



## Confirmation hearing for killer drones master

by Nat Hentoff, January 23, 2013

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After 25 influential years in the CIA, chief counterterrorism adviser John Brennan is currently in charge of Barack Obama's increasing drone-plane assassinations of terrorism suspects, all of which is happening outside our courts. On Feb. 7, he will appear before the Senate Intelligence Committee for a promotion to CIA director.

When this confirmation hearing is over, how many of the senators and viewers will agree with Micah Zenko, Douglas Dillon Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who writes:

"No politically appointed official in U.S. history has played such a prominent role in killing so many people outside of a war zone as John Brennan" ("Pull back the curtain on drones," New York Daily News, Jan. 10).

Some of these senators will also be questioning Brennan about his involvement with George W. Bush and Dick Cheney's torture policy. This policy is detailed in the committee's classified 6,000-page report, only fragmentarily leaked so far, on the "coercive interrogations" used by the CIA and other forces that have shamed us globally, while also giving al-Qaida reason to recruit more members.

But I am particularly interested in Brennan's questioning by committee member Ron Wyden. The Democratic senator from Oregon is one of the few members of Congress who continually insist on bringing back our Constitution's definition of justice, countering the Bush-Cheney-Obama extrajudicial treatment of alleged terrorists and their broadly linked "supporters."

Before the confirmation hearing, Wyden wrote a letter earlier this month to John Brennan requesting, as reported by The New York Times' Scott Shane, "that he and other committee members be allowed to review secret Justice Department legal opinions justifying the killing of American citizens (by Brennan-directed drones) in counterterrorism operations" ("Senator Asks to View Files on Killings of Americans," The New York Times, Jan. 15).

This letter to Brennan was signed only by Wyden.

The Times' Shane adds: "Wyden also requested several other documents he said he has sought without success, including a list of countries in which the intelligence agencies have carried out lethal operations."

Also known as killings.

Since these murders are presumably done for our national security, shouldn't We The People know who is being killed in our name?

For example, try to imagine that you are the parents of this obliterated son, who Code Pink and Global Exchange co-founder Medea Benjamin recently wrote about at [globalexchange.org](http://globalexchange.org):

“In October 2011, 16-year-old Tariq Aziz attended a gathering in Islamabad where he was taught how to use a video camera so he could document the drones that were constantly circling over his Pakistani village, terrorizing and killing his family and neighbors.

“Two days later, when Aziz was driving with his 12-year-old cousin to a village near his home in Waziristan to pick up his aunt, his car was struck by a Hellfire missile. With the push of a button by a pilot at a U.S. base thousands of miles away, both boys were instantly vaporized — only a few chunks of flesh remained.

“Afterwards, the U.S. government refused to acknowledge the boys' deaths or explain why they were targeted. Why should they? This is a covert program where no one is accountable for their actions” (“John Brennan vs. a Sixteen-Year-Old,” [globalexchange.org](http://globalexchange.org), Jan. 9).

And, as I often ask, is this still America? It's entirely possible that most Americans — across racial-religious-political and other lines — who voted to re-elect President Obama knew little or nothing about the assassination of these 12- and 16-year-old kids. The story received very little attention at the time, with some coverage in media outlets like The Guardian and The New York Times.

But surely some in this amalgam of pro-Obama voters knew of drone assassinations — not only of the dead suspects, but also of the civilians nearby who came to mourn their loved ones and friends. Did this corollary slaughter of the innocent bother any Americans who voted to keep our president of Hellfire missiles in office?

How come Obama's first intention, soon after taking office, to make Brennan head of the CIA caused so much resistance because of his involvement in the Bush-Cheney torture policy? The nominee had to withdraw his name, but now his reappointment causes less hostility in Congress and among We The People than the nomination of Chuck Hagel for Secretary of Defense.

Penetrating news analyst Glenn Greenwald explains that, for four years under “Obama’s lead, the country has decided to ignore the fact that it committed grievous crimes as part of the ‘War on Terror.’ Obama’s Orwellian decree that we must ‘look forward, not backward’ has convinced huge numbers of citizens to sweep all this under the rug and pretend it never happened.

“That,” says Greenwald, “is what explains how Brennan went from radioactive and unconfirmable in 2008 to uncontroversial in 2013” (“Nomination Ignores War Crimes,” The New York Times, Jan. 8).

Returning to Medea Benjamin at [globalexchange.org](http://globalexchange.org), she recalls: “On my recent trip to Pakistan, I met with people whose loved ones had been blown to bits by drone attacks, people who have been maimed for life, young victims with no hope for the future and aching for revenge. For all of them, there has been no apology, no compensation, not even an acknowledgment of their losses. Nothing.”

I do not expect any of these shattered survivors will be among the witnesses at the Senate Intelligence Committee’s confirmation hearing of John Brennan.

But in world history, they will be present; and even in our own — if the First Amendment survives.

But what will the historians say about you?