

SOMEONE HACKED OUR MEMORY: “RETALIATION,” “DETERRENCE,” “ESCALATION”

The WSJ has a story developing on earlier WSJ and NYT reporting that someone – believed to be Iran – was using cyberattacks on energy companies in preparation to sabotage operations.

And while the WSJ responsibly includes a short paragraph noting that the US “has previously launched its own cyberattacks” on Iran to sabotage its nuke program, none of the people they interview seem to remember that we struck Iran first and that this should be regarded as retaliation to our own provocation, not vice versa.

In response, U.S. officials warn that Iran is edging closer to **provoking U.S. retaliation**.

“This is representative of stepped-up cyber activity by the Iranian regime. The more they do this, the more our concerns grow,” a U.S. official said. “What they have done so far has certainly been noticed, and they should be cautious.”

[snip]

Underscoring the Obama administration’s growing concern, the White House held a high-level meeting late last month on how to handle the Iranian cybersecurity threat. No decisions were made at that meeting to take action, however, and officials will reconvene in coming weeks to reassess, a U.S. official said.

“It’s reached a really critical level,” said James Lewis, a cybersecurity

specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who frequently advises the White House and Capitol Hill. “We don’t have much we can do **in response, short of kinetic warfare.**”

The Obama administration sees the energy-company infiltrations as a signal that **Iran hasn’t responded to deterrence**, a former official said.

In October, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta issued a veiled threat to Iran, which he did not name in his speech, by warning the Saudi Aramco hack represented a **dangerous escalation** in cyberwarfare. Since then, the Iranian attacks have only **ramped up**. [my emphasis]

One of the reasons we’re likely left with little to do in response short of “kinetic warfare,” of course, is we’ve already economically sabotaged Iran’s economy with sanctions, gutting the already fewer targets we might hit to strike back. (Also, the countries that have exemptions to trade with Iran for oil likely would frown on any attempt on our part to further devastate Iran’s energy sector.)

You’d think someone would have thought of this entirely predictable state of affairs before advising the most cyber-vulnerable nation on earth to pioneer the use of syberwar to sabotage key infrastructure, huh?