

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## **Cheney: Terrorism, nuke threats persist**

By CRAIG SMITH - September 23, 2012

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A moment that resonates with former Vice President Dick Cheney happened during an Afghanistan airfield tour four years ago, when he presented the Silver Star to a female Army medic — only the second awarded to a woman since World War II.

It was a brief respite in almost eight years of warfare that occupied the White House after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Cheney, 71, is proud of the Bush-Cheney legacy of making sure “there wasn’t another attack on the U.S.” He’s unapologetic about the administration’s record, though it remains controversial four years later.

“The job we did in (fighting terrorism) is one I feel very good about,” Cheney told the Tribune-Review during a visit to Pittsburgh last week. “I very much think the threat is still out there.”

After months of staying out of the public limelight while recovering from a heart transplant, Cheney is becoming more visible. He made numerous trips to war-torn regions and other hot spots during his career of public service.

“What we did in Iraq, I think, is very important. When we took down Saddam Hussein, we ended Iraq’s nuclear threat,” said Cheney, who first visited China with President Ford in 1975.

As vice president, Cheney administered the oath to soldiers in Kabul, Afghanistan, during a re-enlistment ceremony. But the Silver Star presentation was special. It is the United States’ third-highest award exclusively for combat valor.

Then-Spc. Monica Brown received the award for her role as a medic from the 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. While her convoy patrolled in Paktika’s isolated Jani Khail District, insurgents attacked. Five soldiers were burned and cut when their vehicle triggered an improvised explosive device. Two soldiers suffered life-threatening injuries.

The Middle East remains volatile. The United States still has 70,000 troops in Afghanistan. At least 50 people were killed on Thursday in Syria when government warplanes bombed a gas station in the northern Raqqa Province.

Protesters took to the streets in Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and other Muslim countries.

“For better or worse, we’re going to be in the region for the foreseeable future,” said Ryan Grauer, an assistant professor of International Affairs in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh.

The Obama administration acknowledged last week that attacks against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were the work of terrorists and not linked to protests over an anti-Islamic film made in California.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to warn that Iran is six to seven months away from being able to build a nuclear bomb.

Nuclear proliferation remains a concern for Cheney.

“Iran wants to wipe Israel off the face of the earth,” he said. That threat and the lack of a policy to keep North Korea from advancing its nuclear capability means “the odds are likely to increase (that) there will be more troubles in the area of nuclear proliferation.”

Grauer believes quiet diplomacy could be more effective than heavy-handed tactics.

Much of the reasoning behind keeping 70,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan is linked to domestic politics, said Justin Logan, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute in Washington. He thinks troops could be there until 2020.

President Obama, he said, “was wary of being labeled weak on defense and sort of got hemmed in (by his advisers). He didn’t push back.”

The Bush-Cheney policies changed Iraq — but not everyone agreed with the administration’s policies.

“Yes, people of Iraq are better off today ... but they turned Iraq into a looting orgy for favored contractors. The waste and bloodshed that followed was unnecessary,” said military analyst Ralph Peters, who gave the Bush administration better marks for ousting the Taliban from Afghanistan.

“In the fall of 2001, they did exactly the right thing in Afghanistan. They shattered al-Qaida and punished the Taliban for hosting them,” Peters said. “The mistake Bush made wasn’t keeping too few troops there ... but keeping too many. We should devastate our enemies and leave.”

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