

PETRAEUS' COFFEE

Remember Jim's question whether David Petraeus was withholding intelligence last year? And remember my observation that Dick Cheney's propagandist had resuscitated Petraeus' gripes about talking points? And remember my focus on the way the Intelligence Committees had become mere spokespeople for the Intelligence Community?

The WaPo adds to that thread. First, by pointing out that Petraeus responded to Dutch Ruppertsberger's (allegedly unsolicited) request for talking points by trying to include intelligence he hadn't in his briefing.

"We had some new members on the committee, and we knew the press would be very aggressive on this, so we didn't want any of them to make mistakes," Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger III (Md.) said last week of his request in an account supported by Republican participants. "We didn't want to jeopardize sources and methods, and we didn't want to tip off the bad guys. That's all."

What Petraeus decided to do with that request is the pivotal moment in the controversy over the administration's Benghazi talking points. It was from his initial input that all else flowed, resulting in 48 hours of intensive editing that congressional Republicans cite as evidence of a White House coverup.

A close reading of recently released government e-mails that were sent during the editing process, and interviews with senior officials from several government agencies, reveal Petraeus's early role and ambitions in going well beyond the committee's request, apparently to produce a set of talking points favorable to his image and his agency.

The information Petraeus ordered up when he returned to his Langley office that morning included far more than the minimalist version that Ruppertsberger had requested. It included early classified intelligence assessments of who might be responsible for the attack and an account of prior CIA warnings – information that put Petraeus at odds with the State Department, the FBI and senior officials within his own agency.

And by claiming that the minimal talking points the NatSec establishment came up with didn't meet Ruppertsberger's needs.

Morell responded with concern about whether Petraeus would approve the document, even after other agencies had signed off.

"Please run the points by the Director, then get them to HPSCI," he wrote soon after. "I spoke to the Director earlier about State's deep concerns about mentioning the warnings and the other work done on this, but you will want to reemphasize in your note to DCIA."

Morell was right to be worried.

In an e-mail sent two hours later to Morell and others inside the agency, Petraeus wrote, "No mention of the cable to Cairo, either? Frankly, I'd just as soon not use this, then. . . [National Security Council] call, to be sure; however, this is certainly not what Vice Chairman Ruppertsberger was hoping to get for unclas use."

Asked about Petraeus's warning, Ruppertsberger said, "I'm not sure what he meant. I had no expectations."

It appears, then, that Petraeus tried to use Ruppertsberger's request (which, I suspect, we'll

one day learn wasn't all that spontaneous) as an opportunity to introduce new issues into the discussion, basically to save his own ass.

It sure looks like Petraeus was more involved in creating the opportunity for the talking points controversy than we have thus far confirmed.