotten others—people like Thomas Drake—prosecuted and stripped of their security clearance. Obama can't continue his war on leakers if he goes easy on Petraeus after compromising his own email account. In addition, it appears that as the FBI closed in on Petraeus, he and Broadwell may have pushed back by revealing (or claiming) CIA had prisoners in Benghazi. That is, in some way Petraeus and Broadwell's response to the investigation appears to have colored how they treated the Benghazi pushback going on at precisely the same time.

Here's a decent timeline of Petraeus' demise (though many of these details—from the start date of the affair, the investigation, and Petraeus' FBI interview have been reported using different dates, suggesting different anonymous stories may be offering different timelines). I'd like to concentrate on the following, which include a few additions.

[Week of, possibly day of] October 21
[alternately reported as September]: Paula Broadwell first interviewed by FBI. She agrees to turn over her computer, which will lead to the FBI finding classified information on it.

October 24 (written the day before): Petraeus applauds the guilty plea of John Kiriakou, who passed the identity of torturers to lawyers representing Gitmo detainees who have been tortured. Those lawyers have clearance, and they did not publicly reveal the most sensitive name. In his second-to-last statement as CIA Director,

he writes,

This case yielded the first IIPA successful prosecution in 27 years, and it marks an important victory for our Agency, for our Intelligence Community, and for our country. Oaths do matter, and there are indeed consequences for those who believe they are above the laws that protect our fellow officers and enable American intelligence agencies to operate with the requisite degree of secrecy.

October 24: Benghazi suspect killed in Cairo.

October 26: Fox reports that CIA security in annex were twice told to stand down by "CIA chain of command."

October 26: At an appearance at DU, Paula Broadwell says,

Now, I don't know if a lot of you heard this, but the CIA annex had actually, um, had taken a couple of Libyan militia members prisoner and they think that the attack on the consulate was an effort to try to get these prisoners back. So that's still being vetted.

The challenging thing for General Petraeus is that in his new position, he's not allowed to communicate with the press. So he's known all of this – they had correspondence with the CIA station chief in, in Libya. Within 24 hours they kind of knew what was happening.

Update: See this post, which makes it clear Fox had the detail about prisoners but then took it out.

October 27: Petraeus and Broadwell hobnobbing at black tie event.

October 29: FBI interviews Petraeus.

October 31: Acting after speaking to FBI “whistleblower,” Eric Cantor’s Chief of Staff calls Robert Mueller about investigation.

October 31- November 1: Petraeus in Cairo for security discussions.

November 2 [based on a briefing held November 1 while Petraeus was still in Cairo]: CIA releases timeline rebutting Fox report—mentioned by Broadwell—that CIA chain of command told security to stand down.

November 2: FBI interviews Broadwell a second time.

November 2: Scott Shane writes odd article on demise of Petraeus’ image, blaming his absence from media for Benghazi blowback, in part repeating a point made by Broadwell on October 26. It includes the following:

But since an attack killed four Americans seven weeks ago in Benghazi, Libya, his deliberately low profile, and the C.I.A.’s penchant for secrecy, have left a void that has been filled by a news media and Congressional furor over whether it could have been prevented. Rather than acknowledge the C.I.A.’s presence in Benghazi, Mr. Petraeus and other agency officials fought a losing battle to keep it secret, even as the events there became a point of contention in the presidential campaign.

[snip]

But the Benghazi crisis has posed an extraordinary test for Mr. Petraeus. After the killings, **intelligence officials concerned about exposing the extent and methods of the large C.I.A. presence in the city would say little to reporters for publication.**

[snip]

On Thursday, hoping to subdue the gathering public relations storm,

intelligence officials invited reporters to a background briefing to, in their view, set the record straight. They offered a timeline of C.I.A. actions on the night of the attack, countering the idea that the besieged Americans were left alone under fire, and explaining why some would-be rescue efforts discussed in news reports were never feasible.

Notably, they also sought to rehabilitate Mr. Petraeus from some of the negative speculation that has surrounded him. The C.I.A. director, said one intelligence official, “has been fully engaged from the start of the agency’s response, particularly in the rescue mission that was swift and aggressive.”

The article also included a paragraph that sounded like a bid to spin issues that have gone haywire in good light.

Mr. Petraeus has managed the delicate task of supporting rebels in Syria’s civil war while trying to prevent the arming of anti-American extremists. But when his C-17 Globemaster touched down in Turkey in September for consultations on Syria, the trip went all but unnoticed by the news media. He worked for months to address the complaints of Pakistani officials about drone strikes against militants, while keeping State Department officials abreast of likely future strikes, a policy called “pre-concurrence” that has prevented interagency squabbles. In his travels to the tumultuous post-Arab Spring Middle East this week, only a brief mention of his arrival in Cairo surfaced in local news reports.

November 5: Based on second interview with

Broadwell, FBI “tentatively” rules out charges.

November 5: Broadwell publishes General David Petraeus Rules for Living, including these.

4. There is an exception to every rule, standard operating procedure, and policy; it is up to leaders to determine when exceptions should be made and to explain why they made them.
5. We all will make mistakes. The key is to recognize them and admit them, to learn from them, and to take off the rear view mirrors—drive on and avoid making them again.
6. Be humble. The people you’ll be leading already have on-the-ground conflict experience. “Listen and learn.”
7. Be a team player. “Your team’s triumphs and failures will, obviously, be yours.” Take ownership of both.

November 6: Having reportedly determined the facts of the case, FBI informs James Clapper of the investigation. Clapper talks to Petraeus, urges him to resign. (Note that public integrity investigations allow for the resignation of a public figure in lieu of charges.)

November 7: Clapper again urges Petraeus to resign. Clapper informs Obama.

November 8: Petraeus meets with Obama, reportedly asks to be allowed to resign.

November 9: Obama accepts Petraeus’ resignation.

Update: This post has been updated to reflect dates reported in this story.