

Bush Funneling Money to al Qaeda-Related Groups

By [Seymour M. Hersh](#)

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New Yorker columnist Sy Hersh says the “single most explosive” element of his latest article involves an effort by the Bush administration to stem the growth of Shiite influence in the Middle East (specifically the Iranian government and Hezbollah in Lebanon) by funding violent Sunni groups.

Hersh says the U.S. has been “pumping money, a great deal of money, without congressional authority, without any congressional oversight” for covert operations in the Middle East where it wants to “stop the Shiite spread or the Shiite influence.” Hersh says these funds have ended up in the hands of “three Sunni jihadist groups” who are “connected to al Qaeda” but “want to take on Hezbollah.”

Hersh summed up his scoop in stark terms: “We are simply in a situation where this president is really taking his notion of executive privilege to the absolute limit here, running covert operations, using money that was not authorized by Congress, supporting groups indirectly that are involved with the same people that did 9/11.” Watch it:

Hersh added, “All of this should be investigated by Congress, by the way, and I trust it will be. In my talking to membership – members there, they are very upset that they know nothing about this. And they have great many suspicions.”

Transcript:

Blitzer: Near the end of your article, you have this explosive point in there about John Negroponte, who is now going to be the deputy secretary of state, as opposed to the head of U.S. intelligence.

You write this: “I was subsequently told by the two government consultants and the former senior intelligence officials that the echoes of Iran-Contra were a factor in Negroponte’s decision to resign from the National Intelligence directorship and accept the position of deputy secretary of state.”

Explain what you were hearing, because that is obviously a very explosive charge.

Hersh: Yes. It is probably the single most explosive, if you will, or depressing – or distressing sort of thing I discovered in the last few months, which is simply this. This administration has made a policy change, a decision that they are going to put all of the pressure they can on the Shiites, that is the Shiite regime in Iran, the Shiite – and they are also doing everything they can to stop Hezbollah – which is Shiite, the Hezbollah

organization from getting any control or any more of a political foothold in Lebanon.

So they essentially, I quote the – I saw Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, and he described it this way, as “fitna (ph),” the Arab word for “civil war.” As far as he is concerned, we are interested in recreating what is happening in Iraq in Lebanon, that is Sunni versus Shia. And in looking into that story, and I saw him in December, I found this. That we have been pumping money, a great deal of money, without congressional authority, without any congressional oversight, Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia is putting up some of this money, for covert operations in many areas of the Middle East where we think that the – we want to stop the Shiite spread or the Shiite influence.

They call it the “Shiite Crescent.” And a lot of this money, and I can’t tell you with absolute certainty how – exactly when and how, but this money has gotten into the hands – among other places, in Lebanon, into the hands of three – at least three jihadist groups. There are three Sunni jihadist groups whose main claim to fame inside Lebanon right now is that they are very tough. These are people connected to al Qaeda who want to take on Hezbollah. So this government, at the minimum, we may not directly be funneling money to them, but we certainly know that these groups exist.

My government, which arrests al Qaeda every place it can find them and send – some of them are in Guantanamo and other places, is sitting back while the Lebanese government we support, the government of Prime Minister Siniora, is providing arms and sustenance to three jihadist groups whose sole function, seems to me and to the people that talk to me in our government, to be there in case there is a real shoot-’em-up with Hezbollah and we really get into some sort of serious major conflict between the Sunni government and Hezbollah, which is largely Shia, who are basically – or as you know, there is a coalition headed by Hezbollah that is challenging the government right now, demonstrations, sit-ins.

There has been some violence. So America, my country, without telling Congress, using funds not appropriated, I don’t know where, by my sources believe much of the money obviously came from Iraq where there is all kinds of piles of loose money, pools of cash that could be used for covert operations.

All of this should be investigated by Congress, by the way, and I trust it will be. In my talking to membership – members there, they are very upset that they know nothing about this. And they have great many suspicions.

We are simply in a situation where this president is really taking his notion of executive privilege to the absolute limit here, running covert operations, using money that was not authorized by Congress, supporting groups indirectly that are involved with the same people that did 9/11, and we should be arresting these people rather than looking the other way...

Blitzer: And your bottom line, Sy...

Hersh: ... and could lead to a real mess...

Blitzer: Your bottom line is that Negroponte was aware of this, obviously, and he wanted to distance himself from it? That is why he decided to give up that position and take the number two job at the State Department?

Hersh: He – that is one of the reasons, I was told. Negroponte also was not in tune with Cheney. There was a lot of complaints about him because he was seen as much of a stickler,

too ethical for some of the operations the Pentagon wants to run.

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