

Brennan Refuses to Rule Out Drone Assassinations Within the US

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In written responses to questions submitted by the Senate Intelligence Committee, John Brennan, the Obama administration's nominee for director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), refused to rule out drone assassinations of American citizens on US soil. The committee on Friday released a declassified version of Brennan's responses.

Brennan, currently President Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser, is the architect and director of the program of drone missile assassinations that is run out of the White House with the personal participation of Obama. Asked squarely, "Could the Administration carry out drone strikes inside the United States?" Brennan replied, "This Administration has not carried out drone strikes inside the United States and has no intention of doing so."

This is what is known as a non-responsive answer. It is reasonable to assume that if the answer was "no," Brennan would simply have written, "no." Instead, in order to avoid a giving straightforward "yes," he answered a different question than the one that was asked.

Brennan's answers to the written questions make clear that there was nothing accidental about his refusal to rule out drone assassinations within the United States at his February 7 confirmation hearing before the Senate committee. It was, rather, an expression of a deliberate policy adopted by the Obama White House and the military/intelligence agencies.

When asked at the hearing whether he believed that the Obama administration could carry out drone assassinations on US soil, Brennan responded that he was determined to "optimize transparency on these issues, but at the same time, optimize secrecy and the protection of our national security." He thus completely evaded the question, and no member of the committee, Democrat or Republican, pursued the matter further.

The very real threat of presidential assassinations of US citizens and others within the United States starkly raises the specter of police-military dictatorship. Behind the legalistic double-talk of the administration's white paper on drone killings of Americans, made public two weeks ago, the US government is claiming unlimited powers to assassinate anyone, anywhere in the world.

By asserting the power to order the killing of alleged terrorists—secretly and without judicial or congressional oversight—and acting on this asserted power to kill thousands of people, including at least three American citizens—the Obama administration has effectively abrogated the US Constitution's Bill of Rights and the Fifth Amendment's guarantee that no person shall be "deprived of life ... without due process of law."

The lack of significant protest from any section of the political or media establishment underscores the disintegration of American democracy and the absence of any constituency for the defense of democratic rights within the US ruling class. Just how rapidly the American bourgeoisie is breaking with its own previous legal norms is demonstrated by the absence of serious opposition to Brennan's confirmation. Four years ago, Obama had to scuttle plans to name Brennan, then a top CIA official, to head the agency, due to protests over his role in and public defense of the Bush administration's use of torture.

Now the Senate is poised to confirm Brennan's nomination. The major newspapers either ignored the transcript of his written responses to the intelligence committee or carried perfunctory reports buried in their inside pages. The major organ of American liberalism, the *New York Times*, which has editorialized in support of Brennan's confirmation, did not bother even to report his refusal to rule out drone assassinations within the US.

On the same day that the Senate committee released Brennan's written responses, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has issued 1,428 domestic drone permits since 2007, a figure far higher than previous estimates. The newspaper wrote, "The FAA this week solicited proposals to create six sites across the country to test drones, a crucial step before widespread government and commercial use is approved."

Under Department of Homeland Security grants, many local police departments have already acquired drones and implemented their own drone spying programs. The use of drones within the US for manhunts, such as the recent dragnet by Los Angeles police in pursuit of rogue officer Christopher Dorner, is by now a reality. The hundreds of drones already buzzing overhead "can carry high-resolution video cameras, infrared sensors, license plate readers, listening devices and other high-tech gear," the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

Since 9/11, the foundations of a police state in the US have been systematically laid. Under the cover of the so-called "war on terror," the extrajudicial "wartime" powers of the president have been massively expanded. With Obama, this process has been intensified. The illegal drone assassination program has been expanded, along with renditions and domestic spying. Laws have been enacted sanctioning the military detention, without charges or trial, of US citizens.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned from the outset, the police state measures enacted since September 11, 2001 have nothing to do with protecting American citizens from terrorism. They are, on the contrary, designed to be used against the growth of working class opposition to social inequality and ever worsening living and working conditions.

Especially since the financial crash of 2008 that set off the greatest crisis of American and world capitalism since the Great Depression, the ruling classes in all of the major imperialist countries have turned to brutal austerity policies to place the burden of the failure of their system on the working class. With no policies to offer for alleviating the suffering of the people, and facing growing popular resistance, they are all turning to state violence and the criminalization of working class struggle.

In the United States, the center of the world crisis, the ruling class has likewise responded to the economic decline of American capitalism with militarism abroad and austerity and

increasing repression at home.

It would be politically naïve not to assume that the US military/intelligence apparatus is drawing up lists of political opponents to be eliminated, “disappeared” or imprisoned in the event of major social convulsions, just as Washington’s client dictatorships in Latin America, Indonesia and elsewhere have done in the past.

The American working class must make its own preparations for the mass struggles that lie ahead. At the center of these preparations, and the only basis for the defense of democratic rights, is the adoption of a socialist and revolutionary perspective whose aim is to break the grip of the corporate-financial ruling elite and replace its repressive state with a workers state.

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