

BLABBY BRENNAN TO REPLACE PUBLICITY PETRAEUS AT CIA?

“He is a horrendously political animal, and there will be a tendency to politicize information to put the best spin for the administration on it.”

—An anonymous CIA officer, speaking of John Brennan, with whom he worked at CIA during the Bush Administration

As predicted, John Brennan’s past support for torture has generated only limited concern from John McCain and Dianne Feinstein, but no real threat that it will hold up his confirmation. No one, as far as I know, seems to care that Brennan was involved in Dick Cheney’s illegal wiretap program, nor that he decided to give NCTC access to the federal data of completely innocent Americans, nor his “intimate familiarity” with the genesis of NYPD’s abusive domestic spying program. And while there has been much discussion of his role in drone strikes—much of it credulously insisting Brennan wants to put order to drone strikes with an effort stalled after Mitt lost—even drone skeptics like Ron Wyden have not yet raised it as a confirmation issue.

John Cornyn’s warning that Brennan won’t be approved until the leak investigations finish is much more interesting, however.

“John Brennan has not been absolved of responsibility for the slew of high-level security leaks that have characterized this White House,” Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) told POLITICO in a statement Monday. “This investigation needs to be resolved before his nomination can move forward.”

An aide to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.),

speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "The questions about national security leaks by this administration have not yet been answered, and that will obviously be an issue as the Senate considers his nomination."

Sure, to some degree Cornyn's professed concern just reflects Cornyn being not only a partisan asshole, but a hypocrite about leaks.

But there seems good reason to inquire into what John Brennan's sieve-like qualities will have on national security.

Consider his role in the exposure of the sources and methods used to set up a sting entrapping AQAP in an UndieBomb plot and with it sustaining the claim that AQAP wants to—and has the ability to—strike in the US. After the AP revealed there had been a plot (having held off at the request of the Administration), Brennan called his predecessors to spin the plot and in doing so made it clear that it was a sting, thereby exposing the British passport holder who set up the sting as an infiltrator.

At about 5:45 p.m. EDT on Monday, May 7, just before the evening newscasts, John Brennan, President Barack Obama's top White House adviser on counter-terrorism, held a small, private teleconference to brief former counter-terrorism advisers who have become frequent commentators on TV news shows.

According to five people familiar with the call, Brennan stressed that the plot was never a threat to the U.S. public or air safety because Washington had "inside control" over it.

Brennan's comment appears unintentionally to have helped lead to disclosure of the secret at the heart of a joint U.S.-British-Saudi undercover counter-terrorism operation.

A few minutes after Brennan's teleconference, on ABC's World News Tonight, Richard Clarke, former chief of counter-terrorism in the ClintonWhite House and a participant on the Brennan call, said the underwear bomb plot "never came close because they had insider information, insider control."

A few hours later, Clarke, who is a regular consultant to the network, concluded on ABC's Nightline that there was a Western spy or double-agent in on the plot: "The U.S. government is saying it never came close because they had insider information, insider control, which implies that they had somebody on the inside who wasn't going to let it happen."

The White House made it clear they would have revealed the plot anyway. Indeed, they did so in an analogous situation two years earlier. And our Saudi and Yemeni partners tend to boast about such things anyway. Much of the outrage over this so-called leak served only to beat up on the AP that had exposed the aforementioned abusive NYPD program.

Nevertheless, revelations about how Brennan briefs his predecessors who then run to their respective networks to officially leak this information show that he is an enthusiastic participant in the asymmetric spread of information in DC.

But hey. We knew that.

Nevertheless, the asymmetry is key. As I've noted, Brennan has an interesting closeness to half of the Administration's whistleblower prosecutions. Yet one of those prosecuted whistleblowers—John Kiriakou, whose book someone who looks exactly like Brennan helped to get published—suggested today that Brennan is "the most prolific leaker in this administration." A former senior Administration official seems to

agree.

"It's not on people's radar, but this could be an issue," said the former administration official, who asked not to be named discussing a potential downside of Brennan's nomination. "He's a guy who comes across as a strong, silent type who never speaks, [but] he actually does a lot of talking both internally with the president and externally with select, influential reporters. ... I'm not saying the guy seeks it, but [other White House officials] view him as the most credible internal mouthpiece on national security matters."

Which brings me back to this point. It's not just that Brennan exposes sources and methods while seemingly supporting the unprecedented prosecution of whistleblowers who do the same. But it's also that he does so for political gain. This is not—contra Brennan's many boosters—transparency. It's about enforcing an official version of events that often contradicts markedly from the truth.

Mind you, it is not at all unprecedented to have a skilled leaker madly spinning Administration policies rather than leveling with the American people at CIA. That doesn't make it good for national security, but it happens a lot.

All that said, one of yesterday's jokes is that Brennan—a man with ties to torture and illegal wiretapping—is replacing a guy purportedly ousted for a consensual affair. There are reasons why such affairs on the part of the Director of CIA raise more concerns in the nuclear era than they might have in the past. And that nuclear tie may be the related complications cited to explain why Petraeus had to resign.

Or maybe not. In Rajiv Chandrasekaran's recent report on Petraeus' habit of giving the pundits

who advanced his career Top Secret clearance and access to materials that might be used to oppose Administration policies, he suggested this practice was receiving new scrutiny at DOD, the kind of scrutiny that might necessitate retirement.

John Cornyn is largely being an asshole in raising Brennan's blabby mouth in respect to his nomination. But in doing so, he may just expose the deep hypocrisy underlying this Administration's asymmetric leaks. That may be the price Cornyn demands to rubberstamp Brennan's CIA appointment.