

Obama Still on the Hook for Drone Killings, Benghazi

by Nancy Spannaus

Feb. 18—President Obama has only himself to blame for the fact that his choices for heading the CIA (John Brennan), the Department of Defense (Chuck Hagel), and now the Central Military Command (Gen. Lloyd Austin) are currently all on hold, as the U.S. Senate goes on a week-long recess. The “issue” blocking all the confirmations is the withholding of crucial documents by the Obama White House, along with its refusal to answer questions about its blatantly unconstitutional policies.

This point was made explicit during the Feb. 14 debate in the Senate, over whether the confirmation vote on the the President’s nominee for Defense Secretary, former Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), could go forward. The Senators want answers from Obama.

There are two broad areas of questioning on the table. One is the White House’s killer drone policy, which has been responsible for killing U.S. citizens abroad, in clear violation of the U.S. Constitution. The other is the still unexplained set of circumstances around the Sept. 11, 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya, and the coverup which followed. In both cases, the Obama Administration is dragging its feet, while applying behind-the-scenes pressure to get its way. So far, it hasn’t worked.

What’s at stake is far more than the fate of the nominees; it’s Constitutional government itself. For, if the President of the United States can get away with carrying out a secret kill policy, including against Americans, he is asserting Hitler-like powers contrary to ev-

erything the U.S. founding principles prescribed. And if he is to be permitted to cover up for an alliance with known al-Qaeda terrorists—as in the Libyan assassination of Amb. Chris Stevens and three other Americans—the President will be exerting license to act as a traitor to the United States.

The Drone Killings

The pressure being applied to the White House on the question of the drone killings, is coming from both sides of the aisle. From the Democratic side, Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), member and chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, respectively, are insisting on the release of *all* the memos that have been produced by the Justice Department on the “legality” of the drone killing policy. Feinstein issued a letter Feb. 13, reiterating the demand, which she reported had been joined by the ranking member of the Committee, Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.). Wyden has issued a more forthright threat that the Brennan nomination could not go forward, without the memos being released.

While the Republican Senators have been considerably softer on this issue, maverick Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has also threatened to put a hold on the Brennan nomination, unless he gets an answer to the question of whether the President believes he has the authority to kill Americans on American soil.

Paul, on CNN Feb. 13, said he wants to hear that no one, in the CIA or the Department of Defense, can kill

an American in the United States without some kind of judicial proceeding: “Senator Wyden asked Brennan this. In a committee hearing, he says, ‘Can you kill an American on American soil with a drone without a judicial hearing?’ And Brennan didn’t answer the question.”

Paul pointed out that both he and Wyden have asked for an answer to this question in writing. “And we don’t have an answer. So if you’re not going to answer ‘no,’ I think that means you’re essentially telling us ‘yes,’ you believe that the President has the power to kill an American in America . . . and that is very scary and worrisome to me that you would strike Americans.”

“Do you realize we do ‘signature strikes’ now?” Paul asked, noting that “we don’t even name . . . people we kill with drones. If there’s a line of traffic coming out of a camp, and we think that [it] is populated by people who don’t like America, we bomb them. Well, is that a high enough standard for Americans, maybe coming out of a city or an encampment somewhere in the U.S., where they’re meeting and saying anti-government things? Are we going to have signature strikes in America? I mean, it opens Pandora’s Box once you say, you may well kill Americans in America without any judicial trial, with politicians making the decision.”

Evasion after Evasion

President Obama went on a Google-sponsored video question-and-answer session Feb. 14, where he purported to answer a question on his authority to carry out drone killings. “There has never been a drone used on an American citizen on American soil,” Obama said. “We respect and have a whole bunch of safeguards in terms of how we conduct counterterrorism operations outside of the United States. The rules outside of the United States are going to be different than the rules inside the United States.”

What does that amount to? “Trust me.”

CIA Director nominee Brennan did answer in writing, but the answer was no more clear. Responding to the question of “Could the Administration carry out drone strikes inside the United States?”, Brennan’s answer, released Feb. 18, was: “This Administration has not carried out drone strikes inside the United States and has no intention of doing so.” This does not answer Senator Paul, who insists correctly that it’s not a question of whether the President intends to do so, but the fact that he *cannot* take such action by law

The issue remains to be fought out, and the question

remains as to whether the Senators keep their nerve.

Another wild card in the situation of the drone killings is the possibility, reported by a number of *EIR*’s Washington sources, that there is an unreleased Justice Department memo, which the White House rejected, because it either declared the practice unconstitutional, or was ambiguous on the subject. Should this memo come to light, as a result of the efforts of those opposing drone killings—of whom there are many, including in the CIA itself—the heat on Obama would accelerate enormously.

And Benghazi

Pressure from Senators on the unanswered questions on the Benghazi 9/11 atrocity has so far come from Republicans, who have threatened to filibuster the Hagel nomination. Faced with that threat, the White House, on Feb. 14, issued a letter to Senators Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), John McCain (R-Ariz.), and Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), in answer to their question about what actions the President took on the evening of Sept. 11, 2012 after he had learned of the attack on the Benghazi compound.

White House counsel Kathryn Ruemmler wrote that President Obama did *not* speak to any Libyan government officials until the night *after* the attack on the Benghazi consulate. It had already been disclosed, in the Feb. 7 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, that Obama never contacted Defense Secretary Leon Panetta or Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey after the 5 p.m. preliminary briefing on Sept. 11, 2012.

Senators Graham, Ayotte, and McCain are unlikely to be mollified by this partial response. On Sunday morning talk shows Feb. 17, both McCain and Graham provided a long list of questions about the Benghazi events which the White House had refused to answer.

On a slower track is legislation in the House of Representatives to establish a Select Committee on Benghazi, HR 36, which has been introduced, and now has 31 co-sponsors. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) compares the need for such a committee to those established for the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals—with the obvious implications for the role and fate of the President.

Ultimately, of course, it is not a pile of particular crimes which will “add up” to sufficient reason to oust President Obama, but his assertion of unconstitutional dictatorial powers, against the welfare of the American people.