

AUSTERITY, DRONES OPPOSED

Party System Fractures as Congress Challenges Obama

by Nancy Spannaus

March 16—The aftershocks of Sen. Rand Paul's (R-Ky.) historic filibuster against Barack Obama's determination to run an imperial Presidency, continue to reverberate across the United States, but especially in Washington, D.C. The filibuster has brought to the surface some of the simmering rage against Obama among Democrats, particularly on his determination to impose murderous cuts in entitlements, but also on his violations of the Constitution through his war policy. At the same time, Senator Paul's courageous stand has shaken up the Republicans who have signed on to deals with the Administration, especially in its assertion of dictatorial powers—exposing them as the toadies or hypocrites they are.

This shake-up of the party system holds great promise, noted Lyndon LaRouche in his March 15 webcast. Whether this breakdown in the party control that has dominated the U.S. for decades will continue, is not certain, of course. But it is clear, LaRouche said, that increasing numbers of legislators are coming to realize that the Obama Administration, itself a mere tool of the British monarchy and its intentions, is threatening to impose a Nazi-style dictatorship—and they either fight it now, or that threatened dictatorship may come to pass.

Stop War on Americans

House and Senate members from both parties have taken up the fight against Obama's drone warfare, since

the March 7 filibuster, demanding that the President finally release the secret documents which purport to authorize the killing of Americans without due process and global warfare through drone strikes. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) has addressed the particular issue raised by Paul, by introducing a bill, co-sponsored by Paul and Sen. Mike Lee (R-Colo.), to prohibit drone strikes against Americans on U.S. soil, on the same date as the filibuster. But, as Paul's filibuster itself demonstrated, the issue goes far beyond that particular scenario.

Although the President conceded a narrow point concerning when he can target American citizens, the issue is not going away. During his closed-door meeting with Senate Democrats March 12, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (W.Va.) confronted Obama on his two-year refusal to provide the legal memos justifying the use of lethal force against American terror suspects abroad. Obama was apparently taken aback, and was only able to muster a defense that, "This is not Dick Cheney we're talking about here."

At the annual Threat Assessment hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 13, Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), the Ranking Member, started out by noting that the stonewalling by the Administration on providing information of intelligence activities, including covert action, to the Intelligence Committee, "simply has to stop." He was followed by Rockefeller, who declared that the restrictions imposed on his ability to see documents were "an insult" and intolerable. His

fellow Democrat, Ron Wyden of Oregon, then promised that he too, was “going to be asking additional questions about drones and targeted killings in the days ahead.”

In the House of Representatives, most of the action is still coming from the Democrats, who have been emboldened to come out more openly against “their” President’s dumping of the Constitution in the “war on terror.” A letter sent to President Obama, signed by eight of the most liberal Democrats in the House, on March 11, was highly critical of the President’s program:

“The executive branch’s claim of authority to deprive citizens of life, and to do so without explaining the legal bases for doing so, sets a dangerous precedent and is a model of behavior that the United States would not want other nations to emulate.

“The information from the Justice Department memo leaked on February 4, 2013, in the context of an increasing devolution of accountability, transparency and Constitutional protections in U.S. counterterrorism operations, leaves us deeply concerned about what appears to constitute overly broad authority language, including, but not limited to:

- “1) An unbounded geographic scope;
- “2) Unidentified ‘high-level’ officials with authority to approve kill-lists;
- “3) A vaguely defined definition of whether a capture is ‘feasible’;
- “4) An overly broad definition of the phrase ‘imminent threat,’ which re-defines the word in a way that strays significantly from its traditional legal meaning; and
- “5) The suggestion that killing American citizens and others would be legitimate ‘under the Authorization for Use of Military Force and the inherent right to national defense.’

“These are vague legal boundaries that raise the risk of the executive branch authorizing the deaths of American citizens otherwise protected by the Constitution and appear to effectively vitiate due process of law without meaningful oversight or accountability.

“Therefore, we ask that you release, in unclassified form, the full legal basis of executive branch claims in the areas which are the subject of this letter. The Executive’s claims of authority need to be fully articulated to the whole of Congress and the American people.

“We also ask that you prepare a report to Congress outlining the architecture of your Administration’s

drone program going forward, including your efforts to limit instances and remunerate victims of civilian casualties by signature drone strikes, broaden access to the due process for identified targets and continue to structure the drone program within the framework of international law. A 2012 GAO study reported that 75 countries and ‘certain terrorist organizations’ have acquired drones and either have or are seeking weaponized drones. We are growing increasingly concerned that there is a risk that our country’s ‘global war’ doctrine will further corrode the foundations of the international framework for protection of human rights....”

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), who initiated this letter, has already introduced a bill to repeal the Authorization of the Use of Military Force.

Leading Democrats Concur

The potential for a breakdown in the insane partisan system, which implicitly creates the conditions for an imperial Presidency, has found some dramatic expression in the days after the filibuster.

“Rand Paul is right,” said former U.S. Rep. Jane Harman (D-Calif.), who chaired the House Intelligence Committee, and now heads the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In a CNN “Security Clearance” column published March 14, Harman wrote: “Many disagree with Sen. Rand Paul on many issues, but he is spot-on about the need for a crystal clear framework regarding the domestic and international use of drones.” Harman went on to say that the letter sent to Paul by Attorney General Eric Holder “left more questions unanswered than answered,” adding: “Indeed, a simple ‘no’ is hardly reassuring when the policy it supports is not clear. In the domestic context, drones should never be used against citizens unless there is an armed conflict on U.S. soil.”

She adds: “America has seen the ‘creeping executive power’ movie before. Using lethal tools without public debate or clear legal authority is a mistake, a slippery slope, something we will come to regret.” She discusses the need for regulation of domestic drones which are being used for surveillance, etc., and concludes that “Rand Paul has managed to move the issue into the sunlight,” adding that the public needs to be involved in the fashioning of policy.

John Podesta, President Clinton’s White House Chief of Staff, who now heads the liberal Center for American Progress, apparently concurs. While never coming out and saying directly that Paul is right, Pod-

esta declared in a March 14 *Washington Post* op-ed, that Obama is wrong in withholding the legal documents justifying drone strikes. “President Obama is ignoring the system of checks and balances that has governed our country from its earliest days. And in keeping this information from the American people, he is undermining the nation’s ability to be a leader on the world stage and is acting in opposition to the democratic principles we hold most important,” he wrote.

“This is why I say, respectfully: Give them [the documents—ed.] up, Mr. President.... The American people have the right to know the laws they live under. In addition to allowing Congress to properly fulfill its oversight duties, the Administration should make available to the public the criteria justifying the targeted killing of Americans, and the safeguards put in place to protect against wrongful death.”

A Filibuster Against Austerity?

While the “issue” of Obama’s anti-Constitutional war policy is not going away, the uproar against the President’s assertion of dictatorial powers is also emerging on the question of austerity. Here the Demo-

crats are taking the lead, in full knowledge that Obama is pressing for dramatic cuts in entitlements—not to please the Republicans, but because he is committed to cutting what he (and his Wall Street/British controllers) consider to be “unsustainable” payments for the old and the sick.

In Obama’s March 12 meeting with the Senate Democrats’ caucus, Vermont Independent Bernie Sanders, and Democratic Senators Tom Harkin (Iowa) and Carl Levin (Mich.) took the point in strongly opposing Obama’s insistence on “balanced” cuts against the weak and vulnerable.

Harkin was quoted by *Politico*: “We’re not going to negotiate away our principals [sic] and what we think is best. When you’re talking about entitlements, Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, there is more than one way to solve that problem.” Levin challenged Obama on his proposal to use the so-called “chainsaw” CPI (Consumer Price Index) measure, which will cut Social Security benefits more and more deeply as the decade goes on.

Sanders told NPR after the meeting: “I’m going to fight as hard as I can, to make the point that Social Security has not contributed one nickel to the deficit.” And to the *Washington Post*’s Greg Sargent, Sanders said, “It’s more than just the filibuster. That’s a one-day tactic. This is about rallying the American people and winning.” “Filibustering may be part of it,” he said.

MSNBC talk-show host Ed Schultz interviewed Sanders, and lamented, “It pains me to say it, but President Obama really could be the president to start the undoing of the New Deal? Wow.”

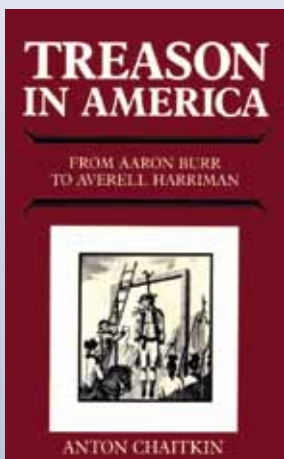
On the House side, a group of 107 Democrats has written an open letter to Obama announcing that they will vote “against any and every cut to Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security benefits—including raising the retirement age or cutting the cost of living adjustments that our constituents earned and need.” A second letter, signed by an additional 25 Democrats, simply promises that they will vote against any proposal that amounts to a benefit cut.

So far, the Republicans have stuck to their ideological mantra about more austerity, and no tax increases, giving Obama leverage against his own party’s revolt. But the dynamic for survival, against a rapacious banking establishment, could easily sweep this away as well—especially after the re-implementation of Glass-Steagall, which is supported by a significant number of Republicans.

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