

SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE MEMBER RON WYDEN STILL HASN'T SEEN TARGETED KILLING MEMO

Every time I get into debates about the targeted killing program—especially the killing of Anwar al-Awlai—drone boosters insist that the oversight provided by the Intelligence Committees is adequate to the task.

That's a quaint thought.

Ron Wyden, in a letter preparing John Brennan for his confirmation hearing, reveals that he still hasn't seen the "secret legal opinions" (plural) authorizing the targeted killing program.

First, as you may be aware, I have asked repeatedly over the past two years to see the secret legal opinions that contain the executive branch's understanding of the President's authority to kill American citizens in the course of counterterrorism operations. Senior intelligence officials have said publicly that they have authority to knowingly use lethal force against Americans in the course of counterterrorism operations, and have indicated that there are secret legal opinions issued by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel that explain the basis for this authority. I have asked repeatedly to see these opinions, and I have been provided with some relevant information on the topic, but I have yet to see the opinions themselves.

[snip]

As I have said before, this situation is unacceptable. For the executive branch to claim that intelligence agencies have the authority to knowingly kill American citizens but refuse to provide Congress with any and all legal opinions that explain the executive branch's understanding of this authority represents an alarming and indefensible assertion of executive prerogative.

Remember, Wyden is a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, that group of select men and women with whom the Executive must share even the findings authorizing the most covert operations.

And yet for two years, they have rebuffed Wyden's questions about their claim to be authorized to kill Americans.

There's more in the letter demonstrating how arrogant the Obama Administration has been with the purported overseers of its covert operations.

But it doesn't get much scarier than the fact that the President won't tell Congress the bases and limits to his authority to unilaterally kill Americans.