

On Jan. 7, the Washington Post published a front-page lead article and an op-ed on the nomination of Leon Panetta as CIA director; both articles exaggerated the extent of opposition to the Panetta appointment and they demonstrated the weakness of mainstream media coverage of the intelligence community, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency.

The front-page article by Karen DeYoung, a seasoned reporter, and Joby Warrick, a newcomer to the intelligence beat, presented a one-sided and inaccurate account of the opposition to the naming of Panetta.

The op-ed by David Ignatius, who has relied heavily on unnamed CIA clandestine operatives as sources for the past 25 years, argues that the CIA “has demonstrated an ability to sabotage bosses it doesn’t like.” Such balderdash!

It is particularly ironic that such senior writers as DeYoung and Ignatius would rely on the views of clandestine officers who are particularly adept at manipulating people and opinion. Indeed, that is part of their job description. The reliance on anonymous CIA sources from the clandestine community does not make for good reporting or good journalism.

It must be understood that many CIA officials, particularly in the National Clandestine Service, have never welcomed the idea of reporting to a CIA director who has a reputation for liberal or progressive policies.

When President Jimmy Carter was considering the nomination of Ted Sorensen as CIA director in 1977, CIA operatives were active on Capitol Hill and in the press community making a case against Sorensen. And when President Bill Clinton nominated Tony Lake as director in 1997, CIA officials successfully engaged in clandestine efforts to undermine Lake’s candidacy.

It would not be surprising for clandestine operatives to lobby against Panetta, particularly in view of his opposition to torture, detainee abuse and secret CIA prisons. It should also be noted, however, that there are also many CIA officers who share Panetta’s views and would welcome his leadership.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that CIA clandestine officers typically have rallied around CIA directors who broke the law as long as they were zealous supporters of covert action.

When CIA Director Richard Helms falsely testified in 1973 that the CIA had not passed money to the opposition movement in Chile, he was fined \$2,000 and given a two-year suspended prison sentence. Helms went from the courthouse to the CIA where he was given a hero’s welcome by clandestine officers who presented Helms with a gift of \$2,000 to cover the fine.

CIA Director William Casey’s violations of the Boland Amendment to outlaw funding for the

overthrow of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua were supported by the directorate of operations.

Conversely, CIA Director William Colby, who cooperated with the Church Commission's investigations of CIA violations of U.S. law during the Vietnam War, was maligned by senior cadre of the clandestine service.

DeYoung and Warrick disingenuously repeated the assertion of one senior CIA officer that the "agency was neither consulted nor informed" about the Panetta nomination. More balderdash!

The CIA has never been consulted about the nomination of a CIA director nor should it be. It is unlikely that Foreign Service Officers were asked to vet the selection of Sen. Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State or that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were asked if they would support the nomination of Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense in 2001.

Civil servants have no role to play in the selection of senior officials of the government, and their professionalism requires support for their leadership, regardless of political beliefs. We certainly expect U.S. military officers, who are overwhelmingly members of the Republican Party, to support the national security policies of Democratic administrations. We should assume that CIA officers will do the same.

It is particularly interesting that DeYoung and Warrick reported that President-elect Obama's first choice for CIA director, John Brennan, withdrew his name from consideration because of opposition to his association with CIA policies of interrogation and rendition.

Brennan, in fact, withdrew his name from consideration because he was involved in and supported those policies and because he has been part of the culture of cover-up at the CIA during the Bush years. His confirmation process would have been confrontational and tendentious, and probably unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, Ignatius's candidate for CIA director is none other than the current deputy director of the CIA, Steve Kappes, the darling of the clandestine community and a supporter of and participant in the very policies of interrogation and rendition that reportedly sank the chances of Brennan.

The Washington Post and the mainstream media for the most part have never understood that the CIA, like other large government entities, are complex organizations and rarely governed by one set of ideas on any issue, particularly the capabilities of their leaders.

There are numerous CIA officials who support the nomination of Panetta, just as there are opponents to his candidacy.

Reporters need to make sure they canvas the entire community before placing front-page articles in front of the American public. They must know that the overwhelming majority of CIA officers would not talk to the press; therefore, they should be skeptical of those who do.

And when they want to deny the fact that there is a serious morale problem at the CIA because of recent intelligence failures, reporters such as DeYoung and Warrick should not consult a CIA spokesman such as Mark Mansfield, a well-known agency flack, to deny such facts.

You would never ask a barber if you need a haircut, and you certainly wouldn't ask a CIA spokesman about internal problems at the CIA.

[Source...](#)