

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE AND SECRET SERVICE OFFICERS AS INSPECTORS GENERAL

I'm reading Paul Alexander's book, Machiavelli's Shadow, in anticipation of Sunday's Book Salon on it.

One of the little-mentioned details he reports in his book is that Bush loaded up the Inspectors General positions with former Secret Service Agents.

"The telltale sign of what the crowd was going to be like was the way Bush was appointing politicals early on.[" said Gordon Hamel, a career bureaucrat. "]He was putting tons of unqualified politicals into positions. One of the things I noticed the most was the inspectors genera. He was filling all of the IG positions with former Secret Service agents. It had nothing to do with their skills. A Secret Service agent does two things: Protect the president and chase counterfeiter. Unless you were a manager, you were one of the geeks standing at the door talking into your sleeve. So how are you qualified to go from that into an executive position that requires manager and policy-making skills? But these Secret Service agents were the ones who had guarded Daddy Bush and Bush and Rove knew it. The agents were loyal Bushies."

Alexander goes on to suggest that Bush did this to limit the reporting of waste, fraud, and abuse from within his own government. And Alexander elaborates on Hamel's story of being intimidated by one of these inspectors general.

Which is all I could think of when I read that

Bush's nominee to replace Cookie Krongard as the State Department's IG is a counter-intelligence officer.

President Bush has nominated Thomas Betro, director of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, to be State Department inspector general, a position roiled by controversy and turnover over the last year.

If confirmed, Betro would fill the slot of Howard Krongard, who resigned under fire in December, and take over for acting State IG Harold Geisel.

Now, don't get me wrong. Unlike those secret service agents installed to be thugs, it appears that Betro has executive experience in the kind of task that IG's perform. He seems qualified for the position.

Still, at a time when the State Department's primary IG complaint is reeling in Blackwater, and a soon-to-be secondary complaint may be the assistance, on the part of the Ambassador to Albania, of weapons fraud, not to mention the always-dominant complaints about the Iraqi Embassy and its related intelligence fun, I find it notable that Bush chose a counter-intelligence officer to take over as State's IG.