

WE HAVE MET THE WMD TERRORISTS, AND THEY ARE US

Well, here comes a new entry in the Captain Renault "I am shocked, *shocked* to hear of this" file. It turns out that Jose Rodriquez and the CIA are not the only ones that Cheney and Bush have ordered to destroy critical material evidence the subject of investigations into international terror cases. Nope; of course not. They have put their grubby little thumbs to the screws on the Swiss as well. From the startling new reporting in today's New York Times:

The president of Switzerland stepped to a podium in Bern last May and read a statement confirming rumors that had swirled through the capital for months. The government, he acknowledged, had indeed destroyed a huge trove of computer files and other material documenting the business dealings of a family of Swiss engineers suspected of helping smuggle nuclear technology to Libya and Iran.

The files were of particular interest not only to Swiss prosecutors but to international atomic inspectors working to unwind the activities of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani bomb pioneer-turned-nuclear black marketeer. The Swiss engineers, Friedrich Tinner and his two sons, were accused of having deep associations with Dr. Khan, acting as middlemen in his dealings with rogue nations seeking nuclear equipment and expertise.

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The United States had urged that the files be destroyed, according to interviews with five current and former Bush administration officials. The purpose, the officials said, was less to

thwart terrorists than to hide evidence of a clandestine relationship between the Tinnners and the C.I.A.

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Yet even as American officials describe the relationship as a major intelligence coup, compromises were made. Officials say the C.I.A. feared that a trial would not just reveal the Tinnners' relationship with the United States – and perhaps raise questions about American dealings with atomic smugglers – but would also imperil efforts to recruit new spies at a time of grave concern over Iran's nuclear program.

So the prosecution and trial of the Tinner group, and related avenues into the depths of the spiderweb of influence and dealings of AQ Khan is lost. Good thing that our good allies against terror, the Pakistanis, have their thumbs on AQ Khan and are getting to the bottom of how Khan's "rogue" network was able to operate. Eh, not so much. Now, we know that in the Bush Administration, all policy and interaction with Pakistan begins and ends with Dick Cheney. Kind of makes you wonder whether the Cheney Administration is behind the curious deal to let AQ Khan run free in life without even so much as having ever been debriefed as to what all he and his network had done to proliferate nuclear weapons and technology.

Go figure; the US and the long dark arm of Cheney looks to be leveraging the spring of AQ Khan too. From Gareth Porter via CommonDreams:

But the Bush administration chose to help Musharraf cover up that inconvenient fact. According to CIA Director George Tenet's memoirs, in September 2003, he confronted Musharraf with the evidence the CIA had gathered on Khan's operation and made it clear he was expected to end its operations and arrest Khan.

The following January and early February, Khan's house arrest, public confession of guilt and pardon by Musharraf was accompanied by an extraordinary series of statements by high-ranking Bush administration officials exonerating Musharraf and the military of any involvement in Khan's activities.

That whole scenario had been "carefully orchestrated with Musharraf", Larry Wilkerson, then a State Department official but later Colin Powell's chief of staff, told IPS in an interview last year. The deal that had been made did not require Musharraf to allow U.S. officials to interrogate Khan.

But the Bush administration apparently conveyed to the Pakistani military after that episode that it now expected the Musharraf regime to deliver high-ranking al Qaeda officials – and to do so at a particularly advantageous moment for the administration. The New Republic magazine reported Jul. 15, 2004 that a White House aide had told the visiting head of ISI, Ehsan ul-Haq, that "it would be best if the arrest or killing of any HVT [high value target] were announced on 26, 27 or 28 July." Those were the last three days of the Democratic National Convention.

The military source added, "If we don't find these guys by the election, they are going to stick the whole nuclear mess up our a**hole."

Just hours before Democratic candidate John Kerry's acceptance speech, Pakistan announced the capture of an alleged al Qaeda leader.

Wow. Yet another Captain Renault moment presents itself. Jeebus, is there any significant terror

plot or network in the world that we are not either some type of clandestine part of or, alternatively, haven't botched the prosecution of through torture, rendition and other immoral/illegal behavior? It is a rhetorical question. Donald Rumsfeld once famously mused about whether we even have the metrics to know whether we are preempting more than is being created when it comes to terrorism. I don't know what kind of metrics and optics Rummy views through, but it is damn hard to contemplate any set that would yield a positive answer.

The masterminds behind 9/11 and al Qaida, bin Laden and Zawahiri, run free, the purveyors of nukes to Iran, Libya, North Korea, possibly Syria and who knows what other states and/or entities, AQ Khan and the Tinnars, run free. You have to question whether the US, through the Cheney/Bush Administration, really wants to curtail these modalities of terror as opposed to merely reaping the giant whirlwind of profit from the constant chase. The Europeans have some questions too. Again, from the NYT article:

But in Europe, there is much consternation. Analysts studying Dr. Khan's network worry that by destroying the files to prevent their spread, the Swiss government may have obscured the investigative trail. It is unclear who among Dr. Khan's customers – a list that is known to include Iran, Libya and North Korea but that may extend further – got the illicit material, much of it contained in easily transmitted electronic designs.

The West's most important questions about the Khan network have been consistently deflected by President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, who resigned last Monday. He refused to account for the bomb designs that got away or to let American investigators question Dr. Khan, perhaps the only man to know who else received the atomic

blueprints. President Bush, eager for Pakistan's aid against terrorism, never pressed Mr. Musharraf for answers.

"Maybe that labyrinth held clues to another client or another rogue state," said a European official angered at the destruction.

The Swiss judge in charge of the Tinner case, Andreas Müller, is not terribly happy either. He said he had no warning of the planned destruction and is now trying to determine what, if anything, remains of the case against Friedrich Tinner and his sons, Urs and Marco.

Oh, wait, there is one more little part of this sordid story that is relevant to the denizens of this blog, and the expertise of the headmistress. So, what exactly were the Tinner clan doing in relation to the CIA? Well, one of the things involved the clandestine counterproliferation of nuclear weapons:

In 2000, American officials said, Urs Tinner was recruited by the C.I.A., and American officials were elated.

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After the Tinnings were arrested, Swiss and other European authorities began to scrutinize their confiscated files and to conduct wide inquiries. European investigators discovered not only that the Tinnings had spied for Washington, but that the men and their insider information had helped the C.I.A. sabotage atomic gear bound for Libya and Iran. A former American official confirmed the disruptions, saying the technical architect of the operation was "a mad-scientist type" who took pleasure in devising dirty tricks.

An American intelligence official, while refusing to discuss specifics of the sabotage operation or the Tinnings'

relationship with the C.I.A., said efforts to cripple equipment headed to rogue nuclear states "buy us some time and space." With Iran presumably racing for the capability to build a bomb, he added, "that may be the best we can hope for."

Well, that sounds suspiciously like "Operation Merlin" doesn't it? In case you don't recall Operation Merlin, Marcy wrote a wonderful piece about it and a fellow with a curious history known as Jerry Doe. The full background on Merlin is described in James Risen's book "State of War", excerpted at length here in the Guardian.

One last parting shot, because I know you are already honing in on this question. Yep, it sure is amazing, isn't it, that the Cheney/Bush Administration is willing to go to such extreme lengths to protect covert CIA assets that they will scuttle the Swiss, European and IAEA investigation of the biggest nuclear proliferation ring in the world, yet they blithely, and with no remorse whatsoever, out Valerie Plame and burn Brewster-Jennings and it's assets and contacts? Shocking. But true. I'll hazard a guess that Marcy will be stopping by to ante in on this story. Oh, and make sure you click the links and read both the NYT and CommonDreams pieces in full, they are worthy of a full read.