



Cheney: White House "Slandering" America's Defenders

In accepting the "Keeper of the Flame Award" from the Center for Security Policy Wednesday night, former Vice President Dick Cheney turned up the heat in his campaign against the Obama administration, as he accused the President of abandoning Poland and Czechoslovakia in the face of Russian aggression and of "talking down our country and those who do its hardest work — the men and women of our military and intelligence services."



In his prepared remarks, Cheney invoked memories of both World War II and the Cold War in denouncing the President's decision to cancel plans with the two Eastern European nations for the installation of U.S. antiballistic missile systems in their countries. The former Vice President characterized the decision as dangerous in light of Russia's military invasion of Georgia and Moscow's opposition to sanctions against Iran for that country's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons.

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"I consider the abandonment of missile defense in Eastern Europe to be a strategic blunder and a breach of good faith," Cheney said. "You hardly have to go back to 1939 to understand why these countries desire — and thought they had — a close and trusting relationship with the United States. Only last year, the Russian Army moved into Georgia, under the orders of a man who regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century. Anybody who has spent much time in that part of the world knows what Vladimir Putin is up to. And those who try placating him, by conceding ground and accommodating his wishes, will get nothing in return but more trouble." Cheney called the cancellation a "serious blow to the hopes and aspirations of millions of Europeans. For twenty years, these peoples have done nothing but strive to move closer to us, and to gain the opportunities and security that America offered. These are faithful friends and NATO allies, and they deserve better. The impact of making two NATO allies walk the plank won't be felt only in Europe. Our friends throughout the world are watching and wondering whether America will abandon them as well." Cheney defended the anti-terrorism policies of the Bush administration and was harshly critical of investigations by the Obama Justice Department into allegations of torture and prisoner abuse during the Bush-Cheney administration.

"Such accusations are a libel against dedicated professionals who acted honorably and well, in our country's name and in our country's cause," said Cheney, who employed the now familiar term,



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 22, 2009

"enhanced interrogation," to describe some of the harsh methods used to elicit information from suspected terrorists. "What's more, to completely rule out enhanced interrogation in the future, in favor of half-measures, is unwise in the extreme. In the fight against terrorism, there is no middle ground, and half-measures keep you half exposed," he said. Critics of enhanced interrogation have ignored its "legal underpinnings and safeguards," he said. "For all that we've lost in this conflict, the United States has never lost its moral bearings — and least of all can that be said of our armed forces and intelligence personnel," Cheney said. "They have done right, they have made our country safer, and a lot of Americans are alive today because of them."

Obama has ruled out the "enhanced interrogation" methods, he said, and has "filled the air with vague and useless platitudes." The argument that the information could be derived by other means, said Cheney, "ignores the hard, inconvenient truth that we did try other means and techniques to elicit information from Khalid Sheikh Muhammed and other al-Qaeda operatives, only turning to enhanced techniques when we failed to produce the actionable intelligence we knew they were withholding. In fact, our intelligence professionals, in urgent circumstances with the highest of stakes, obtained specific information, prevented specific attacks, and saved American lives."

Bush administration claims about the effectiveness of the "enhanced interrogation" techniques in preventing terrorist attacks have been disputed in several quarters, however. President Bush, for example, claimed in a September 6, 2006 speech that the interrogation of Abu Zubaidah yielded information that helped prevent a terrorist attack planned against targets inside the United States. But according to a March 29, 2009 *Washington Post* story, what Zubaidah told his interrogators led directly to the arrest of U.S. citizen Jose Padilla at O'Hare Airport in Chicago on May of 2002. Zubaidah, according to the *Post* story had identified Padilla as the leader of a plot to set off a radiological "dirty bomb" in a city somewhere in the United States. Padilla was imprisoned in a Navy brig for 3 ½ years as an enemy combatant without charges and without trial. He was eventually charged and convicted in 2007 on terrorism conspiracy charges based on application government officials said he filled out for training in an al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan in 2000. But the charges were unrelated to the "dirty bomb" plot that Zubaidah described to his interrogators. "We spent millions of dollars chasing false alarms," one former intelligence official was quoted as saying.

While charging the administration with "slandering" military and intelligence professionals defending the country, Cheney said Obama and his advisers have been "giving in to the angry left" by "demagoguing an issue more serious than any other they'll face in these four years." As Obama continues to ponder General Stanley McChrystal's request for up to 40,000 more troops for Afghanistan, Cheney charged the President with "dithering while our armed forces are in danger." Obama, he said, "now seems afraid to make a decision, and unable to provide his commander on the ground with the troops he needs to complete his mission."

Cheney was not the only former Bush administration official or operative publicly berating Obama's handling of military and diplomatic affairs on Wednesday. In an op ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, Karl Rove, senior political advisor to President George W. Bush, argued that Obama has bungled diplomatically in relations with Afghanistan by wavering in his support of President Hamid Karzai. Rove said he had learned from a confidante of Karzai's that Obama had refused to take a call from the Afghan President. He further pointed out that James Carville, a political strategist with close ties to both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, has become an advisor to Ashraf Ghani, one of the candidates who ran against Karzai in this year's highly disputed



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election.

"Mr. Karzai took that as a sign that Mr. Obama was encouraging opposition to him," Rove said. Karzai conceded on Tuesday of this week that he did not win the August 20 election and is now in a runoff against former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah. "If Mr. Karzai does prevail, alienating him will have only complicated the task of waging a campaign against the Taliban," Rove wrote.

Rove did not mention, however, that Karzai views the anti-American regime in Iran as a friend. When he met with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki met with him in Afghanistan in 2007, Karzai said: "We have resisted the negative propaganda launched by foreign states against the Islamic Republic (of Iran) and we stress that aliens' propaganda should not leave a negative impact on the consolidated ties between the two great nations of Iran and Afghanistan."

The administration's policy toward Iran also came under fire from Cheney, who cited the nation's "rigged elections" in June and the government beating and jailing of protestors as evidence of a need for a tougher line toward Tehran. "The administration clearly missed an opportunity to stand with Iran's democrats, whose popular protests represent the greatest challenge to the Islamic Republic since its founding in 1979. Instead, the President has been largely silent about the violent crackdown on Iran's protestors, and has moved blindly forward to engage Iran's authoritarian regime. Unless the Islamic Republic fears real consequences from the United States and the international community, it is hard to see how diplomacy will work," Cheney said.

The former Vice President expressed his pleasure at receiving the Keeper of the Flame Award "in the company of so many good friends," noting that his longtime friend, former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is a previous recipient. Other honorees include President Ronald Reagan, former Democratic and now Independent Senator from Connecticut Joseph Lieberman, and James Jones, now Obama's national security advisor. But James Gaffney, founder and president of the Center for Security Policy, has been even more severe than Cheney in his assessment of Obama and his policies toward the Arab world. In an op-ed piece that appeared in the *Washington Times* in June, Gaffney suggested Obama may be "America's first Muslim President." Gaffney claimed the President has aligned himself with the "Shariah," or Muslim Brotherhood. Obama, who attended a Muslim school as a child, "not only identifies with Muslims, but actually may still be one himself," Gaffney wrote.

Photo of Dick Cheney: AP Images



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