

CIA: CONGRESS SHOULDN'T GET RECORDS OF OUR CRIMES

Mark Hosenball reports on some anonymous current and former CIA officers complaining that Congress wants to do oversight. In particular, they're bitching that Leon Panetta seems willing to give Congress the operational cables—such as the ones listed in this log—describing the methods used during detainee interrogations and the people who used those methods.

"Operational traffic" refers to cables from the field to CIA headquarters, and they go well beyond the intelligence reports routinely provided to Congress, chronicling in exacting, minute-by-minute detail who did what to whom, and how detainees responded to particular questions and techniques.

[snip]

Panetta's instinct was to give Congress what it wanted. But undercover officers warned him that this would break with standard practice, and veteran spies worried that it would chill brainstorming between field agents and their controllers. Aiming to compromise, Panetta signaled to Congress that the CIA would turn over only redacted documents—and that it would take a long time to vet as many as 10 million pages of cable traffic.

Congressional investigators aren't backing down, however, insisting on all of the material without deletions, including names of personnel who participated in harsh questioning, and holding subpoenas in reserve.

The real purpose of the story, presumably, is for anonymous CIA officers to repeat the old worried threat—that they'll "lose their sense of mission" if the details of their actions become known to those exercising oversight over them. And, most amusing, the threat that CIA will end oversight if any of these details leak.

"If they blow this, if stuff leaks or it all gets turned into a political circus, you can close the book on the current system of intelligence oversight," one intel official warned. "Nobody will trust it."

Hahahahahaha!!! After eight years of almost no oversight, after months of CIA claiming it briefed Congress when it didn't and claiming it said things in briefings that it didn't. Add in the trumped up intelligence, and there really is no trust in the other direction. And there is no "current system of intelligence oversight." There are the past years, and there's this, an attempt to actually exercise oversight after the fact. Oversight, of course, that is mandated by law. Yet here you've got this guy, threatening to "close the book on the current system of oversight" if this "gets turned into a political circus."

And I can't help but notice that it's the "former senior agency official," who might be someone like Jose Rodriguez, the kind of person who was brainstorming torture over cables (and in one case, according to the May 30, 2005 OLC memo, ordered the onsite interrogators to waterbaord Abu Zubaydah an extra time even though interrogators deemed him compliant), who is reporting the "nervousness" of the officers in question. I'm sure the guy who ordered up that extra torture—in violation of even the Bybee Two memo—is pretty "nervous" about the prospect of Congress learning who issued the order.

Which is what this is all about. Seeing these cables will, at a minimum, allow the Senate

Intelligence Committee to pinpoint when the torture started, and whether it came before or after approvals. It'll allow them to determine whether the CIA really tried non-coercive questioning before using torture, and whether that non-coercive interrogation was even minimally competent. It'll allow the CIA to see all the false information provided under torture.

Finally, kudos to DiFi. I've had my worries about this inquiry—conducted in secret by a committee that has a history of caving to the CIA under both Democratic and Republican leadership. The CIA may be squawking about Congress exercising oversight for once, but I, for one, am all in favor of it.