

BUT WHAT ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT?

In addition to showing how the Iran hawks have evaded oversight over their Special Forces war plan against Iran, Sy Hersh seems intent on generating pressure on Democrats to withhold funding now being used to start a covert war with Iran.

Hersh notes that the Gang of Eight has been briefed on the CIA—but not the Special Forces, assassination of high value targets—part of the plan.

Although some legislators were troubled by aspects of the Finding, and “there was a significant amount of high-level discussion” about it, according to the source familiar with it, the funding for the escalation was approved. In other words, some members of the Democratic leadership—Congress has been under Democratic control since the 2006 elections—were willing, in secret, to go along with the Administration in expanding covert activities directed at Iran, while the Party’s presumptive candidate for President, Barack Obama, has said that he favors direct talks and diplomacy.

I love how Hersh feels the need to remind Democrats they are in the majority.

Then, after recalling all the opposition to Administration plans from within the military, Hersh returns to Democrats’ failure to prevent policies they oppose.

The Democratic leadership’s agreement to commit hundreds of millions of dollars for more secret operations in Iran was remarkable, given the general concerns

of officials like Gates, Fallon, and many others. “The oversight process has not kept pace—it’s been coöpted” by the Administration, the person familiar with the contents of the Finding said. “The process is broken, and this is dangerous stuff we’re authorizing.”

Now, the problems with oversight seem to focus on two things. First, the Democrats once again got punked by Administration lies when, three years ago, David Obey backed off an attempt to withhold funding for such operations.

On March 15, 2005, David Obey, then the ranking Democrat on the Republican-led House Appropriations Committee, announced that he was putting aside an amendment that he had intended to offer that day, and that would have cut off all funding for national-intelligence programs unless the President agreed to keep Congress fully informed about clandestine military activities undertaken in the war on terror. He had changed his mind, he said, because the White House promised better coöperation. “The Executive Branch understands that we are not trying to dictate what they do,” he said in a floor speech at the time. “We are simply trying to see to it that what they do is consistent with American values and will not get the country in trouble.”

Obey declined to comment on the specifics of the operations in Iran, but he did tell me that the White House reneged on its promise to consult more fully with Congress. He said, “I suspect there’s something going on, but I don’t know what to believe. Cheney has always wanted to go after Iran, and if he had more time he’d find a way to do it. We still don’t get enough information from the agencies, and I have very little confidence that they give us information

on the edge.”

So Congressional Dems aren't doing the most efficacious thing to prevent BushCo from starting their war with Iran, defunding such efforts.

Democrats who have been briefed on the Presidential Finding (which appears to be restricted to the Gang of Eight), are just now figuring out that Cheney has the assassinations hidden behind Bush's EO giving Special Forces a blank check.

Senior Democrats in Congress told me that they had concerns about the possibility that their understanding of what the new operations entail differs from the White House's. One issue has to do with a reference in the Finding, the person familiar with it recalled, to potential defensive lethal action by U.S. operatives in Iran.

[snip]

The defensive-lethal language led some Democrats, according to congressional sources familiar with their views, to call in the director of the C.I.A., Air Force General Michael V. Hayden, for a special briefing. Hayden reassured the legislators that the language did nothing more than provide authority for Special Forces operatives on the ground in Iran to shoot their way out if they faced capture or harm.

Yet it appears that Dems are doing the same thing they did in response to the warrantless wiretap program: writing letters into the black hole of the White Hous email system.

The legislators were far from convinced. One congressman subsequently wrote a personal letter to President Bush insisting that “no lethal action,

period" had been authorized within Iran's borders. As of June, he had received no answer.

(Note, there's a strong chance that this "congressman" is Silvestre Reyes, since he's the only Congressman briefed on the full Finding; the other Congresswoman would be Speaker Pelosi.)

And an aide for what appears to be Senator Reid (the only male in leadership briefed on the program), suggests Reid is just claiming he's powerless to do anything about the Iran war-mongering.

An aide to one member of the Democratic leadership responded, on his behalf, by pointing to the limitations of the Gang of Eight process. The notification of a Finding, the aide said, "is just that-notification, and not a sign-off on activities. Proper oversight of ongoing intelligence activities is done by fully briefing the members of the intelligence committee." [my emphasis]

So that's it. Reyes (presumably) sending notes into the void again and Reid (presumably) simply despairing of the intelligence oversight process. That's what has become of the the power to declare war.