

COMPARTMENTALIZATION, SYRIAN AIRSTRIKE STYLE

Apparently, Crazy Pete Hoekstra's been complaining again that the Bushies are keeping secrets from Congress. He co-authored a WSJ editorial several weeks ago to complain that only senior leaders in Congress (including Crazy Pete) knew the truth about the Syrian bombing. In the op-ed, Hoekstra sounded like he had found another *casus belli*.

It has briefed only a handful of very senior members of Congress, leaving the vast majority of foreign relations and intelligence committee members in the dark. We are among the very few who were briefed, but we have been sworn to secrecy on this matter. However, we are prepared to state, based on what we have learned, that it is critical for every member of Congress to be briefed on this incident, and as soon as possible.

[snip]

We want to remind President Bush that the Constitution invests Congress with various powers and authority over foreign policy. Not only does Congress have an obligation to conduct oversight over these matters, but it is accountable to the people of this country to ensure that their security and interests are safeguarded.

The proposed deal with North Korea will involve substantial expenditures of U.S. funds to pay for heavy fuel oil deliveries. Congress will be asked to approve the authorization of funds for this expenditure. We cannot carry out our duties when we are being denied information about these critical national security matters.

We all want to secure agreements that address the proliferation of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and unconventional weapons. However, for these agreements to have long-term viability, they must be transparent, and based on close consultations and collaboration with the Congress.

If the Israeli airstrike last month is related to covert nuclear collaboration involving Syria and either North Korea, Iran or other rogue states, this may or may not be an issue that can be easily addressed by negotiations alone. It is certain, however, that such a serious international security issue will not stay secret forever.

Congress, therefore, needs to be fully briefed, not just on the details of the airstrike, but on how to address this matter and how, if press reports are true, rogue states will be held accountable for what could amount to a very serious case of WMD proliferation.

Hoekstra seems to suggest that he was briefed that the airstrike really was a response to attempted nuclear proliferation (though I'm still doubtful that's what it was).

Nick Schwellenbach did some follow-up on this question, asking whether Congress has yet been briefed. And he found that the Administration is compartmentalizing information about the Syrian bombing as closely as they compartmentalized their illegal wiretap program.

However, a congressional staffer told me that "the issue has been closely held. The leadership of the defense committees and Intel committees have been briefed, but not the general membership of the Congress as you correctly noted in Ros-Lethinen's OpEd." Another source told me that they were not aware

of their full committees being briefed yet either.

Perhaps of greater practical concern for congressional oversight is, though a few select members have been briefed, none of their staff, which members depend upon for their expertise and knowledge, have not been allowed to accompany them, POGO has been told.

Schwellenbach thought of precisely what I did upon learning that *staffers* hadn't been briefed—of Jello Jay Rockefeller's complaint (or, for that matter, telecom lobbyist John Ashcroft's) that his staffers hadn't been briefed and so he was helpless to exercise oversight over it. In other words, they're only telling wingnuts like Hoekstra, and not the people who can inform Hoekstra that the story doesn't make any sense.

I'm reminded of what ArmsControlWonk said of Stephen Hadley's compartmentalization of this same information within the Intelligence Community.

Suddenly, I understand why the intelligence from Israel, as Kessler reported, was "restricted to a few senior officials under the instructions of national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley, leaving many in the intelligence community unaware of it or uncertain of its significance."

Because we'd already looked at the building and Hadley *knew* what the IC would say.