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America's Foreign Dictatorship

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President Obama's reaction to the alleged Iranian assassination plot reflects, once again, the dictatorial powers that the president of the United States now wields in foreign affairs.

As many commentators are noting, the whole scheme appears to be as bogus as a 3-dollar bill, but that isn't really the point. The point is that we now live in a country in which the ruler wields the omnipotent power to send the entire nation into war for whatever reason he wants, bogus or not.

That's not the way things were supposed to be. The Framers didn't devise a system where the president had that omnipotent power. When they called the federal government into existence with the Constitution, they delegated the power to declare war to Congress and the power to wage war to the president.

Thus, under the Constitution Obama is required to come to Congress with a request to declare war on Iran (or even to impose sanctions on the country). Presumably Congress would say, "Show us the evidence on which you're relying for your request for us to declare war on Iran."

At that point, it would be "put up or shut up" time for Obama and his FBI, Justice Department, CIA, and Pentagon. They would have to submit their evidence to rigorous scrutiny from Congress, just as they're going to have to do in a criminal trial of the alleged assassination plotter, Manssor Arbabsiar. (That's assuming, of course, that they don't send Arbabsiar down the

“enemy combatant” route by removing him from the jurisdiction of America’s constitutional judicial system and delivering him into the clutches of the U.S. military.)

That’s not to say, of course, that Congress would necessarily decline to issue a declaration of war but rather that it’s an important barrier that Obama might not be able to overcome. Since war necessarily involves death, destruction, spending, debt, inflation, and infringements on liberty, that’s why the Framers decided to make it difficult for the president to send the nation into war against other nations.

But Obama doesn’t have to concern himself with that barrier. He now wields the authority to ignore that constitutional provision. When it comes to war, he is the declarer. He is the decider. He — and he alone (along with his advisers in the CIA and Pentagon) — decides whether America is going to war against Iran or any other nation.

And what happens if Obama sends the nation into war and the whole assassination plot turns out later to have been bogus? No problem. Obama will simply take the same position that George W. Bush took when he sent the United States into war against Iraq without the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war. Like Bush, Obama will simply claim that he regrets the error but that the troops are bringing “freedom and democracy” to Iran anyway.

The principle is actually no different with respect to Obama’s power to assassinate Americans. He doesn’t need a trial to determine whether a person really is engaged in an action that warrants a non-judicial execution. He is the decider — the determiner. He reviews the evidence and if he’s convinced of the person’s guilt, that’s all that’s necessary. He issues the order to take out the person, and the order is carried out by either the Pentagon or the CIA. No judicial review. No congressional impeachment. Just the omnipotent power to assassinate, along with the omnipotent power to send the nation into war.

Meanwhile, as the U.S. government accuses Iran of sending agents to conduct an assassination on American soil, the U.S. government continues to wield the post-9/11 “emergency” power to send its agents into any foreign country on earth to kidnap people, torture them, rendition them to dictatorial regimes to be tortured, or assassinate them.

It’s all enough to remind Americans of the dictatorial power that their ruler now wields in foreign affairs as well as the rank hypocrisy that people all over the world find so offensive.