

LOST AMONG THE FINDINGS IN SYRIA

The Neocons have been pressuring Obama to do something in Syria. So it's thoroughly unsurprising that we're officially learning what we've known for months: the CIA has been involved in Syria. According to Mark Hosenball the Finding Obama signed authorizing such actions permits us to collaborate at a "secret" command center on or close to our air base at Incirlik.

A U.S. government source acknowledged that under provisions of the presidential finding, the United States was collaborating with a secret command center operated by Turkey and its allies.

[snip]

This "nerve center" is in Adana, a city in southern Turkey about 60 miles from the Syrian border, which is also home to Incirlik, a U.S. air base where U.S. military and intelligence agencies maintain a substantial presence.

The Finding doesn't authorize arming the rebels (though Hosenball's sources seem unsure about the general scope of the Finding), but NBC has reported that the Saudis and Qataris have already armed them with shoulder-launched missiles.

It's just like old times! The US partnering with Saudis to get shoulder-launched missiles into the hands of rebels with dubious loyalties. Whatever could go wrong with that?

There are two details about this that deserve notice.

What happened to the leak hawks in Congress?

First, this story is based on the leak of a

covert Finding—precisely the kind of leak that Congress has gone on the warpath against. Hosenball attributes his reporting to US sources—an attribution that can (though doesn't necessarily) refer to Congressional sources.

U.S. sources familiar with the matter said.

[snip]

A U.S. government source acknowledged

And while he notes—and names—the Senators who have been pressuring Obama to do precisely what he has been doing for months, Hosenball doesn't name the members of Congress who are opposed to such an action.

Some U.S. lawmakers, such as Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, have criticized Obama for moving too slowly to assist the rebels and have suggested the U.S. government should become directly involved in arming Assad's opponents.

Other lawmakers have suggested caution, saying too little is known about the many rebel groups.

In short, chances are not insignificant that a Congressional source leaked the contents of a Finding authorizing covert operations.

And yet ... crickets!

Those same Senate Intelligence Committee leak hawks who have authorized a range of stupid actions to prevent leaks seem unperturbed by a leak revealing information that is as sensitive as the leaks they're demanding be investigated.

How does anti-Assad Finding relate to the Assad-cooperation authorized under the Gloves Come Off Memorandum of Notification?

Then there's this. In his description of all the things included in the Gloves Come Off

Memorandum of Notification authorizing the war on terror, Bob Woodward said cooperation with Syria (and Libya) were included.

[George Tenet] called for initiating intelligence contact with some rogue states such as Libya and Syria that he said might be helpful in trying to destroy al Qaeda. For the CIA to obtain helpful information against the terrorists, they might have to get their hands dirty. (*Bush at War* 77)

We know the MON included such cooperation with Libya because liberated documents have reflected cooperation on renditions. And Maher Arar, who was rendered to Syria and tortured, can tell you all about what our cooperation with Syria entailed.

The thing is, the MON authorizing cooperation with Syria remains in effect. We know that to be true because Judge Richard Wesley, in enabling the government to keep all mention of this MON secret a few months ago, stated it pertained to "active intelligence activity." Rather than writing a new MON—one that doesn't give CIA carte blanche in deciding the limits of things like targeted killings—Obama is still relying on this MON for things like killing American citizens.

So does that mean the CIA is at once authorized to share intelligence with Bashar al-Assad (under the Gloves Come Off MON) and help rebels overthrow and probably kill him (under this new Finding)?

Probably, there is a very simple explanation for this (and for the fact that we helped to kill Moammar Qaddafi, as well). Probably, the new Finding (and whatever Finding authorized the activities our spooks engaged in in Libya) simply includes language canceling the prior language authorizing cooperation with Assad. So no big deal, really.

Still, doesn't that give lie to the

Administration's seeming treatment of that 11 year old MON as inviolate? That is, if this Finding renders (heh) part of that MON meaningless, then maybe it wouldn't be so hard for Obama to write a new MON, one that involved actual oversight.