

THE LATEST 60 MINUTES PROPAGANDA: WE NEED A CRYPTO BACK DOOR BECAUSE ISIS IS “COMING HERE” WITH WMD

It has been clear for several years now that 60 Minutes has become a propaganda vehicle for the intelligence community (post, post, post). So it was unsurprising that John Brennan was given an opportunity to fearmonger last night without pesky people like Ron Wyden around pointing out that CIA itself poses a threat, even according to the terms laid out by the Intelligence Community.

I find the timing and content of John Brennan's appearance of note.

The first segment (indeed the first words!) of the appearance did two things: first conflate ISIS-inspired attacks with ISIS-directed ones to suggest the terrorist organization might strike in the US.

Scott Pelley: Is ISIS coming here?

John Brennan: I think ISIL does want to eventually find it's, it's mark here.

Scott Pelley: You're expecting an attack in the United States?

John Brennan: I'm expecting them to try to put in place the operatives, the material or whatever else that they need to do or to incite people to carry out these attacks, clearly. So I believe that their attempts are inevitable. I don't think their successes necessarily are.

Here's how the global threat testimony from last week, which really serves as temporal justification for Brennan's appearance, carried out a similar though more nuanced conflation of ISIS' aspirations with the aspirational plots here in the US.

The United States will almost certainly remain at least a rhetorically important enemy for most violent extremists in part due to past and ongoing US military, political, and economic engagement overseas. Sunni violent extremists will probably continually plot against US interests overseas. A smaller number will attempt to overcome the logistical challenges associated with conducting attacks on the US homeland. The July 2015 attack against military facilities in Chattanooga and December 2015 attack in San Bernardino demonstrate the threat that homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) also pose to the homeland. In 2014, the FBI arrested approximately one dozen US-based ISIL supporters, in 2015, that number increased to approximately five dozen arrests. These individuals were arrested for a variety of reasons, predominantly for attempting to provide material support to ISIL.

Both Brennan and the threat testimony slide carefully from ISIS overcoming the logistical problems to attack themselves with attacking here to the ISIS-inspired far smaller attacks.

After having suggested ISIS wants to attack the US, Pelley then led Brennan to overstate the degree to which the Paris attackers hid behind encryption.

Scott Pelley: What did you learn from Paris?

John Brennan: That there is a lot that ISIL probably has underway that we don't

have obviously full insight into. We knew the system was blinking red. We knew just in the days before that ISIL was trying to carry out something. But the individuals involved have been able to take advantage of the newly available means of communication that are—that are walled off, from law enforcement officials.

Scott Pelley: You're talking about encrypted Internet communications.

John Brennan: Yeah, I'm talking about the very sophisticated use of these technologies and communication systems.

From all the reports thus far, ISIS achieved what little obscurity they had primarily through burner devices, *not* through encryption (not to mention the fact that French authorities got an encryption key from someone who had decided against carrying out an ISIS attack the summer before this attack). And while Jim Comey revealed that FBI had not yet cracked one of several phones used by the San Bernardino attackers (who were not directed by ISIS and may have only invoked it for their own obscurantist purposes), the threat testimony pointed to social media as as big a concern as encryption (most of what ISIS uses is fairly weak).

Terrorists will almost certainly continue to benefit in 2016 from a new generation of recruits proficient in information technology, social media, and online research. Some terrorists will look to use these technologies to increase the speed of their communications, the availability of their propaganda, and ability to collaborate with new partners. They will easily take advantage of widely available, free encryption technology, mobile-messaging applications, the dark web, and virtual environments to pursue their objectives.

Finally – still in the first segment!!! – Pelley invites Brennan to suggest that limited reports that ISIS has used chemical weapons in Syria mean they might use them here.

Scott Pelley: Does ISIS have chemical weapons?

John Brennan: We have a number of instances where ISIL has used chemical munitions on the battlefield.

Scott Pelley: Artillery shells.

John Brennan: Sure. Yeah.

Scott Pelley: ISIS has access to chemical artillery shells?

John Brennan: Uh-huh (affirm). There are reports that ISIS has access to chemical precursors and munitions that they can use.

The CIA believes that ISIS has the ability to manufacture small quantities of chlorine and mustard gas.

Scott Pelley: And the capability of exporting those chemicals to the West?

John Brennan: I think there's always the potential for that. This is why it's so important to cut off the various transportation routes and smuggling routes that they have used.

Compare Brennan's suggestion that ISIS may be manufacturing CW with the threat testimony note that two people have been exposed to mustard gas, though with far more widespread allegations of such use.

We assess that non state actors in the region are also using chemicals as a means of warfare. The OPCW investigation into an alleged ISIL attack in Syria in August led it to conclude that at least two people were exposed to sulfur mustard. We continue to track numerous

allegations of ISIL's use of chemicals in attacks in Iraq and Syria, suggesting that attacks might be widespread.

Now, I'll grant you that Brennan much more carefully dodges here than Dick Cheney ever used to. But it's pure fear-mongering – especially in the wake of the Oregon standoff that makes it clear domestic extremists are not only every bit as motivated as ISIS wannabes, but better trained and equipped. And fear-mongering using Dick Cheney's favorite techniques (albeit with the added kicker of crypto fear-mongering).

And it all happened as Brennan's buddies the Saudis are pretending to (finally) join the fight against ISIS in what is a fairly transparent attempt to prevent Russian-backed Syrian forces from gaining a crucial advantage in Syria. That is, this fairly crass fear-monger is likely directed at Assad as much as it is ISIS.