

SHORTER ROGER AILES: I'M NOT A KINGMAKER, I'M A CHAIRMAN-MAKER

Presumably as part of David Petraeus' effort to rehabilitate his image, Bob Woodward obtained a tape of a discussion in which Fox News' "Analyst" Kathleen McFarland passes on Roger Ailes' April 2011 advice to Petraeus: if Obama doesn't name him Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Ailes instructed, he should quit and run for President.

When you listen to the tape, it seems clear Petraeus is getting the promises Ailes and Rupert Murdoch previously made to him on a tape he presumably knew was running. Note the way he leads the discussion in this passage.

Petraeus: He is. Tell him if I ever ran *[laughs]* but I won't . . .

Q: Okay, I know. I know.

Petraeus: But if I ever ran, I'd take him up on his offer.

Q: Okay. All right.

Petraeus: He said he would quit Fox.

Q: I know. Look, he's not the only one.

Petraeus: And bankroll it.

Q: Bankroll it? *[Laughs]*

Petraeus: Or maybe I'm confusing that with Rupert. No. *[Laughter]*

Q: I know Roger, he's done okay, but . . . no, I think the one who's bankrolling it is the big boss.

Petraeus: That might be it.

Q: Okay. The big boss is bankrolling it. Roger's going to run it. And the rest of us are going to be your in-house.

Mind you, I'm not sure what Petraeus thought he was accomplishing by getting this on tape. It is not news, after all, that Republican hacks like Ailes wanted Petraeus to run. Nor is it news that Fox is a partisan organization that would drop everything to back the right candidate. And a tape record that Murdoch promised to bankroll the unsullied Petraeus for President does not legally bind Murdoch to do the same for a now-shamed former General.

So while the tape and transcript are fun on a lot of levels, all they really does is confirm what we've long known about Ailes, Murdoch, and the publicity hound Petraeus.

Moreover, I'm far more troubled by the way McFarland discussed what she called gossip she has picked up from some former chiefs, purportedly repeating the White House's fears, about Petraeus.

Q: Okay. But they think if you're chairman, they can't overrule you. They can't go against whatever your advice is going to be, militarily. Plus, they have a Colin Powell problem. Where Colin Powell, very successful chairman, is everybody's sort of rallying point to run for an office where there's nobody that they think is – that the group can . . .

Petraeus: But of course he didn't run.

Q: But he could have.

Petraeus: And he wouldn't have. No.

Q: He could have. Politically, he could have. So they look at you and they think, how can we keep him quiet? We don't want him out on the loose to potentially run in '12, and we sure don't want him in '16. We'll put him at the CIA, where he can speak publicly twice a year before an open session of Congress. No backgrounders to the press, no Sunday talk shows, no speeches, no

nothing. Now, I'm throwing that out as gossip.

Mind you, McFarland attributes these beliefs to the White House via presumably retired officers, not Ailes. But it comes just after she has delivered Ailes' instructions: take JCS or run for President.

Q: That's not the question at this point. He says that if you're offered chairman, take it. If you're offered anything else, don't take it, resign in six months and run for president. Okay?

So in addition to a purported media outlet (albeit one that solicited advice on its coverage) recruiting Petraeus to run for President, said media outlet first said that if Petraeus could get into a position where the White House "can't overrule" him, he should stay in government.

Just minutes after relaying advice that he should stay if he were JCS Chair, McFarland stated that the value of having him at Chair is that the Commander-in-Chief could not overrule him.

For Fox, it seems, having their guy in charge is more important than maintaining civilian rule over the military.

When Woodward contacted Ailes about the conversation, Ailes downplayed McFarland's actions, her position at Fox, and his own role.

In a telephone interview Monday, the wily and sharp-tongued Ailes said he did indeed ask McFarland to make the pitch to Petraeus. "It was more of a joke, a wiseass way I have," he said. "I thought the Republican field [in the primaries] needed to be shaken up and Petraeus might be a good candidate."

Ailes added, "It sounds like she thought she was on a secret mission in the

Reagan administration. . . . She was way out of line. . . . It's someone's fantasy to make me a kingmaker. It's not my job." He said that McFarland was not an employee of Fox but a contributor paid less than \$75,000 a year.

He wasn't a kingmaker, Ailes said. Though it seems he was happy to play Chairman-Maker.