

“AN INTERNAL AND AN EXTERNAL REVIEW”

I’ll have more to say about WSJ’s report that Obama was unaware that the NSA was wiretapping 35 world leaders tomorrow.

But in my opinion, the most important detail in it reveals in addition to Obama’s James Clapper Committee to Make You Love the Dagnet, he has an internal review.

This summer, President Obama launched two reviews—an internal one and an external one. He highlighted them in a speech in August as part of a series of measures being taken to respond to the domestic uproar over NSA’s extensive spying practices in the U.S.

[snip]

The internal review, among different U.S. national security agencies, will be informed by findings from the external review, which is expected to deliver its final report in December, said White House spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden. [my emphasis]

Frankly, I don’t buy that Obama “highlighted” both these speeches in August. He highlighted his “independent” review, but mentioned nothing else that I can see.

Fourth, we’re forming a high-level group of outside experts to review our entire intelligence and communications technologies. We need new thinking for a new era. We now have to unravel terrorist plots by finding a needle in the haystack of global telecommunications. And meanwhile, technology has given governments – including our own – unprecedented capability to monitor communications.

So I am tasking this independent group to step back and review our capabilities – particularly our surveillance technologies. And they'll consider how we can maintain the trust of the people, how we can make sure that there absolutely is no abuse in terms of how these surveillance technologies are used, ask how surveillance impacts our foreign policy – particularly in an age when more and more information is becoming public. And they will provide an interim report in 60 days and a final report by the end of this year, so that we can move forward with a better understanding of how these programs impact our security, our privacy, and our foreign policy.

Nor did the White House provide any details on reviews in the readout of the Angela Merkel conversation last week.

In other words, I suspect that for some reason – probably for a variety of them – Obama has decided that The James Clapper Committee to Make You Love the Dragnet is insufficient to the task of restoring confidence in the dragnet, so has people internal to the Administration working on fixes, probably tasked well after the Clapper committee, if not in the last week.

Or maybe he has just invented the existence of an “internal review” so as to explain why he is prepared to admit that 35 world leaders were being wiretapped by the NSA and anything else that proves inconvenient.

The National Security Agency ended a program used to spy on German Chancellor Angela Merkel and a number of other world leaders after an internal Obama administration review started this summer revealed to the White House the existence of the operations, U.S. officials said.

Officials said the internal review turned up NSA monitoring of some 35 world leaders, in the U.S. government's first public acknowledgment that it tapped the phones of world leaders.

After all, the Guardian reported on the 35 world leaders (which the WSJ notes), and only after that we learn there's an "internal review" that raised this as a point of concern? (Perhaps, too, this serves as a convenient fiction to accord with whatever Obama has told Angela Merkel on various occasions.)

WSJ spends much of the rest of the story trying to suggest the James Clapper Committee to Make You Love the Dragnet is not, as all evidence indicates, kabuki.

I don't buy that, nor do I buy that there was really an "internal review" before things got really hot this week.

But I do hope that having been forced to create at least the appearance of a second review, Obama will use it as an opportunity to make more changes than he otherwise had planned on.

Update: Adding to my suspicion that the Administration created an "internal" review in the last few days, National Security Rice is now tweeting about it.