

GOOD THING OBAMA KEPT THAT IRAQ AUMF LYING AROUND

Remember how both Congress and the Administration refused to repeal the Iraq AUMF?

Maybe they wanted to have it to hang over Nuri al-Maliki's head for the time when Iraqis were discovered helping Iran evade sanctions? The NYT reports that Elaf Islamic Bank—which Obama called out last month—is just one of a number of Iraqi institutions helping Iran bust our sanctions.

The little-known bank singled out by the United States, the Elaf Islamic Bank, is only part of a network of financial institutions and oil-smuggling operations that, according to current and former American and Iraqi government officials and experts on the Iraqi banking sector, has provided Iran with a crucial flow of dollars at a time when sanctions are squeezing its economy.

[snip]

In announcing that he was “cutting off” Elaf Islamic Bank, Mr. Obama said it had “facilitated transactions worth millions of dollars on behalf of Iranian banks that are subject to sanctions for their links to Iran’s illicit proliferation activities.”

[snip]

Iraqi banking experts said last week that the bank was still allowed to participate in the Iraq Central Bank’s daily auction at which commercial banks can sell Iraqi dinars and buy United States dollars. These auctions are a crucial pathway for Iranian access to the international financial system.

It's an interesting predicament for the Administration. At the same time as they're systematically taking out Iran's allies and/or implicating them as expansively as they dare, they're in a bit of a pickle with Iran's closest geographic ally, the one with the biggest oil reserves.

Which may explain why James Risen (with Duraïd Adnan) is reporting this story. Sure, he has written some of the key financial flow stories in the last decade. But he's not exactly in good grace with this—or any recent—Administration. And the whole story reads like one that the Administration—which hasn't found a Syrian or Lebanese insinuation they wouldn't magnify—doesn't want reported.

The Obama administration is not eager for a public showdown with the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki over Iran just eight months after the last American troops withdrew from Baghdad.

That sheepish tone continues through the rest of the article.

Consider. The one country where Obama can't engage in the same kind of hardass approaches as he has elsewhere (at least not before the election) is helping Iran to flout sanctions. Obama can't admit the truth—that Iran won the Iraq War. If he does, the neocons will accuse him of withdrawing prematurely. If he takes a hard stance, I might no longer be the one person talking about the extant AUMF.

And yet Iraq seems to be a key hole in the sanctions.