CLASSIFICATION GAMES HIDING THE AFGHAN DEFEAT

Amidst all the discussion of the Administration's crack-down on leaks, two details have made it clear the Administration is using its own abuse of classification to hide reports of our impending defeat in Afghanistan.

Administration leaks to enforce and protect our pro-corruption policy

One of those comes from Sarah Chayes, the former Stanley McChrystal advisor. She was last seen on the pages of this blog complaining about CIA support for corruption in Afghanistan. In a new piece, she offers one of the most interesting takes on the Administration's pursuit of leaks.

While her main point is that if reporters were as exposed as their sources to legal consequences for leaks, they might better judge the truly important leaks, she throws some fascinating details showing how broken the classification system is.

> Far too much information is protected by unwarranted classification. It's hard to take a system seriously that places so many gigabytes of material that are not critical to national security under the same umbrella as the few nuggets that are. I've seen a New Yorker article included among prep documents for a National Security Council meeting stamped SECRET//NOFORN (meaning that only cleared U.S. citizens were allowed to read it).
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> In September 2010, a flurry of coverage in major U.S. newspapers reported a supposed government decision on how corruption in Afghanistan would be

> handled. Perusing the articles with growing wonder, I looked down at a memo on my desk. Not only were passages quoted from it classified, the document was also watermarked DRAFT. No decision had been made yet because debate on the draft had not even reached the level of Cabinet secretaries. It was a classic Washington case of offensive leaking. For months, I was convinced that the perpetrator was the late Richard Holbrooke, then special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan. But I kept asking reporters. Finally I traced the leak to a senior White House official, whose career has progressed untroubled.

She makes it very clear what the second example of classification abuse is. While she links to this early September 2010 WaPo article describing a decision to ignore corruption in Afghanistan, in her own account of what happened, she points to mid-September as the period when it became clear top figures in the Administration had bought off on supporting corruption in exchange for "progress" towards wiping out the Taliban.

Effectively, Chayes is suggesting that a top White House figure effectively won the debate in support of ignoring corruption in Afghanistan by leaking a draft classified decision as a fait accompli. Given her suggestion that this person's career has "progressed," it's a safe bet that it is one of the people — like current National Security Advisor Tom Donilan, current CIA Director John Brennan, or current Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes — who got promoted since this leak.

Chayes doesn't provide much guidance about which New Yorker article was classified SECRET and used in a National Security Council meeting, but I'm betting it was this Dexter Filkins article that rehearses the same issues of corruption. As I've noted, while the NYT (where Filkins had recently departed) only hinted at how badly the

collapse of the Kabul Bank implicated Hamid Karzai's corrupt administration, Filkins provided extensive details. The Filkins article, like the earlier series of articles, arises out of the decision to capitulate to CIA bagman Muhammad Zia Salehi's blackmail to avoid prosecution.

> Salehi telephoned Karzai from his jail cell. "He told Karzai, 'If I spend one night in jail, I'll bring the whole thing down,' " the Western official recalled.

Out of fear Salehi would "bring the whole thing down," it seems, the Obama Administration chose to abuse the classification system to ignore — while hiding the true extent of — the corruption of our Afghan partners.

Selective protection of CIA's efforts to convince our allies to remain in Afghanistan

Meanwhile, one of the things the government convinced Bradley Manning trial judge Denise Lind to keep secret even after it had been inadvertently released once appears to relate to CIA's efforts to shore up support for the Afghan War among our European allies.

Alexa O'Brien makes a compelling argument that one of the witnesses who will testify to the harm allegedly caused by Manning's leaks in secret is Robert Roland. She further argues that Roland will testify about 2 CIA Red Cell Memos, one of which strategizes how to ward off political opposition to the Afghan War of the kind that got our coalition partners in the Netherlands ousted (the other, which I wrote about here, pertains to concerns that other countries will figure out we export terrorism). The analysis of the memo itself is rather unsophisticated; it argues if we emphasize the benefit for women of our continued presence in Afghanistan and the support one poll showed Afghans had for our presence, it'll be enough to keep French and German voters in line.

But I guess it is rather embarrassing to have CIA's reflections, however naive, on how to counter democratic opposition to war out there. And I suppose Roland's identity might have been protected until whatever reviewer missed it in one of Manning's defense filings.

At this point, however, both are public. Yet Roland's identity and the CIA reports are being treated with far more sensitivity than far more damning State reports that will be discussed publicly.

Ah well. The report I want to see is the CIA plan to shore up support for the Afghan war as it becomes more and more clear the war serves only to prop up the crooks the CIA has been bribing for 12 years.