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OP-ED COLUMNIST

Cheney Grabs a Third Term

By [MAUREEN DOWD](#)

WASHINGTON

Dick and Rummy are at Cafe Milano in Georgetown, holding court. The maître d' fawns. Waiters hover. Tourists snap pics on their digital cameras. Cable chatterers stop by to ingratiate themselves.

It isn't so much that Dick and Rummy are back. It's that they never left.

They had no intention of turning America's national security over to the Boy Wonder. The two best infighters in Washington history weren't yielding turf to a bunch of peach-fuzz pinkos who side with terrorists.

Let W. work out at the S.M.U. gym in Dallas, waiting for history to redeem him; Dick and Rummy are leaning forward into history, as they always do. Cheney is tawny with TV makeup; there's no point taking it off. The gigs are nonstop, and he has a big Obama-bashing speech Thursday at the American Enterprise Institute.

"That was funny when you were on Fox and Neil Cavuto called you Obama's 'ball and Cheney,'" Rummy grins, taking a gulp of his brunello.

Dick grunts, raising a fork of his Risotto Gucci with roasted free-range quail.

"The punks thought they could roll over us," Vice mutters. "Nobody puts Baby in a corner."

Eyeing the quail, Rummy shakes his head. "Can you believe the nerve of that dadburn whippersnapper at the press dinner, saying your memoir would be called 'How to Shoot Friends and Interrogate People?' Whatever happened to the great White House tradition of giving respect to your predecessors?"

Dick is looking over at himself on the TV behind the bar, where Fox is doing a segment about how Republicans on the Sunday talk shows praised him for his shock-and-awe campaign against Obama.

"I can't believe how easy it was to bring Obama into line," Rummy says, gnawing on

Gorgonzola "We wouldn't have needed waterboarding if everybody cracked like a peanut. It
nytimes.com/2009/05/.../20dowd.htm...

Gorgonzola. "We wouldn't have needed waterboarding if everybody cracked like a peanut. It was even easier than getting the bit into Junior's mouth. Way simpler than if we'd had to contend with McCain. In the end, the right guy won."

Dick is surprised, too, but who can tell?

"You're running national security now and everyone knows it," Rummy says. "You got Obama to do an about-face on the torture photos. He's using our old line about how it would endanger the troops. He's keeping our military tribunals. His Justice Department invoked our state secrets privilege to try to get that lawsuit on torture and rendition dismissed. He's trying to stop any sort of truth commission, thank goodness. He's got his own surge going in Afghanistan. He's withdrawing from Iraq more slowly. He's extended our secret incursions over the Afghan border into Pakistan."

Dick smiles on one side of his face.

"Transparency bites," he snarls.

"By golly, yes," Rummy says. "We controlled Junior by playing on his fear of looking like a wimp just as his dad did. And now we're controlling Boy Wonder by playing on his eagerness to show that the Democrats are tough on national security. He's a sucker for four-star generals, can't resist anyone in uniform. Petraeus and Odierno speak and he jumps. If we want to roll him, we just send in the military brass flashing their medals."

Rummy knocks back some more brunello, and shoos away some Japanese tourists after confiscating their cameras.

"I hear Poppy Bush is furious at you," he says. "He's telling folks he put Junior in your care and you stole his presidency and destroyed the Bush name and derailed Jeb's chances to ever be president, and P.S., you wrecked the country and the Atlantic alliance to boot. He has it in for Lynne, too. Thinks she spun you up, like she did in high school with her flaming batons. He thinks you got loopy from all the heart procedures. And Colin's mad at you."

"He can go to yoga with Pelosi for all I care," Dick growls.

The two old connivers clink glasses. "So," Rummy muses, "what do we make our new White House boy toy do next?"

"Well," Dick says. "He's got to keep Gitmo open. It's rich that his own party won't give him the money to close it. The NIMBY factor works every time — no terrorists in my backyard. He's got to stop this pansy diplomacy with Muslim nations. He's got to let Bibi take out those Iranian centrifuges. He's got to stop his Kodak moments and Commie book club with Hugo Chávez. He's got to release those C.I.A. memos proving that we were right to rip up the Constitution. And, of course, he's got to pardon Scooter."

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“Can we get him to do all that, Dick?”

Dick twinkles. “Yes, we can.”

Thomas L. Friedman is off today.

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