

EVEN AS HE JOINS TRIBUTE TO GEORGE W. BUSH, OBAMA CAPITULATES TO WMD FEARMONGERS

Congratulations to Shrub, who today gets his very own (as Jim calls it) Lie Bury.

How appropriate that even as the President who lied us into war with false WMD claims was speaking, the national security establishment was hyperventilating over what some are claiming is “confirmation” that Bashar al-Assad has used chemical weapons.

The reports are based on a letter sent to John McCain and Carl Levin – in response to a request they made 24 hours ago – stating (in part) the following:

Our intelligence community does assess with varying degrees of confidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale in Syria, specifically the chemical agent sarin. This assessment is based in part on physiological samples. Our standard of evidence must build on these intelligence assessments as we seek to establish credible and corroborated facts. For example, the chain of custody is not clear, so we cannot confirm how the exposure occurred and in what conditions. We do believe that any use of chemical weapons in Syria would very likely have originated with the Assad regime. Thus far, we believe that the Assad regime maintains custody of these weapons, and has demonstrated a willingness to escalate its horrific use of violence against the Syrian people.

[snip]

Given the stakes involved, and what we have learned from our own recent experience, intelligence assessments alone are not sufficient – only credible and corroborated facts that provide us with some degree of certainty will guide our decision-making, and strengthen our leadership in the international community.

This letter comes a week after, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper had suggested whether Syria had used chemical weapons was a policy question, not an intelligence one, and DIA Director Mike Flynn had said (in response to a question about North Korea intelligence) that DIA's standard for confidence was lower than that of other Intelligence Community Agencies.

The government is saying the following:

- Some IC members are very confident Assad has used sarin; others are not as confident
- That judgment is based on physiological evidence (presumably taken from victims), but not "corroborated" by evidence about chain of control
- That judgment assumes that any chemical weapons used in Syria would come from Assad

And based on that information, McCain and far too many members of the press are saying this "confirms" that Assad used chemical weapons.

Well, if and when we go to war based on WMD this time, Obama will be able to say that Congress was the entity making the most out of carefully

caveated intelligence claims, not the President (though John Kerry appears to speaking without nuance).

Update: I've changed the headline to try to clarify the relationship between the Bush library ceremony and this release. I'm still not certain I'm happy with it, though, so please let me know if you've got suggestions.

Update: Arms Control Wonk's Jeffrey Lewis commented on this, talking about the implicit shortcomings in the claims above (though with more credibility). In addition, he notes that because we've made this a "red line," it increases the likelihood those who want us to intervene will cross it themselves.

Having set a red line for US involvement to deter Assad, we've also created an incentive for certain groups to tell stories that might result in more US assistance. As I have noted before, these groups don't appear particularly scrupulous when it comes to the truth. So, I'd be very, very careful about leaping to conclusions.

And he also observes that even while the evidence might support a claim that someone in Assad's regime used Sarin, it doesn't appear to amount to an attack.

Suddenly the constant references to the "small scale" use becomes more clear – we don't have multiple victims in a single use, as might be expected if the Syrians gassed a military unit or a local community. At most, we have two events in which only one person was exposed.