

Lieberman, Bennett, And Kristol See Petraeus Hearing As ‘An Argument’ For ‘Going Into Iran’

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During their appearance before the Senate on Tuesday, Gen. David Petraeus and Amb. Ryan Crocker accused Iran of “funding, training, arming and directing extremist ‘special groups’ in Iraq.” “I think one might look for a reconsideration in Tehran as to just where they want to go in Iraq,” said Crocker. “This would be an excellent time for them to reassess.”

Liveblogging the hearings for the Washington Post, Fiasco author Thomas Ricks pondered what Crocker could have intended with his “reassess” comment, considering that “there will be a new American president in place in less than a year”:

But he also said, “This would be an excellent time for them to reassess.” What does he mean by that? Why would Iran want to adjust their relationship now, when there will be a new American president in place in less than a year? Or is there some sort of implied threat there: You guys better get smart, or this president still has time to pound you?

It is unclear whether such a veiled threat was Crocker’s intention, but some on the right are certainly seeing his and Petraeus’s testimony as cause to begin talking about striking Iran again.

On his radio show this morning, Bill Bennett told the Weekly Standard’s Bill Kristol — who had a personal meeting with President Bush yesterday — that a “conclusion” he drew was that the hearing was “less an argument for getting out of Iraq than going into Iran.” After suggesting that Iran may “have to pay some price at some point on their own soil,” Kristol said that President Bush authorizing an attack of some kind before he leaves office is not “out of the question”:

BENNETT: Do you think there’s any chance that, and we won’t ask you to reveal anything confidential, do you think there’s any chance that we might take some action against some aspect of the Ira...against Iran, let’s put it that way, before the president leaves office?

KRISTOL: We didn’t really talk about that, in all honesty, directly. I don’t think it’s out of the question. I think people are overdoing how much of a lame duck the president is.

Appearing on Hugh Hewitt’s radio show last night, Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT) said that he wished the Bush administration would tell the Iranians that “unless they stop it, we’re going to take action.” “I’m not talking about all out war,” added Lieberman before saying, “they ought to believe that we’re going to hit those training camps.”

Lieberman has previously said that “we have to be prepared to take aggressive military

action against the Iranians” while Kristol once believed that President Bush “could easily build political support” for strikes against Iran.

Transcript:

BENNETT: Here’s another conclusion I drew, I hadn’t heard this. I think Pat Buchanan might have drawn it. Maybe Pat and I would like your view of it. If you listen closely to this thing and you see where the trouble is now, the whole thing seems to me less an argument for getting out of Iraq than going into Iran, ah there increased role, right or wrong?

KRISTOL: Well, it is striking how much Petraeus and Crocker — again they have no agenda on this, they are reporting what they see on the ground — ah, how much Iran is behind the trouble making in the south and behind the Shia extremist groups, now that we’ve pretty much rolled up al Qaeda, except for some work that still has to be done up north. The Iranian backing of the Shia becomes the main, the Shia extremists, Sadr, becomes sort of the main obstacle to really, you know, having a successful resolution in Iraq, and so, I think just beginning from a very practical point of view, they are concerned about Iran and Crocker said, he’s talked to Iran. It’s not like we’re not talking to Iran. We’ve tried the Barack Obama method there. I think Crocker said two or three meetings with the Iranians in Baghdad and they have an interest in destabilizing Iraq, it’s that simple. And I think they only way they won’t is if they’re pushed back as we’ve done a little bit, as the Iraqi government has done in Iraq and then maybe, if they have to pay some price at some point on their own soil.

BENNETT: Do you think there’s any chance that, and we won’t ask you to reveal anything confidential, do you think there’s any chance that we might take some action against some aspect of the Ira...against Iran, let’s put it that way, before the president leaves office?

KRISTOL: We didn’t really talk about that, in all honesty, directly. I don’t think it’s out of the question. I think people are overdoing how much of a lame duck the president is. I think he thinks he needs to leave things in as good shape as he can for his successor. I don’t think he’s going to do something rash, I don’t think he’s got the attitude of, “I’ve got to do it because my successor won’t.” I think he wants to try to assume that his successor will have our interests at heart, will take a cold serious look at those when he takes over, and therefore he wants to leave things as good shape as possible. That’s one reason I think he’s very concerned not to try to drawdown to fast in Iraq. Whether that will lead him to do something in Iran or atleast or maybe leave it to his successor, I don’t know.

[...]

HEWITT: Now Senator, we’re rapidly getting back to where we were in, say, 1969, ’70 and ’71, where an enemy operating from a sanctuary does whatever they want to kill Americans, and we don’t do anything about it. What’s your advice to this administration about how to deter Iran from this continued killing, as you said, of hundreds of Americans?

LIEBERMAN: Yeah, you can’t deter these people...you know, some people say sit down and talk to them. I mean, Senator Obama has said if he’s elected president, he’d sit down and talk with Ahmadinejad without preconditions. But that will be taken as such a sign of weakness, that they will just increase their attacks against us. Honestly, I wish that this administration would specifically and clearly warn the Iranians that we know that they’re continuing to train terrorists who are killing American soldiers, we know that they’re

bringing large caches of arms into Iraq, and unless they stop it, we're going to take action. And you know, I'm not talking about all out war. We know, and I'm not revealing anything here, Hugh, the American military spokespeople in Iraq have said this over and over again publicly. We know that there are three training camps in Iran where they're training the Iraqis who go back and kill our men and women in uniform. And if they don't cut it out, they ought to believe that we're going to hit those training camps. That, to me, is an act of self defense.

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