

CHENEY'S STAY BEHIND

By now, you've heard Sy Hersh's explanation for why he hasn't yet gotten the flood of revelations about the Bush Administration he had expected.

HERSH: I'll make it worse. I think he's put people left. He's put people back. They call it a stay behind. It's sort of an intelligence term of art. When you leave a country and, you know, you've driven out the, you know, you've lost the war. You leave people behind. It's a stay behind that you can continue to contacts with, to do sabotage, whatever you want to do. Cheney's left a stay behind. He's got people in a lot of agencies that still tell him what's going on. Particularly in defense, obviously. Also in the NSA, there's still people that talk to him. He still knows what's going on. Can he still control policy up to a point? Probably up to a point, a minor point. But he's still there. He's still a presence. [my emphasis]

This is not remotely surprising. We discussed the likelihood this was happening just days after Obama took over, as dead-enders tried to spike Obama's promise to withdraw from Iraq. And there has been a ton of reporting on the burrowing of loyal appointees that Cheney accomplished before leaving.

But Hersh's report that such stay behind includes NSA is of particular concern.

Not only does this raise concerns about the warrantless wiretap program and its use (particularly given reports that the NSA was segregating contacts with journalists, like Hersh, who has lots of contacts in the Middle East). But it raises concerns about whether or not Cheney sustains the practice—publicized

during the John Bolton confirmation hearings—of getting the US person end of NSA intercepts (I have no idea whether Cheney would do this through dead-enders, whether he's getting that much more directly, or whether he's getting help from Israelis involved in our wiretap programs). A number of people suspected that Bolton had used NSA intercepts to undermine North Korean diplomacy (among other things). Such a practice obviously fits Cheney's MO.

Yet more reason we need to reassess our use of electronic wiretapping within the US.