

MADAME SECRETARY FINALLY ACCEPTS AN INVITATION

Frankly, I've been holding my breath since I first saw this (tentatively) on Selise's weekly hearing schedule. After all, Waxman has been trying to get Condi Rice to appear before the Oversight Committee since early spring. But they've now announced the hearing, so I'm breathing again.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform will hold a hearing entitled, "The State Department and the Iraq War" on Thursday morning, October 25, 2007, in 2154 Rayburn House Office Building.

The hearing will examine unanswered questions regarding the performance of the State Department on several significant issues relating to the Iraq war, including the impact of the activities of Blackwater USA and corruption within the Iraqi ministries on the prospects of political reconciliation in Iraq. The Committee may also discuss with the Secretary allegations of wrongdoing associated with the construction of the new U.S. Embassy Compound in Baghdad, as well as other matters under investigation by the Committee.

WHO: The Honorable Condoleezza Rice,
Secretary of State

That said, I imagine Condi's neatest piece of diplomacy since taking over as Secretary of State was this hearing (granted, the competition isn't all that stiff). The Crypt reports that Condi will face a wide range of questions.

Condoleezza Rice is scheduled to appear

before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Thursday to answer questions about corruption within the Iraqi government, the possibility of political reconciliation in that war-ravaged country and the department's controversial security contract with Blackwater USA, according to a release from the committee.

Oversight Chairman Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.) has been pressing Rice and other agency officials for months to testify about corruption and the department's contract with Blackwater. According to the release, committee members will also be asking about allegations of misconduct in the construction of the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad. [my emphasis]

Which is to say, don't expect Condi to answer any questions about why her NSC put the Niger claims into the 2003 SOTU after having been forced to take it out of a speech three months earlier.

FWIW, I suspect Condi agreed to appear in a desperate attempt to pitch State's recent attempts to exercise oversight over contractors as real progress. Consider: Congress has the ability to take much of the freedom on contracting out of the hands of State, which would devastate State's initiatives in Iraq (not to mention the CIA's). So if Condi wants to avoid ceding all of Iraq to DOD, she needs to convince Congress she has this under control and that her recent changes will work.

Too bad she always comes off so unconvincingly when she testifies before Congress.

Update: More evidence Condi is trying to arrive in front of Waxman to make assurances she has fixed everything at State:

The State Department's security chief announced his resignation on Wednesday in

the wake of last month's deadly Blackwater USA shooting incident in Baghdad and growing questions about the use of private contractors in Iraq.

Richard Griffin, the assistant secretary of state for diplomatic security, announced his decision to resign at a weekly staff meeting, according to an internal informational e-mail sent to colleagues.