

PRESIDENTIAL PARSING

Anonymous Liberal has a really important post that shows that—wait for it—Alberto Gonzales is a lying sack of shit. AL shows that, in the same Senate appearance where Gonzales tried to parse the Administration out of trouble for illegally spying on American citizens by claiming the program **wasn't** the program, Gonzales also admitted that the program **was** the program. Orwell would be proud.

But AL also points back to the radio address where President Bush famously confirmed the program that both was and wasn't the program, and I see that Gonzales' precarious parsing was built on top of Bush's own precarious parsing. Bush's confirmation consists of confirming certain details about certain activities that have occurred since fall 2001.

In the weeks following the terrorist attacks on our nation, I authorized the National Security Agency, consistent with U.S. law and the Constitution, to intercept the international communications of people with known links to al Qaeda and related terrorist organizations.Â Before we intercept these communications, the government must have information that establishes a clear link to these terrorist networks.

Those details include intercepting international communications of people with known links to Al Qaeda. Bush repeats, before such wiretapping occurs, "the government must have information that establishes a clear link to these terrorist networks."

Bush's admission here carefully avoids conceding two details that the program has been reported to include: the tapping of domestic communications, and the tapping of people whose link to any terrorist networks have only been established through legally-suspect data-mining.

In other words, Bush is not admitting to the two aspects of the program that most clearly violate FISA: the tapping of domestic communications, and tapping people for whom probable cause has not been established. These, I'm certain, are the same parsing distinctions that Gonzales has in mind when he refers to the program that is/is not the program.

Following this paragraph of distinctions, Bush makes the only reference to "a program" that appears in the whole address.