

THE WHITE HOUSE — LISA MONACO? — “CUTTING OFF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY”

Too bad for Obama he has decided the great new way to aggressively prosecute leaks without the bad PR of doing it through the Courts is to have James Clapper's Inspector General investigate them. Because I'm betting the IC IG will be unenthusiastic about hunting down this admitted leaker.

Some U.S. intelligence officials said they were being blamed by the White House for conducting surveillance that was authorized under the law and utilized at the White House.

“People are furious,” said a senior intelligence official who would not be identified discussing classified information. “This is officially the White House cutting off the intelligence community.”

But I'm a bit more interested in this barb, putting Homeland Security Advisor Lisa Monaco solidly in the line of communication receiving intelligence from wiretaps on foreign leaders.

Any decision to spy on friendly foreign leaders is made with input from the State Department, which considers the political risk, the official said. Any useful intelligence is then given to the president's counter-terrorism advisor, Lisa Monaco, among other White House officials.

As I have twice noted, Monaco brings dramatically different experience to the

position than her predecessor, John Brennan. Rather than being implicated in the illegal program that was the root of many of the problems as the program moved under FISA Court review, she had had to try to clean them up while Assistant Attorney General for National Security, including at least the upstream violations. She also participated in the decision to shut down the Internet dragnet collection program.

After prior bitching about her silence during this scandal, she penned an op-ed last week laying out the evolving White House position.

Today's world is highly interconnected, and the flow of large amounts of data is unprecedented. That's why the president has directed us to review our surveillance capabilities, including with respect to our foreign partners. We want to ensure we are collecting information because we need it and not just because we can.

[snip]

Going forward, we will continue to gather the information we need to keep ourselves and our allies safe, while giving even greater focus to ensuring that we are balancing our security needs with the privacy concerns all people share.

The implication, of course, is that the same person voicing this "because we need it and not just because we can" has been implicated by receiving intelligence with Merkel's and other leaders names on it, and may be responsible for not alerting the President to it. The accuracy of the claim, of course, depends on whether the White House really shut down the collection on Merkel earlier this summer or only in the last week or so; remember tasking priorities are reassessed biannually. Moreover, it's not like

wiretaps on allied leaders would be the primary focus of someone whose job centers on counterterrorism.

The thing is, this attack can backfire, as having received this information puts Monaco in an appropriate position to know whether we were collecting it because we could, not because we need to.

Monaco has, in the past, been part of a team that deemed a program not valuable enough to sustain. Which means she has a little experience for the pushback the IC may be throwing at her in coming days.