

CRACKERS AND CASTOR BEANS: FBI BUSTS WANNABE RICIN WMD “TERRORISTS” IN GEORGIA

Almost as if in response to Marcy’s noting less than two weeks ago that at least in Detroit the FBI overlooks white terrorists when profiling, the FBI yesterday announced the arrests of four individuals in Georgia accused of planning attacks using explosives, a silencer and the biological agent ricin:

Frederick Thomas, 73, of Cleveland, Ga.; Dan Roberts, 67, of Toccoa, Ga.; Ray H. Adams, 65, of Toccoa; and Samuel J. Crump, 68, of Toccoa, were arrested today relating to plans to obtain an unregistered explosive device and silencer and to manufacture the biological toxin ricin for use in attacks against other U.S. citizens and government personnel and officials.

The “attack” planned with ricin is laughable on its face:

The complaints charge that during the investigation of Thomas and Roberts, Roberts described another individual named “Sammy” who, according to Roberts, had manufactured the biological toxin, ricin, and had access to the beans used to make ricin. During one of the group’s meetings in September, which was recorded by the confidential source, Crump arrived and said that he would like to make 10 pounds of ricin and disperse it in various United States cities, including Atlanta. Crump described a scenario for dispersing the ricin in Atlanta in which the toxin

would be blown from a car traveling on the interstates. Crump allegedly also said that he possessed the ingredient used to make the toxin and cautioned the source about the dangers of handling it.

Ricin is indeed highly toxic and can be deadly in very small amounts. However, the prospect of delivering a lethal dose of the toxin to anyone by releasing it while driving along an interstate seems extremely unlikely to be effective. As described in the CDC document, ricin powder, which was the planned form to be used, is not particularly toxic on contact with skin and does not transport readily across skin despite many references to keeping it off skin in the conversations reported in an affidavit from the case posted by MSNBC (pdf). Instead, ricin has to be eaten or inhaled to be toxic:

- *Inhalation: Within a few hours of inhaling significant amounts of ricin, the likely symptoms would be respiratory distress (difficulty breathing), fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. Heavy sweating may follow as well as fluid building up in the lungs (pulmonary edema). This would make breathing even more difficult, and the skin might turn blue. Excess fluid in the lungs would be diagnosed by x-ray or by listening*

to the chest with a stethoscope. Finally, low blood pressure and respiratory failure may occur, leading to death. In cases of known exposure to ricin, people having respiratory symptoms that started within 12 hours of inhaling ricin should seek medical care.

- *Ingestion: If someone swallows a significant amount of ricin, he or she would develop vomiting and diarrhea that may become bloody. Severe dehydration may be the result, followed by low blood pressure. Other signs or symptoms may include hallucinations, seizures, and blood in the urine. Within several days, the person's liver, spleen, and kidneys might stop working, and the person could die.*
- *Skin and eye exposure: Ricin is unlikely to be absorbed through normal skin. Contact with ricin powders or*

products may cause redness and pain of the skin and the eyes.

And how would a real terrorist go about using ricin as a WMD? Well, al Qaeda knows:

Intelligence officials say they have collected evidence that Qaeda operatives are trying to move castor beans and processing agents to a hideaway in Shabwa Province, in one of Yemen's rugged tribal areas controlled by insurgents. The officials say the evidence points to efforts to secretly concoct batches of the poison, pack them around small explosives, and then try to explode them in contained spaces, like a shopping mall, an airport or a subway station.

To carry out a significant attack with ricin, it would be necessary to suspend the ricin in air (hence the explosives) in an enclosed area where people are likely to inhale the powder.

Dispersing it instead along an interstate highway where people are driving up to 80 mph is almost the opposite of the scenario planned by al Qaeda, and yet the FBI devotes significant space to the freeway part of the plan in the affidavit.

Following the pattern seen in recent FBI busts of "terrorists", this group also was infiltrated by a "confidential human source", referred to as CHS1 in the affidavit. Remarkably, even the first meeting discussed in this affidavit was recorded. A bit of nomenclature stood out to me in the discussion of the recording; the affidavit described the meeting as "consensually recorded". After a bit of digging, I found an IRS description of terms where I learned that this means that the meeting was recorded with the "consent of at least one, but not all, of the participants". This means, of course, that

CHS1 “consented” to the recording, but the other participants in the meeting almost certainly did not.

As usual, CHS1 is an informant facing other charges from the government. From the affidavit:

CHS1 is currently on bond for pending felony state charges. The FBI administered a polygraph test to CHS1 during the investigation of a militia group. The FBI polygrapher determined that CHS1 gave less than truthful responses concerning the activities of the militia group.

It’s good that these clowns are off the streets, as it does sound like they had intentions of doing as much harm as they could. However, from what I can see so far in the one affidavit I have read, they hadn’t gotten much farther than showing off a few castor beans after a meeting at the local Waffle House. Oh, and the FBI breathlessly tells us that a castor bean obtained from the plotters “tested positive for ricin”. Sheesh, I would hope so, since castor beans are the source of ricin. And yes, they even carried out a DNA test to prove the bean was a castor bean.

It will be very informative to read the rest of the documents in this case as they become available in order to determine the extent to which these guys intended violence on their own or if they were pushed in that direction by infiltration.

AFGHANISTAN EXIT

STRATEGY: “FIGHT, TALK, BUILD” WORKING (FOR FIGHT, ANYWAY)

As the US stumbles around, trying to find its way out of a country it has occupied for over ten years, the path “forward” remains as murky as ever. Just under two weeks ago, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was chosen as the point person for introducing the new US catchphrase “fight, talk, build” that is meant to describe US strategy in the region. As I noted at the time, the US seemed to completely miss the irony of using the country’s chief diplomat to introduce a new strategy that is based on the concept of shoot first and ask questions later.

We learn in this morning’s Washington Post that the US strategy of attacking the Haqqani network on both sides of the Pakistan border before starting serious efforts to hold talks with them has only increased the frequency of attacks from them. As the remarkable passage from the Post below illustrates, the US had to endure no fewer than five large, high profile attacks from the Haqqani network before considering the possibility that the attacks could be a return of “fight” for “fight” and an attempt to improve the Haqqani position for later negotiations rather than the laughable early suggestion from the US that by resorting to more spectacular attacks, the Haqqanis were demonstrating that they had been weakened significantly:

This official and others acknowledged that the success of the strategy, which Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has described as “fight, talk and build,” depends on a positive outcome for several variables that currently appear headed in the wrong direction.

On Saturday, insurgents staged a suicide bomb attack in Kabul that killed at

least 12 Americans, a Canadian and four Afghans. A similar truck bomb attack Monday left three United Nations employees dead in the southern city of Kandahar.

The attacks were the latest in a series of spectacular insurgent strikes that have made reconciliation seem remote. In September, the Pentagon blamed the Haqqani network for a truck bombing of a combat outpost west of Kabul that wounded 77 U.S. troops and for an assault by gunmen on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

A week after the embassy strike, a suicide bomber killed Burhanuddin Rabbani, the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, which is in charge of reconciliation negotiations for the government.

U.S. officials have said they were unsure whether the attacks were a reflection of insurgent military weakness, a rejection of talks or a burst of aggression designed to improve the militants' negotiating position – similar to the escalation of U.S. attacks on the Haqqani network.

That bit at the beginning should not be overlooked: the success of the “fight, talk, build” strategy “depends on a positive outcome for several variables that currently appear headed in the wrong direction.” Mechanisms for reversing the current direction of these variables are not presented in the article.

Meanwhile, the first in a series of “conferences” has gotten underway in Turkey, with Afghan President Hamid Karzai meeting directly with Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari. Parallel meetings between the two countries' top military officers are also taking place. Clinton had been scheduled to join the

conference tomorrow, but her trip was canceled yesterday, apparently because of her mother's ill health (Update: there are reports on Twitter that Dorothy Rodham has died). It looks as though the US feels talking can wait, as no replacement for Clinton at the conference has been announced.

While the Obama administration begins to think about preparing to maybe get the Pentagon perhaps to agree to withdraw a few more troops out of Afghanistan, we see the terrain being softened a bit more for the eventual realization that all of the US efforts and investments in "training" Afghan forces are destined for failure. It appears from this article that David Petraeus, who is touted in the press as responsible for training when it is described as being successful, will escape blame for the failure in Afghanistan because William Caldwell is described in the article as having "overseen all NATO training in Afghanistan for the past two years". In true Petraeus fashion, the slate for the previous eight years is not just wiped clean, but ceases to exist. Petraeus' name does not appear in the article.

There is one truly refreshing bit of honesty that breaks through into the Reuters piece on training of Afghan troops:

But senior U.S. military officials admit that money has not always been spent in the wisest ways.

"We have received an awful lot of money from the U.S. government. We need to use it differently now," said U.S. Army Major General Peter Fuller, deputy commander for programs and resources within the NATO training mission.

Another U.S. official in Kabul, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the mission was buying up high-tech equipment to satisfy Washington, while more basic needs were ignored.

Yup. “Training” Afghan forces turns out to be nothing more than an exercise in further lining the pockets of military contractors and the lawmakers who benefit from their lobbying. With that driving force in mind, efforts to achieve a true exit from Afghanistan will face fierce resistance in Washington.

JSOC DENIAL OF IGNORING TORTURE IN AFGHAN PRISONS NOT CREDIBLE-THEY TRAINED AFGHAN MILITARY POLICE

Yesterday, the Washington Post finally caught up to where Marcy was over two weeks ago and discussed the UN report “Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan Custody” (pdf). I’d like to move beyond the primary findings of the report, that torture is widespread in Afghan detention facilities and that the US continued bringing prisoners to these facilities long after other nations discontinued the practice due to concerns over reports of torture, and to examine US denials of knowledge regarding the torture.

First, to set the stage from the Post article:

Department 124 was long sealed off from the outside world; the ICRC, the United Nations and other organizations concerned with human rights were barred by Afghan officials from monitoring conditions there.

But American officials frequently went inside, according to Afghan officials

and others familiar with the site. U.S. Special Operations troops brought detainees there, and CIA officials met with Department 124's leadership on a weekly basis, reviewed their interrogation reports and used the intelligence gleaned from interrogations to inform their operations, the officials said.

And now the denial I'm most interested in:

One U.S. official in Kabul said the CIA officers and Special Operations troops would not have ignored torture. "Not in the post-Abu Ghraib era," the official said. "All American entities out there are hyper-aware of these allegations and would report them up the chain."

We will dismiss the CIA denial out of hand: documentation of CIA torture practices and the CIA's attempts to have DOJ provide legal cover for them now fills many books. However, JSOC involvement in torture is less well-documented despite the fact that JSOC torture played a central, but under-reported, role in David Petraeus' COIN strategy as implemented in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Petraeus' primary operative in implementing the torture strategy in both countries was Stanley McChrystal.

First, note that the worst Afghan torture facility, Department 124, "was sealed off from the outside world" to the point that the ICRC was denied access. Gosh, that sounds familiar:

In 2006, Human Rights Watch released a major report based on dozens of interviews with soldiers who had witnessed the interrogation of prisoners in Iraq. "No Blood, No Foul" revealed that the elite forces conducting the interrogations at Camp Nama and two other locations, known (among other names) as Task Force 121, committed

systematic abuse of prisoners at other facilities across Iraq, leading to at least three deaths. Whether or not he was present during the actual abuse – and it seems unlikely that he would need or want to put himself in that exposed position – as commander of JSOC, Stanley McChrystal oversaw them.

Let's look a little more at the operations of Task Force 121:

The only thing Jeff knew about Camp Nama was that he'd be able to wear civilian clothes and interrogate "high value" prisoners. In order to get to the second step, he had to go through hours of psychological tests to ensure his fitness for the job.

Nama, it is said, stood for Nasty Ass Military Area. Jeff says there was a maverick, high-speed feeling to the place. Some of the interrogators had beards and long hair and everyone used only first names, even the officers. "When you ask somebody their name, they don't offer up the last name," Jeff says. "When they gave you their name it probably wasn't their real name anyway."

/snip/

It was a point of pride that the Red Cross would never be allowed in the door, Jeff says. This is important because it defied the Geneva Conventions, which require that the Red Cross have access to military prisons. "Once, somebody brought it up with the colonel. 'Will they ever be allowed in here?' And he said absolutely not. He had this directly from General McChrystal and the Pentagon that there's no way that the Red Cross could get in – they won't have access and they never will. This facility was completely

closed off to anybody investigating, even Army investigators.”

So, is it just a coincidence that the site at which the Afghans carried out their worst abuses was closed off to the outside world, and especially closed off to the Red Cross, just as JSOC closed off Camp Nama? No, it's not coincidence at all, because the Afghan military police were trained in detention operations by the same folks in JSOC who operated Camp Nama.

Look back at the photo at the top of this post.

That's Robert Harward on the left after having just awarded a spiffy ink-jet-printed certificate to Brig. Gen. Saffiullah, Afghan National Army Military Police Brigade commander.

This ceremony took place in April, 2010, in preparation for the US handing over responsibility for the shiny new detention center at Parwan that the US built to divert attention from facilities like its own secret facility at Bagram Air Base. From all appearances in the spotty reports available to us, Department 124 for the Afghans would appear to be their equivalent of the secret US site at Bagram.

Just before this certificate ceremony took place, I wrote about a particularly insidious bit of media manipulation by the US. AFP had reported (the link in my post no longer works):

As the NATO commander, the only forces not under McChrystal's control will be a special US task force that handles detainees, the small number of special operations forces and some support troops from other nations, the official said.

I doubted this statement from the moment I saw it. I knew that McChrystal's involvement in detention was central to Petraeus' (who was then head of US Central Command) plans for "calming" Afghanistan in the same way he had

“calmed” Iraq by imprisoning thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians and instituting a program of torture. After a bit of digging, I was able to get clarification from a Central Command spokesman:

The AFP story is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete in its explanation of Gen. McChrystal’s authorities. The story says that “as the NATO commander,” the detainee operations task force is not under his control. While that’s accurate, it does not explain Gen. McChrystal’s dual-hatted role as Commander, ISAF, and Commander of US Forces in Afghanistan (COMUSFOR-A). The latter includes forces serving under the Operation Enduring Freedom mission, which is separate from the NATO/ISAF mission.

It appears that Central Command was willing to allow a deceptive portrayal of McChrystal’s role in detention operations to sit without clarification until I pressed them further.

This is not surprising, since the Esquire and other reports on McChrystal’s involvement with torture in Iraq were already published and there was a push to put public-relations friendly patina on US efforts in Afghanistan.

Here is how I described the certificate ceremony:

So it appears that the shell game has progressed to one prison already being handed over to Afghan control. With Saffiullah now in possession of his full color Military Police Training Certificate, he and his brigade are nearly ready to take over control of another prison. Somehow, I doubt that these changes will result in any improvements in the process for Afghan citizens who have been detained to obtain a hearing on whether they were properly arrested.

Sadly, my biggest concern at the time was over the possibility that large numbers of innocent civilians would be held in the Afghan-run prisons without a chance for a hearing on whether they were properly detained. Now we know that torture should have been an even bigger concern.

Given the documented history of JSOC personnel training Afghan detention personnel and the strong parallels in the worst abuses taking place at JSOC and Afghan facilities, the JSOC denial that they were aware of torture at Department 124 lacks all credibility. Not only would JSOC be aware of these practices, they likely were responsible for putting them in place.

THE “GOOD FAITH” DODGE: MOVING FROM TORTURE TO BUSINESS?

One short phrase in an article [braz](#) alerted me to yesterday set my blood to boiling. I fumed about it off and on through the rest of the day and even found myself going back to thinking about it when I should have been drifting off to sleep.

The phrase? “Good faith”

Here’s the phrase in the context of the article:

The U.S. Justice Department’s stepped up enforcement in the pharmaceutical industry has struck “the fear of God” in executives, a top lawyer at GlaxoSmithKline said today, addressing whether prosecutors have gone too far in building cases rooted in business conduct.

/snip/

The panel's moderator, Jonathan Rosen, a white-collar defense partner in the Washington office of Shook, Hardy & Bacon, described what he called a "highly aggressive" enforcement environment.

Rosen posed questions to the panel members to explore the extent to which the government is criminalizing good-faith business decisions.

So, why would the longer phrase "criminalizing good-faith business decisions" set me off so? When I read that phrase, my mind flashed back to April, 2009 and the release of the torture memos. Here is Eric Holder, as quoted by ABC News:

"Those intelligence community officials who acted reasonably and in good faith and in reliance on Department of Justice opinions are not going to be prosecuted," he told members of a House Appropriations Subcommittee, reaffirming the White House sentiment. "It would not be fair, in my view, to bring such prosecutions."

But Holder left open the door to some legal action, saying that though he "will not permit the criminalization of policy differences," he is responsible as attorney general to enforce the law.

Uh-oh. Now it's even worse. See the additional parallel? Holder decried the "criminalization of policy differences" at the same time he said he wouldn't prosecute those who acted in "good faith" on the torture memos. The "good faith" in the business article above was smack in the middle of "criminalizing" "business decisions".

Holder didn't just pull "good faith" and "criminalizing policy differences" out of thin

air. Bush administration officials, led primarily by Dick Cheney, had been trumpeting that defense since before the end of the George W. Bush administration. In fact, John Perr, at Crooks and Liars, traces the “criminalizing policy differences” defense back to George H.W. Bush when he announced the Iran-Contra pardons.

It was one thing for Eric Holder and Barack Obama to cave on the question of prosecutions for the torturers, but to adopt the convoluted language and reasoning of the Republicans in doing so makes it even worse. Especially in the case of torture, “good faith” and “criminalizing policy differences” are total garbage. Holder agreed, in testimony before Congress both during his confirmation and later as the torture memos were being released, that waterboarding is torture. The UN Convention Against Torture, which has been approved as a treaty by Congress and has the force of law, states categorically:

No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat or war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.

Furthermore:

An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture.

So, the fact that the Bush administration chose to implement a policy of torture means that they chose a criminal policy. Prosecuting those guilty of torture and ordering torture is not criminalizing the policy, it is prosecuting the crime. In adopting the twisted language and logic of the Republicans on this issue, Holder and Obama demonstrated the same depraved moral weakness that allowed torture to become official US policy in the first place.

What will be the consequence of this depraved morality and logic moving to the defense of

crimes committed by businesses? The Occupy Wall Street movement that is sweeping the country now is doing a fantastic job of pointing out the collateral damage of “business decisions” run amok. The continued upward transfer of wealth in our country has moved into outright criminal activity as the greed at the top has grown beyond legal and moral grounds. Especially in the housing crisis, multiple crimes have been committed as mortgages were pushed onto consumers who had no chance of repaying them and then the mortgages were bundled and sold multiple times into speculative investment vehicles that in the end nearly brought the entire world economy down.

And yet, we now see testing of the admonishment not to “criminalize good faith business decisions”. No. Just no. The current economic crisis that has seen millions of Americans reduced from a healthy middle class existence to mere subsistence came about because there is only one component to “business decisions” and that component is to maximize profit no matter what. Profit is to be maximized, regulations are to be ignored and the law is for sissies has become the operating mantra of Wall Street.

Inadvertently, Barack Obama himself has admitted that there was no “good faith” in the mortgage securities heist. Here is David Dayen describing an exchange in an Obama press conference on October 6:

For perhaps the first time, President Barack Obama was forced to explain why there have been no prosecutions of Wall Street executives for their fraudulent actions during the run-up to the financial crisis. Asked by Jake Tapper to explain this behavior, Obama basically suggested that most of the actions on Wall Street weren't illegal but just immoral, and that his Administration worked to re-regulate the financial sector with the Dodd-Frank reform legislation.

"Banks are in the business of making money, and they find loopholes," the President said. Apparently forging and fabricating documents to prove ownership of homes that are subsequently stolen from borrowers is now a loophole.

If those responsible for the financial crisis acted immorally and relied on "loopholes" to carry out the looting of the economy, then there is no way that such behavior was in "good faith". Never mind that Obama was simply lying when he said no crimes were committed. However, in his lame attempt to justify why there have been no prosecutions, his admission that good faith was not involved exposed, if only for a moment, the moral depravity of both those who carried out the crimes and those who choose not to prosecute them.

Yes, it is the Obama administration and its Justice Department that has chosen not to prosecute these crimes. Going back to the original article that set me off:

Deborah Connor, chief of the fraud and public corruption section of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, said prosecutors take into account a corporation's cooperation when it comes time to decide whether to bring charges.

"We decline to prosecute cases every day," said Connor, the only current assistant U.S. attorney on the panel today. "We have that choice, and we make that choice all the time."

So, yes, coming soon to a financial criminal near you, more criminals will adopt the claim that they merely acted in "good faith" to carry out "business decisions" and therefore should not be prosecuted. Obama's prosecutors then will fall in line and choose, yet again, not to prosecute.

Crime is still crime, but the Holder Justice Department chooses those crimes it wishes to prosecute. Those choices are informed by a moral depravity dictated by the very criminals who have driven our country's descent into torture and financial ruin.

</rant>

BBC DOCUMENTARY EXPOSES ISI TRAINING, EQUIPPING OF TALIBAN MILITANTS

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf3KgUoBJno>[/youtube]

For just over a month, the US and Pakistan have been struggling to deal with tensions created by former Joint Chiefs Chairman Michael Mullen's testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee where he stated flatly that Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency directly aids militants who attack US interests in Afghanistan. Wednesday night, BBC Two aired part one of its "Secret Pakistan" documentary, providing detailed evidence that supports Mullen's accusations.

From BBC News, we get some details on the disclosures in the documentary:

Pakistan has repeatedly denied the claims. But the BBC documentary series Secret Pakistan has spoken to a number of middle-ranking – and still active – Taliban commanders who provide detailed evidence of how the Pakistan ISI has rebuilt, trained and supported the Taliban throughout its war on the US in Afghanistan.

"For a fighter there are two important

things – supplies and a place to hide,” said one Taliban commander, who fights under the name Mullah Qaseem. “Pakistan plays a significant role. First they support us by providing a place to hide which is really important. Secondly, they provide us with weapons.”

Another commander, Najib, says: “Because Obama put more troops into Afghanistan and increased operations here, so Pakistan’s support for us increased as well.”

He says his militia received a supply truck with “500 landmines with remote controls, 20 rocket-propelled grenade launchers with 2000 to 3000 grenades... AK-47s, machine-guns and rockets”.

Reuters also describes some of the revelations from the program:

Other Taliban commanders described how they and their fighters were, and are, trained in a network of camps on Pakistani soil.

According to a commander using the name Mullah Azizullah, the experts running the training are either members of the ISI or have close links to it.

“They are all the ISI’s men. They are the ones who run the training. First they train us about bombs; then they give us practical guidance,” he said.

The BBC News article also quotes CIA officer Bruce Riedel, who prepared a review of US intelligence on ISI involvement with militants.

Riedel told BBC that the ISI actively supports Taliban militants that carry out actions in Afghanistan. Riedel also claimed that US drone attacks are now more successful because Pakistan is not given advance warning:

And the recent drone attacks in Pakistan have become increasingly effective as intelligence has been withheld from the Pakistanis, claims Mr Riedel.

“At the beginning of the drone operations, we gave Pakistan an advance tip-off of where we were going, and every single time the target wasn’t there anymore. You didn’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to put the dots together.”

Riedel’s claim that Pakistani intelligence is excluded from information on US drone strikes is at odds with some of the reporting on today’s drone strike in South Waziristan. This strike is said to have killed five commanders of the Maulvi Nazir faction of Pakistan’s Taliban. But Reuters’ article on the strike has this passage:

Pakistani leaders say drone strikes inflame widespread anti-American sentiment in Pakistan and play into the hands of militants.

But analysts say high-profile militants can’t be spotted without help from Pakistani intelligence.

It is hard to reconcile the view that excluding Pakistani intelligence is necessary to prevent tipping off Taliban figures that they are about to be targeted with the claim that Pakistani intelligence is vital to locating Taliban figures for targeting.

At the very least, it appears that either the operator in today’s attack was having difficulty aiming or the driver of the vehicle in which the targets were traveling was good at evasive maneuvers. From Dawn:

According to initial details, five missiles were fired on a vehicle carrying several passengers.

I guess for drone operators, the fifth time's the charm.

TEN YEARS AGO, ANTHRAX ATTACKS-AND JUDY MILLER-HAD HUGE EFFECT ON PASSAGE OF PATRIOT ACT

Ten years ago today, George W. Bush signed the Patriot Act into law in what many consider to be the single biggest blow to civil liberties our country has seen. I will leave it to others to detail the damage done to our rights, but a quick list of that damage can be seen here on the History Commons website. Instead, what I want to focus on is the prominent role played by the anthrax attacks in the passage of the Patriot Act.

Although most would say that the Patriot Act was a direct result of the 9/11 attacks, timeline analysis shows that key events in the anthrax attacks took place during the critical days leading up to passage of the act. The timeline I have assembled here draws on data in timelines prepared by Marcy Wheeler, History Commons (anthrax), History Commons (Patriot Act) and Ed Lake, along with my own contributions.

September 4, 2001 Exactly one week before the 9/11 attacks, Judy Miller disclosed Project Bacus, in which the Defense Threat Reduction Agency demonstrated that they could construct a functional small bioweapons facility at the Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah for under \$1 million. The facility is capable of both growing and weaponizing biowarfare agents.

September 18, 2001 Letters containing anthrax

mailed to the New York Post and Tom Brokaw were postmarked one week after the 9/11 attacks. It is presumed that the letter that led to the death of Robert Stevens of American Media in Boca Raton, Florida was also mailed around this time but the letter itself was never recovered.

September 30, 2001 Robert Stevens begins to feel ill.

October 2, 2001 Patriot Act introduced in Congress.

October 3, 2001 Tom Daschle, Majority Leader, announces that he doubts the Senate will take up the Patriot Act on the one-week timetable Bush administration has requested.

October 3, 2001 Stevens is confirmed to have anthrax.

October 4, 2001 Pat Leahy, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, accuses the Bush administration of reneging on an agreement about the Patriot Act.

October 5, 2001 Stevens dies.

October 7, 2001 The building where Stevens worked is shut down after anthrax spores were found on the keyboard of his computer.

October 9, 2001 Postmark date for higher grade anthrax letters mailed to Tom Daschle and Pat Leahy.

October 12, 2001 Judy Miller receives hoax anthrax letter in her office at the New York Times. (See below for further discussion of Judy Miller and William Patrick)

October 12, 2001 Dick Cheney appears on the PBS Newshour for a long interview. Among other things, he pushes for passage of the Patriot Act. In response to a discussion about what Americans can do to protect themselves, he says:

We need to improve our – some of our law enforcement procedures, and we've got legislation pending before the Congress, for example; it's important we get that

through. Every day that goes by when we don't have all the tools we think we need to find out who these people are and to run them to ground is one more day when we could conceivably suffer the consequences of undue delay. Call your congressman and senator, tell them that's important legislation, you'd like to see it passed.

October 14, 2001 Known cases of anthrax at twelve individuals, mostly skin infections and arising from the September 18 mailings to media outlets. Lots of media attention.

October 15, 2001 Daschle letter is opened and tests positive for anthrax. [The Leahy letter had been mis-routed and was not discovered until November 16.]

October 24, 2001 House passes Patriot Act by vote of 357-66 with 9 representatives not voting. A breakdown of the votes can be seen [here](#).

October 25, 2001 Senate passes Patriot Act by vote of 98-1, with one not voting. Russ Feingold was the "no" vote and Mary Landrieu was the Senator who did not vote. There was no public debate in either the House or Senate.

October 26, 2001 Bush signs Patriot Act.

Judy, Judy, Judy (and William Patrick) I want to return to the role of Judy Miller. Recall that she published the article disclosing Project Bacus one week prior to 9/11. Part of the reason for publishing that article and several more on the topic of bioweapons was that she and two co-authors had written a book, "Germs: Biological Weapons and America's Secret War".

The publication date of the book was October 2, 2001. One of her primary sources for writing the book was William Patrick, who had headed the United States' offensive bioweapons research in the 1960's at Fort Detrick (yes, the same Fort Detrick where Bruce Ivins worked later). It is clear from Miller's writing that Patrick was a

consultant to Project Bacus and almost certainly was the source of information for weaponizing anthrax and anthrax simulants during this time.

In association with the publication of the book, Miller and co-author William Broad also participated in a one hour episode of the PBS science series Nova, which aired November 13, 2001. There is a very chilling interview with William Patrick published in association with the program and there is even video of Patrick dispersing a cloud of an anthrax simulant. In the interview, Patrick discusses his disagreement with Richard Nixon when Nixon unilaterally cancelled offensive bioweapons research in 1969.

William Patrick died just over a year ago. Miller wrote a tribute to him on her website. This part is of particular relevance:

That was how we met. Bill Broad, a science journalist and then my colleague at the *New York Times*, and I went to see him in 1997 at his comfortable home atop a wooded hill in Frederick, Maryland, not far from the government bio-lab where he had worked for over 35 years. As we sipped tea on his porch and munched sandwiches prepared by his wife, Virginia, his dog, Billy the Kid, tried snatching chips from our plates. Strains of classical music filled the air and hummingbirds buzzed above the bird feeders he and Ginny had set at strategic spots on the terrace.

Then this seemingly cheerful father of two led us downstairs to his basement office, as he had legions of other students of the black bio-arts, to give us a PowerPoint tutorial on how germ weapons were made, stored, and distributed. He patiently answered our questions about how bacteria, viruses, and other deadly pathogens could be used as weapons of mass destruction. Near the end of our session, he pulled a garden

sprayer out of a green duffel bag and vigorously pumped it several times, producing a large cloud of fine particles that hung in the air like fog. If this were anthrax, he told us, we would all soon be dead. Offering me a memento of our class, he put a vial of the simulated anthrax in my purse and scribbled his home number on the stationery of his one-man consulting firm, Biothreats Assessment. It was topped with an image of the Grim Reaper. A skull and crossbones were engraved on the business card he handed me. Call any time, he said merrily.

With that as background, consider portions of the article Miller wrote describing her experience with the anthrax hoax letter she received. After opening the article by saying the powder in the letter looked like baby powder and smelled sweet, she eventually wrote:

As I washed my hands and tried to dust off the powder that clung to my pants and shoes, I thought about what Bill Patrick, my friend and bio-weapons mentor, had told me: anthrax was hard to weaponize. To produce a spore small enough to infect the lungs took great skill. Bill knew that firsthand. He had struggled to manufacture such spores for the United States in the 1950's and 60's as a senior scientist in America's own germ weapons program, which President Richard M. Nixon had unilaterally ended in 1969.

/snip/

The other cases, Bill told me, could well have involved a larger spore that was cut with baby powder or another substance to mask the deadly pathogen with a smell that was reassuringly familiar. Anthrax itself had no smell. And it was almost never white.

By now, I was no stranger to this deadly agent. My education had started with Bill Patrick's demonstration of how easily anthrax could be slipped past airport security. Bill had shown me how the fine powder in the small vial he kept on his desk dissolved like magic into the air when the vial was shaken and poured.

In general, Miller's article is a personable account of the fear generated by a potential anthrax attack and how the average person would respond. The problem with this narrative, though, is that Miller should have been far from the average person. She had been researching bioweapons for several years as she wrote her book. She had known Patrick for about four years at the time she received the letter. She had seen his demonstration of how weaponized biological agents can disperse in air. She even had her own vial of simulant as a reminder. And yet, she "tried to dust off the powder that clung to my pants and shoes"? This is the worst possible thing she could have done if the material in the letter had been real anthrax of the quality received by Daschle and Leahy, as it would have dispersed even more spores into air in an enclosed building. Even if the emergency personnel who responded to the office hadn't realized it, Miller should have known that her clothing should have been in the bag that was used to remove the letter and recovered powder.

Did Miller know before she received it that her anthrax letter would be a hoax?

Oh, and one more point. Miller noted that Patrick had told her that anthrax spore preparations are "almost never white". Here's a photo of the white powder from the Leahy letter (the powder in the Daschle letter was identical) alongside the more yellow powder from the New York Post letter. Miller published this account of the hoax letter on October 14, one day before the white powder in the Daschle letter was found.

So, yes, Judy and Bill, anthrax spore preparations are “almost never white”, but when they are, it’s pretty darned important.

PAKISTAN UPDATE: 18,000 FLEE KHYBER AREA, HAQQANI INSIST TALIBAN MUST LEAD TALKS

Last week’s visit by a delegation of high-ranking US officials to Pakistan featured the ironic use of the US Secretary of State to deliver a newly militarized message to the Pakistanis regarding the way forward, with the introduction of the “fight, talk, build” catchphrase. Although the US clearly urged Pakistan to attack the Haqqani network in its safe haven in North Waziristan, it appears that Pakistan is taking part of the message to heart and is attacking militants, but the attacks are in the Khyber Agency, two agencies away from North Waziristan. At the same time, we learn that the Haqqanis are now insisting that if they take part in talks with the US, the talks must include the Taliban in a leading role.

Pakistan’s Dawn informs us through an AFP story that Pakistan’s army has ordered over 18,000 civilians to evacuate portions of the Kyber Agency because of military action there:

At least 18,000 people have fled their homes in Pakistan’s tribal district of Khyber, fearing a fresh onslaught of fighting between the army and Islamist militants, officials said Tuesday.

Families streamed out of the district, a flashpoint for Taliban and other violent

groups on the Nato supply line into neighbouring Afghanistan, after the army ordered them to leave because of military action going on in the area.

/snip/

“Around 3,200 families, up to 18,000 people, have arrived in the Jalozai refugee camp and we are making arrangements to facilitate them,” Adnan Khan, spokesman for the disaster management authority of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP.

It will be interesting to see if the US accepts this action by Pakistan as a good faith effort to respond to last week’s demands. Cutting down on the frequency of attacks on US convoys into Afghanistan might help to soften the US reaction to Pakistan’s refusal to carry out attacks on the Haqqanis in North Waziristan. The Torkham Crossing is the most heavily used supply route into Afghanistan and it sees a steady stream of tankers delivering fuel. These tankers often are subject to attack in Pakistan, so if the current action in Kyber reduces those attacks, the US should see this as a positive development.

Meanwhile, the Haqqani network tells Reuters that they will not take part in direct talks with the US unless the Taliban play a lead role:

The Afghan Haqqani insurgent network will not take part individually in any peace talks with the United States and negotiations must be led by the Taliban leadership, a senior commander told Reuters on Tuesday.

“They (the Americans) would not be able to find a possible solution to the Afghan conflict until and unless they hold talks with the Taliban shura,” said the Haqqani group commander, referring to the Taliban leadership council.

/snip/

“This is not the first time the U.S. has approached us for peace talks. The Americans had made several such attempts for talks which we rejected as we are an integral part of the Taliban led by Mullah Mohammad Omar,” he said.

The fact that the Haqqanis now are laying out the conditions for taking part in talks would appear to be progress toward talks eventually taking place. The question now becomes how much the US will insist on its “fight” part of “fight, talk, build” preceding the actual talks.

NOW THAT TRAINING IN IRAQ IS A FAILURE, PETRAEUS NO LONGER MENTIONED

A remarkable story in this morning’s Washington Post addresses a report released today from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. The report details that the training of police forces in Iraq has been a failure:

Over the course of the eight-year-old war and military occupation, thousands of U.S. troops have spent considerable time and effort wooing and training police recruits, but Iraqi officials have often accused the United States of not providing much more than basic training.

In an August interview, Akeel Saeed, inspector general of the Iraqi Interior Ministry, said that in the past, the

U.S. military was too often
“implementing what they wanted, without
acknowledging what the Iraqis wanted.”

The article discloses that despite all of this basic “training” that the US has provided over the years, now that the program has been handed over to the State Department, they will use the bulk of their \$887 million budget this year on private security contractors. That fact alone is all the proof we need that there is no confidence at all in Iraqi security forces, or there would be little to no need for the mercenaries:

But a government report set for release Monday found that the department is spending just 12 percent of money allocated for the program on advising Iraqi police officials, with the “vast preponderance” of funds going toward the security, transportation and medical support of the 115 police advisers hired for the program. When U.S. troops leave, thousands of private security guards are expected to provide protection for the thousands of diplomats and contractors set to stay behind. For security reasons, the State Department has declined to specify the cost and size of its anticipated security needs.

However, the SIGIR report (pdf) itself provides more background for understanding why such a large mercenary force is needed. First, the report documents the handing over of responsibility for police training to DoD back in 2004 [INL is the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs]:

Since 2003, the United States has spent about \$8 billion to train, staff, and equip Iraqi police forces to maintain domestic order and deny terrorists a safe haven within Iraq. Within DoS, INL

is responsible for developing policies and managing programs that strengthen law enforcement and other rule of law institutional capabilities outside the United States.

In 2003, INL was assigned initial responsibility for the Iraqi police training program and funded it. The Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigation Training and Assistance Program was also involved. However, program responsibility was transferred to DoD in 2004 due to the Iraq security situation, the scale of the task, and the need to ensure unity of command and effort. Specifically, on May 11, 2004, National Security Presidential Directive 36 assigned the mission of organizing, training, and equipping Iraq's security forces, including the police, to the U.S. Central Command, until the Secretaries of State and Defense agreed that DoS should take on that responsibility.

But the reality is that first DoD, and now DoS refuse to provide a realistic assessment of the current capabilities of the Iraqi police forces:

INL has not currently assessed Iraqi police capabilities to the extent necessary to provide a sufficient basis for developing detailed program tasks and an effective system for measuring program results. Over two and-a-half years ago, a Joint Transition Planning Team made a three-week visit to Iraq to gain a baseline understanding of Iraq police forces' capabilities, but noted that a number of follow-on steps would be required for program design. However, the follow-on steps for program design were not accomplished and a planned 2011 baseline assessment was not completed.

The report goes on to note:

In October 2010, SIGIR raised concerns that DoS would be assuming responsibility for a program to advise and assist Iraqi police forces when the capabilities of those forces had not been assessed in any comprehensive way. We reported that neither DoD nor DoS has fully assessed the capabilities of the Iraqi police. DoD carried out some assessments, but they have limited usefulness in evaluating the current capabilities of the Iraqi police services. SIGIR recommended that the Commanding General, U.S. Forces-Iraq, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary, INL, work with the MOI to help assess the capabilities of the Iraqi police and provide that assessment to INL. Although U.S. Forces-Iraq agreed with the report recommendation, the assessment was not completed.

The simplest explanation for why so many groups refuse to complete the task of assessing the capabilities of Iraq's police forces is that the result is not one they wish to publish. The refusal to publish an assessment of Iraqi police capabilities, coupled with the DoS plan to rely on mercenaries rather than on the "trained" forces, can only lead to the conclusion that Iraq's police forces cannot be counted on to function at a level that would protect DoS activities in Iraq after withdrawal of US troops.

Now that the most reasonable assumption is that US efforts to train security forces in Iraq have failed, it is notable that the Washington Post's article today is missing one key piece of background. Since the handover of the training program to DoD in 2004, every time there have been claims about how well things were going in Iraq and/or how many security forces were being trained, the press has been careful to credit David Petraeus as being the driving force behind

such efforts. In fact, one of the first times Petraeus burst onto the national scene was when in September, 2004 the Washington Post carried an op-ed from Petraeus in which he was allowed to make grandiose claims about progress in training Iraqi security forces. Later, in September, 2007, the kerfluffle over Move-On's "Betrayus" ad diverted attention from the fact that during his testimony on the effectiveness of the "surge", he was effectively starting over on training of Iraqi security forces, with his "progress" from 2004 having been wiped off the books and out of Washington's memory. There was one ABC News report in 2005 that actually mentioned failures in Petraeus' efforts training Iraqi police, but this particular report is very much in the minority.

Will any press reports this week manage to connect Petraeus' name with the failure in training security forces in Iraq? Don't hold your breath waiting.

FROM US-PAKISTAN MEETINGS: NO PAKISTAN ACTION IN NORTH WAZIRISTAN; PETRAEUS TO DELIVER EVIDENCE AGAINST ISI

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaRKHVw4rUo>[/youtube]

The high level meetings in Islamabad between US and Pakistani officials head into their second day today, after a marathon four hour session late yesterday. The line-ups of officials present for the two countries is remarkable and reflects the seriousness with which the two

countries view the current situation.

Pakistan's Express Tribune provides a partial list of those present at the meetings:

Clinton was accompanied by US Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, Director Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) David Petraeus, US Special Envoy Marc Grossman and US Ambassador Cameron Munter, while Premier Gilani was assisted by Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, ISI chief Lt General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and other senior officials.

Despite the pomp surrounding the meetings and the seniority of those present, there seems to be little prospect that positions on the major issue will change. As I described yesterday, Clinton is delivering the "new" catchphrase for the US of "fight, talk, build", meaning that the US places the highest priority on fighting the Haqqani network, seen by the US as the biggest current threat and unlikely to participate in meaningful peace talks. By contrast, Pakistan's Prime Minister has implored the US to "give peace a chance". From the same Express Tribune article:

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's press office also confirmed that Pakistan has no plans to initiate a military operation in North Waziristan.

"Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani called upon US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to give peace a chance, as envisaged in the All Parties Conference's resolution," said the statement.

We learn from today's Washington Post that Clinton is warning Pakistan that they will pay a price for this refusal to attack the Haqqani network in their safe havens:

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stepped up the rhetorical pressure on Pakistan Thursday, warning Pakistani officials that there would be a “very big price” if they do not take action against militant groups staging attacks in Afghanistan.

Dawn provides more details, revealing that Clinton expects action by Pakistan to occur quickly:

“We look to Pakistan to take strong steps to deny Afghan insurgents safe havens and to encourage the Taliban to enter negotiations in good faith,” said Clinton after talks with Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar.

The United States was looking for operational action “over the next days and weeks, not months and years, but days and weeks because we have a lot of work to do to realise our shared goals,” emphasised Clinton.

In remarks today, Clinton responded to the “give peace a chance” challenge from Pakistan:

In a joint press conference held with Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar in Islamabad, Clinton urged the Pakistani government to show greater cooperation with the US to corner militants.

“You can’t keep snakes in your back yard and expect them to only bite your neighbours,” Clinton said, making a clear reference to the Haqqani network that the US has accused Pakistan of maintaining links with.

She added that US and Afghan forces have “successfully” responded to Pakistan’s legitimate concern regarding terrorists working from the Afghan side of the border, and that Pakistan is expected to

do the same.

“If we want to give peace a chance, we have some work to do,” said Secretary Clinton, urging Pakistan to do more to crackdown on extremists operating from Pakistani territory.

And there is the stand-off. Pakistan’s unchanging position is that now is the time for negotiations with the Haqqani network and the US maintains that it is necessary first to beat them into submission before they will negotiate “in good faith”.

A very important additional aspect of the ongoing meetings comes from the first Express Tribune story linked above, where we learn that new CIA chief David Petraeus will be sharing US intelligence linking Pakistan’s ISI spy agency with the Haqqani network:

The addition of Petraeus could be especially significant, political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi told Reuters.

“America will produce evidence before the army chief, that you are involved (in supporting the violence in Afghanistan). With David Petraeus coming as well, they have definitely brought evidence,” he said. “He will provide evidence that you are involved, ISI is involved,” he added. “But nothing will come out in public.”

It seems especially noteworthy that it is believed that Petraeus will share this intelligence with Ashfaq Kayani, who heads Pakistan’s Army, rather than Ahmed Pasha, who heads the ISI. The article notes separately that Petraeus will meet with Pasha but separates that meeting from the discussion of Petraeus sharing the ISI-related intelligence with Kayani.

There is a very interesting side note relating

to the timing of these high level meetings in Islamabad. Recall that Clinton's visits to Kabul and then Islamabad were not announced in advance. However, the arrival of the US delegation caused the leader of another country to reschedule a planned visit to Islamabad.

From Iran's Mehr News:

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reportedly decided to defer his travel to Pakistan as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to arrive in Islamabad on Thursday.

A diplomat confirmed the postponement of the Iranian president's visit but said it had nothing to do with Clinton's visit and was only a matter of working out the schedule of the Iranian president, who would now visit Pakistan some other time in the near future, Pakistan Today said in a report on Monday.

It is worth noting that at the height of the US-Pakistan rhetorical battle, Pakistan had meetings with China. These meetings were viewed by many as a signal to the US that Pakistan would consider seeking a closer relationship with China should US-Pakistan relations deteriorate further. Did the US suddenly decide to pre-empt Ahmadinejad's visit because they fear an Iran-Pakistan alliance much more than they fear a China-Pakistan alliance?

For those closely following Marcy's coverage of the Scary Iran Plot, note also that Mehr News is carrying an article accusing Pakistan of being a new "conduit" for smuggling drugs into the Persian Gulf region. The issue of illicit drugs seems to dance around the margins of Scary Iran Plot, so this accusation is worth noting while monitoring that evolving situation.

CLINTON, PETRAEUS HEAD TO PAKISTAN FOR TALKS WHILE NATO ATTACKS NEAR BORDER

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and CIA Director David Petraeus will be in Islamabad today for talks amid somewhat calmer US-Pakistan relations and to set the stage for a possible negotiated end to hostilities in Afghanistan.

At the same time, NATO has been conducting raids for about a week on the Afghanistan side of the border with Pakistan, attempting to rid the area of members of the Haqqani network.

The previously escalated rhetorical battle between the US and Pakistan has been on a calming trajectory since reaching its highpoint when Joint Chiefs Chair Mullen claimed that the Haqqani network was a virtual arm of Pakistan's ISI. Amid these calming relations, Clinton arrives in Islamabad today after a visit to Kabul.

The visit to Afghanistan was aimed in part at boosting Afghanistan's efforts to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban ahead of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Those negotiations were dealt a severe setback when Burhanuddin Rabbani, the chief negotiator for Afghanistan, was killed last month by a suicide bomber. As the Washington Post points out, the US and Afghanistan have not always agreed on how to proceed in the negotiations:

Clinton, who traveled to Kabul after visits to Libya and Oman, was scheduled to meet Thursday with President Hamid Karzai and other government and parliamentary leaders. Her trip comes at a time of increased tensions between

U.S. and Afghan officials over how to pursue peace with the radical Islamist Taliban movement after a decade-long insurgency.

/snip/

U.S. officials are pushing for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban as a crucial step toward ending the conflict and have engaged in secret parallel talks with Taliban leaders, so far without success.

Karzai, who has criticized the secret U.S. talks, has urged a greater role for Pakistan in the reconciliation process, noting that many of the key Taliban commanders use Pakistan's lawless tribal region as a base. The State Department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic matters, said Clinton "agrees with President Karzai that Pakistani cooperation is critical."

Note that while differing on their approaches to negotiating with the Taliban, both Afghanistan and the US agree that Pakistan must do more to control militants, especially the Haqqani network. However, the accusations of providing safe havens for the Haqqanis now seem to flow both directions:

High in the mountains, a nation's troops are regularly attacked by insurgents who easily come and go from sanctuaries across a porous international border. Armed forces in the neighboring country, nominally an ally, do little to stop the rebels. Resentment in the capital is growing.

For several years, that is how frustrated U.S. officials have described the challenge for the NATO coalition in Afghanistan, which, they say, is battling Taliban enemies who operate

freely from hilly hideouts in next-door Pakistan, an American ally and aid recipient.

But in the past several months, Pakistan has turned the tables, adopting a mirror-image argument in its own defense.

According to this increasingly assertive account, Pakistani Taliban fighters flushed out by Pakistani military offensives have now settled into a security vacuum created by NATO forces in eastern Afghanistan whose attention is focused elsewhere. That territory, Pakistan contends, is the new regional hub for Islamist militants of all stripes, one that the U.S.-led coalition must better control to prevent attacks on American forces as well as strikes inside Pakistan.

It undoubtedly is no coincidence that NATO is in the midst of a campaign against these militants near the Pakistan border at the same time that Clinton and Petraeus will visit Pakistan. In fact, the massing of NATO troops in the region is so large that many Pakistani newspapers have blared headlines warning of a massive ground invasion into Pakistan. NATO is claiming that this campaign has killed 115 insurgents since its start on October 15.

This NATO action sets the stage for Clinton's remarks in Kabul as she prepared to head to Islamabad today. As reported by AFP and carried by Dawn:

"We are taking action against the Haqqanis. There was a major military operation inside Afghanistan in recent days," she told a joint news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

/snip/

Clinton is later Thursday due in

Pakistan, where she is to be joined by CIA chief David Petraeus and top US military officer Martin Dempsey.

"We intend to push the Pakistanis very hard as to what they are willing and able to do with us...to remove the safe havens and the continuing threats across the border to Afghans," said Clinton.

And what good is a "new" effort at talks without a new catchphrase to go with it? Reuters reports [*this quote is from the 5:51 am version of the story which was changed at 7:42 am to no longer have the first two quoted paragraphs*] that the new phrase is "fight, talk, build":

Clinton will fly on to Islamabad, a U.S. official said, where she will also urge officials to work more closely with counterparts across the border. She presented a new summary of the mission in both countries: "fight, talk, build."

The message is that all three countries should aim to fight against irreconcilable militants, talk with those willing to negotiate, and meanwhile keep building on the economic side.

"We're going to be fighting, we're going to be talking and we're going to be building. And they can either be helping or hindering, but we are not going to stop our efforts," Clinton said at a news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

It seems puzzling to me that the Secretary of State should be sent out to gather support for "fight, talk, build" when the proper function of a State Department should be to make the case that with sufficient talking and building first, fighting might not be necessary. After over ten years of fighting in Afghanistan, the US appears to be confirming with the choice of this phrase

that it will fight first and ask questions later. What could possibly go wrong with that approach?