

IS DICK FINALLY GOING TO GO AFTER OBL?

The NYT has a disturbing story this morning, explaining that, with the US policy in tatters after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, they're considering ratcheting up the pressure by allowing the CIA to partner with the Special Forces on operations in Pakistan.

President Bush's senior national security advisers are debating whether to expand the authority of the Central Intelligence Agency and the military to conduct far more aggressive covert operations in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

The debate is a response to intelligence reports that Al Qaeda and the Taliban are intensifying efforts there to destabilize the Pakistani government, several senior administration officials said.

[snip]

Several of the participants in the meeting argued that the threat to the government of President Pervez Musharraf was now so grave that both Mr. Musharraf and Pakistan's new military leadership were likely to give the United States more latitude, officials said. But no decisions were made, said the officials, who declined to speak for attribution because of the highly delicate nature of the discussions.

Many of the specific options under discussion are unclear and highly classified. Officials said that the options would probably involve the C.I.A. working with the military's Special Operations forces.

Two pseudonymous counter-insurgency analysts cross-posting at Danger Zone have a good response to this:

Now if this was going to be a low-key, under-the-radar affair like our work in the the Horn of Africa or the excellent program in Mindinao in the Southern Philippines, Charlie would be on board. But there are two conditions that support those operations that simply are not present in Pakistan.

- 1. A welcoming and cooperative government, whose armed forces take the lead in ground operations.*
- 2. Little in the way of media coverage or Pentagon/Foggy Bottom meddling.*

Unfortunately, there will be meddling a-plenty, and the 10,000 mile screwdriver will be in full effect in Pakistan, no matter how covert the program wants to be. There was a time where aggressive, kinetic counter-terrorism operations in Pakistan could have been effective. We've long since past it. Which is exactly why Musharraf might let us in now. We'll go ahead and add Pakistan's tribal areas and Northwest frontier to our ever-growing list of "too little, too late."

And another thing: what, exactly, would exactly the special forces *do* in Pakistan? The easiest (and only by comparison) might be snatch-and-grab operations. But they're also the least strategically significant; they don't change the endgame of a growing Jihadi

movement directed against the Pakistani government (and one divorced from the older Islamist establishment). At worst, a never ending game of a whack-a-mole feeds jihadi recruitment and further undermines Musharraf. Does the Bush administration want to try and own the tribal areas? You and whose army? No literally, which army? It's not gonna be ours. And the Pakistani one is alternately busy focusing on India and getting kidnapped by the very Taliban they're supposed to be fighting.

[snip]

So, what gives? Anyone seen a mission statement around here?

I'd add one more big caution to this (on top of the obvious one that everyone on earth would be better off if the incompetents running this government didn't try to add to their failures with another clever non-plan). According to reports, the US repeatedly advised Benazir Bhutto not to employ US security forces, for fear that it would only inflame extremists. Now admittedly, I wouldn't advise putting more Blackwater thugs into any politically inflamed area, but you're telling me Bhutto couldn't have competent security but now it's a good idea to throw more kerosene on the fire of the tribal areas by putting our Special Forces in?

All that said, I wonder. Pakistan is only the latest of this Administration's great clusterfucks, in which we've turned a nuclear-armed ally into an increasingly effective shelter for the guys who hit us on 9/11. They're really at the point where they risk being seen as the worst possible failures in history, particularly in foreign policy, unless they have a really dramatic success.

So I wonder—are they finally deciding they ought to finish the unfinished business from 9/11? If

Osama bin Laden really is, as reported, in Pakistan's tribal areas, is this just a bid to get the guy Bush promised he'd get "Dead or Alive"?