

IT'S GREG CRAIG'S FAULT THAT DAWN JOHNSEN HASN'T BEEN CONFIRMED

Marc Ambinder has one of the most thorough discussions of Greg Craig's ouster I've seen so far. It claims (Eric Holder's public statements notwithstanding) that Craig wasn't ousted for his "idealism" on national security...

The notion that the President was dissatisfied with Craig's handling of the Guantanamo Bay closure has reached the level of an accepted urban myth, even though it is not true. This may be Craig's legacy – and it may serve him well with his allies on the ideological left who are eager to portray his departure as evidence that Obama rejects a new national security paradigm.

Rather, he was ousted because his focus on such issues distracted him from things like Senate confirmations.

The White House was also dissatisfied with Craig's handling of political appointments, believing that Craig should have spent more time working with the Justice Department and with Congress to force through some of the President's most eagerly-awaited principals, like Dawn Johnsen, whose nomination to be head of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel still languishes. The issue of nominations is especially sensitive for the president, a constitutional law lecturer in his former life. [my emphasis]

As a threshold matter, let me agree that Bob Bauer will be much more successful at ramming

through nominations, which if we're going to reclaim the judicial system from the mess that the Federalist Society and Alberto Gonzales' DOJ made of it, is critically important. Bauer's a fierce partisan unafraid to call out Republicans on their partisan grand-standing. I look forward to his role in nominations.

That said, Ambinder does give evidence of such a split.

It is true that Mr. Craig and Mr. Emanuel did not always see eye to eye. It was Craig's importuning that may have convinced the president to release Bush-era Justice Department memorandum that sanctioned torture.

"This is what you were elected to do," Craig told the president in one Oval Office meeting.

Emanuel worried about the political repercussions of a first-term young Democratic president who would appear to be thumbing the eyes of the national security establishment. Craig won the round.

Which, at the very least, ought to make you ask: even accepting the premise that this was all about Craig's management problems, why was it handled in this way? Why was it clear to everyone outside the White House—at the time when, Ambinder claims, "the president's staff appeared to be ready to give Craig a second chance"—that there was this animosity between Rahm and Craig? Why was that animosity always framed in terms of Gitmo and torture? If "the president's staff appeared ready to give Craig a second chance," why did leaks that looked remarkably like leaks from the President's Chief of Staff continue unabated? Why did that leaker turn this into a public issue, rather than just handling it quietly?

If the White House is ousting people for bad management, and the Chief of Staff spent the

last three or four months leaking about Craig's imminent departure rather than implementing that imminent departure, then why isn't Obama also ousting the Chief of Staff, who turned the White House into a petty sniping war instead of managing it like an adult?

Rahm may want to blame Greg Craig that Dawn Johnsen hasn't been confirmed (a nice sop to the liberals suspicious that Craig's ouster was over torture). But in doing so, he is making it clear he's to blame for turning the Craig ouster into a fiasco.