

STEVEN KAPPES LEAVES THE AGENCY, AGAIN

Here's one of the more curious details about yesterday's surprise news that Steven Kappes was leaving the CIA.

Best as I can tell, the White House has not yet issued a statement about his retirement (at least not via the White House press list). Not even in a week when one of the key issues for which Kappes gets some credit, the elimination of loose nukes (in Kappes case, in connection with Libya), was much in the news. Obviously, Obama doesn't have to nominate Kappes' replacement and get it approved by the Senate, but wouldn't you think the White House would have had a "thank you for all your service" comment prepared?

House Intelligence Committee Chair Silvestre Reyes' statement mentioned Kappes' departure, but not until he spent two paragraphs lauding Kappes' replacement, first.

I want to extend my congratulations to Mike Morell for his selection to serve as the next Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. I have had the pleasure of knowing Mike and, for the past nine years I have worked with him on a broad range of subjects. He is an exemplary CIA officer. Throughout his 30-year career with the agency, Mike has served with distinction. Whether serving at the Director's right hand, leading the agency's team of analysts, or serving as the principal briefer to the President, Mike's diligence and commitment to duty, and to his country, will serve him well as he assumes his new role.

I know the agency appreciates the job Steve Kappes has done for the nation during his tenure. I will miss Steve's

insight and candor, and I wish him all the best as he moves on to his post-agency career.

CIA Director Leon Panetta's statement does take the traditional form—lauding the retiring officer first, before announcing his replacement. But even there, Panetta downplays the news that Kappes is leaving.

When I came to the CIA in February of 2009, I was extremely pleased that Steve Kappes agreed to stay on as my Deputy. He was a great partner and I, like so many others, valued his advice and experience. Steve is a one-of-a-kind professional who has dedicated himself to the CIA. He has helped me tremendously in guiding this great organization. Having worked side-by-side on some of the toughest issues around, I'm proud to call him a friend.

Throughout his life, Steve has put the needs of others first, as he did in returning to the CIA in the summer of 2006. He hadn't planned on so lengthy a stay this time around. So when he told me a few months ago that it was time for him to move on, I understood. Steve has, to put it simply, more than met the highest standards of duty to the nation. He excels at what he does, because he embodies the very best of this outfit—skill and loyalty, dedication and discipline, integrity and candor. He also has, if you know him, one hell of a sense of humor.

After a superb career of public service that stretches back to the mid-1970s, when Steve was in the United States Marine Corps, he deserves the gratitude of his colleagues and his country. As he prepares to retire in May, I know I speak for every one of you when I wish him and his family all the good things.

It was, of course, crucial to both of us that we find an outstanding successor. Today, as we celebrate the achievements of one extraordinary public servant, I am announcing the promotion of another. I have asked Michael Morell, a 30-year veteran of the Agency, to become our next Deputy Director.

Only Senate Intelligence Committee Chair DiFi (who of course championed Kappes to take this position last year) gets the announcement pitch perfect, a balance between the recognition for Kappes' service and welcome to Morrell.

I deeply appreciate the service that Stephen Kappes has given to the CIA and to the United States over the course of his long career. I was very supportive of his decision to remain as Deputy Director in the transition between the Bush and Obama Administrations, and he has maintained stability at the Agency and been a great help and resource for Director Panetta over the past year. I wish Mr. Kappes the best in the next stage of his career.

I also look forward to working more closely with Michael Morell, the new CIA Deputy Director. Mr. Morell is a 30-year veteran of the CIA and has served in the past decade in a senior position overseas, in the Agency's top internal management position, as the President's intelligence briefer, and as the Deputy Director for Intelligence.

Now surely there's not that much you can conclude from deconstructing retirement notices, but these do seem to suggest Kappes departure announcement was fairly sudden—and that it was welcome in some quarters.

Jeff Stein, whose report on Kappes' departure echos his recent unflattering profile of Kappes,

attributes Kappes departure at least partly to the investigations CIA is under.

A congressional intelligence committee source said Kappes, 59, was feeling ground down. There were "investigations of his interrogators," the source said, and the White House was "taking away tools" in counterterrorism. There was also "growing unrest among [friendly foreign] intel services," he added, over perceived restrictions on the CIA's operational latitude.

[snip]

Another former senior CIA official said Kappes's resignation "has been in the works for some time. Why today? Not sure."

"It's been rumored for six months," said another. "The idle speculation is that things have just gotten too complex with all the investigations going on."

Six months, FWIW, would date those rumors to October, less than two months after John Durham's investigation expanded to include Gul Rahman's death. And while I'm not sure the complexity referred to here portends legal problems for Kappes, it might suggest increased scrutiny on chain of command.

Or maybe it just means Kappes doesn't like anyone overseeing the work his officers do.