

OBAMA'S INTELLIGENCE LEADERS: FOR GAO OVERSIGHT BEFORE THEY WERE AGAINST IT

Yesterday, we talked about how Rahm Emanuel opposed indefinite detention before he started working for it with Lindsey Graham.

Today, Steven Aftergood shows that Obama's two intelligence heads, Leon Panetta and Dennis Blair, supported GAO oversight of intelligence activities before—presumably—they supported yesterday's veto threat of GAO oversight.

As a Congressman in 1987, Leon Panetta actually introduced a measure to give GAO oversight authority over the CIA.

Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA) and others have repeatedly argued that the GAO could usefully supplement the intelligence oversight process without detracting anything. "It is Congress's responsibility to ensure that the IC carries out its critical functions effectively and consistent with congressional authorization. For too long, GAO's expertise and ability to engage in constructive oversight of the IC have been underutilized," Sen. Akaka said last year.

In 2008, Sen. Akaka chaired a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subcommittee hearing (at which I testified [pdf]) on the feasibility and utility of GAO intelligence oversight. "Congress must redouble its efforts—that is what we are trying to do—to ensure that U.S. intelligence activities are conducted efficiently, effectively, and with due respect for the civil rights and civil liberties of Americans, and I

will work to see that it does,” Sen. Akaka said then.

Amazingly, an earlier version of the proposal for an expanded GAO role in intelligence oversight was introduced in 1987 by then-Rep. Leon Panetta, who is now the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

According to Rep. Panetta’s proposed “CIA Accountability Act of 1987” (pdf) (H.R. 3603 in the 100th Congress), “Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Comptroller General [who directs the GAO] shall audit the financial transactions and shall evaluate the programs and activities of the Central Intelligence Agency” either at his own initiative or at the request of the congressional intelligence committees.

And during his confirmation hearings, Blair was open to the possibility of GAO oversight as well.

At the January 22, 2009 confirmation hearing (pdf) of Adm. Dennis C. Blair to be Director of National Intelligence, Adm. Blair also acknowledged a role for GAO in intelligence oversight.

Sen. Ron Wyden asked him: “If the GAO is conducting a study at the direction of one of the intelligence committees using properly cleared staff, will you give them the access they need to do their work?”

Adm. Blair replied: “Senator, I’m aware that the direction of GAO studies and the terms of them are generally subject to talk between the two branches of government for a variety of reasons, and subject to having those discussions, ultimately I believe the GAO has a job to do and I will help them do that job.”

But, along with Obama's opposition to investigating the Amerithrax investigation, he is now threatening to veto legislation that advocates just this kind of oversight.