

JOHN HANNAH: UNITARY EXECUTIVES CAN ASSASSINATE ENEMY LEADERS

In his appearance tonight on Wolf Blitzer, Sy Hersh said the same thing I said about his "revelation" that JSOC had assassination squads that bypassed normal reporting channels—Hersh pointed out that he had reported all that previously, last July. The biggest news in that part of his appearance is that Hersh revealed the number of countries—twelve—in which JSOC could work its assassination teams.

After Hersh appeared, Wolf had John Hannah, Cheney's replacement Scooter and by far the biggest hack witness at the Libby trial, to try to rebut Hersh's reporting.

Though Hannah didn't really do that.

Instead, he dismissed Hersh's concerns about the legality of the operations by insisting that the Chairs of the Intelligence and Armed Services committees, and Congressional leadership, could learn about these operations. Aside from the fact that Hannah admitted he didn't actually know that to be true, he's working on the assumption that they'll come and ask about something that Hannah admits is a very close hold.

Wolf: And when he says this JSOC, the Joint Special Operations Command has this authority that they don't even tell Congress about?

Hannah: It is extremely hard for me to believe, I, I, don't know exactly what the consultations are with the Congress but it's hard for me to believe that those committee chairmen and the leadership on the Hill involved in intelligence and armed services, if they

want to know about these operations, cannot get this information from the Defense Department.

Wolf: And so this would be, from your perspective—and you worked for the Bush Administration for many years—it would be totally constitutional, totally legal to go out, find these guys, and to whack them.

Hannah: There's no question, in a theater of war, when we are at war—and there's no doubt, we are still at war against Al Qaeda in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. and on that Pakistani border—that our troops have the authority to go out after and capture and kill the enemy, including the leadership of the enemy.

Ultimately, though, Hannah resorts to the Cheneyesque justification for all abuses of power, the AUMF, arguing that troops "in the theater of war" can capture and kill the enemy.

Of course, we've already seen that, until last November at least, the Bush Administration considered the US to be in the theater of war. And Hannah pretends these assassinations are only going on in Iraq (if you're Nuri al-Maliki or more pointedly, Moqtada al-Sadr, how does this make you feel?), Afghanistan (I hear we're turning on Hamid Karzai), and those border regions of Pakistan (golly, I seem to recall that Benazhir Bhutto was assassinated). But, as I mentioned, Hersch said these teams operated in twelve countries.

But don't worry—if they assassinate someone in one of those twelve countries and Carl Levin happens to learn about it after the fact, according to John Hannah he can ask DOD for details.