



## Obama brings new historical disgrace on U.S.

By Nat Hentoff January 16, 2013

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I understand why President Barack Obama has full confidence in John Brennan, whom he has now nominated to head the CIA. Brennan's record of lawlessness, starting when he became chief of staff to CIA Director George Tenet in 1999, mirrors that of Obama.

They share contempt for the Constitution's separation of powers, allowing the executive branch to ignore Congress and the courts in the name of national security. When Obama first became president, for example, he wanted Brennan to head the CIA, but there was so much opposition to Brennan's deep involvement in George W. Bush and Dick Cheney's extra-judicial "dark side" (torture, including renditions of suspects to be tortured in other countries) that Brennan had to withdraw his name from consideration.

Instead, the president appointed Brennan his chief counterterrorism adviser, a post not requiring Senate confirmation. In this role, Brennan has been in charge of Obama's "kill list" of drone assassinations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, et al.

Brennan is already a key force in this administration's "disposition matrix," by which "the administration claims the authority to kill those named, anytime and anywhere, based on secret information and unreviewable judgments" ("Time for a Reset on Human Rights," Suzanne Nossel, Foreign Policy, Nov. 7).

Moreover, in these Obama-Brennan assassinations, "The administration has declared any man killed by a drone to be an enemy terrorist, and defends such killings regardless of resulting civilian casualties."

Now, all of you who voted to re-elect Obama, dig what the president said when, on Jan. 7, he proudly declared his choice for CIA chief: "(Brennan) has worked to embed our efforts in a strong legal framework."

Wow! This from a former teacher of constitutional law at the University of Chicago? It's no wonder that Brennan has always had direct, immediate access to Obama. They are soul brothers, united in their ceaseless suspension of our Constitution.

How many of you know — or care?

It's also no wonder that, on the fateful day when Obama told us of Brennan's further ascent, he turned to him and said: "John, you've been one of my closest advisers," adding, "I am deeply grateful for your extraordinary service."

Of course he's grateful.

The New York Post's Michael A. Walsh summarizes with piercing clarity what the Obama-Brennan conspiracy has accomplished: "In effect — and especially as employed by the Obama administration — the CIA has become the president's private army, with a classified budget, contracts with some extremely dubious operatives and under-the-table relations with thuggish and oppressive foreign governments. With its fleet of armed drones, it regularly rains death from the skies on enemies (some of them American citizens).

"That's a power that ought to be under the control of the regular military, not directly under the chief executive and his national-security henchmen" ("Spooky pick for CIA," Michael A. Walsh, the New York Post, Jan. 9).

Getting back to what these benighted soul brothers have done and how it may continue to affect us as Americans for a long time, I return to Suzanne Nossel, who is Amnesty International USA's former executive director. In her article in Foreign Policy, she emphasizes that these Obama-Brennan crimes are taking place in nations with which we are not at war, reminding us: "The administration is now backed into claiming that a war exists because it has convinced itself that it cannot function without a broad license to kill. Short of al Qaeda suing for peace, this war may never end. The administration's reshaping of the concept of war risks undoing over 100 years of evolution of the laws of war, and the protections those laws have delivered."

She goes on to make me uneasier than any other commenter has previously, explaining how we have allowed Obama and Brennan to outline America's values for the rest of the world:

"The next four years will define whether this rewriting of the rules becomes a bipartisan 'new normal' in the United States, and implicit permission for the rest of the world to sidestep human rights. ... The bipartisan affirmation of drone use will make those weapons routine for the United States and any other government with a kill list of its own."

She then reminds the president and his dear friend Brennan what Obama pledged in 2007: "To build a better, freer world, we must first behave in ways that reflect the decency and aspirations of the American people. This means ending the practices of shipping away prisoners in the dead of night to be tortured in far-off countries, of detaining thousands without charge of trial, of maintaining a network of secret prisons to jail people beyond the reach of the law."

But less than two years after Obama heralded our virtues, Brennan became his trusted confidante, overseeing the management of the killer drones. Notes Nossel:

"By stepping up drone attacks, he has turned angry families in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere into terrorist sympathizers, stoked anti-American sentiment, and set an example that other regimes use to rationalize abusive behavior."

Elsewhere, our renditions continue.

Of course Obama is delighted to have Brennan by his side for the next four years, with ever-greater authority to impose the American stamp of identity on these Hellfire missiles.

What would prevent the indispensable Brennan running for president four years from now?