



Fire Brennan — or Abolish the CIA?

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) called for the firing of CIA Director John Brennan after an internal investigation by the agency confirmed that some CIA officials electronically spied on Senate committee work on an investigation into the agency's interrogation techniques. Paul was sharply critical of the agency for violating the security of a Senate committee's database and of Brennan for his earlier denial that it happened.



"It is illegal for the CIA to spy on Americans and an affront to our republic to spy on the Senate," Sen. Paul said in statement released on Friday. He added, "Brennan told the American people that the CIA did not spy on the Senate but now he admits that they did. Brennan should dismiss those responsible for breaking the law and be relieved of his post."

Paul, who led a 13-hour filibuster against Brennan's confirmation in March, became at least the third U.S. senator to call for Brennan's removal since last Thursday when CIA Inspector General David Buckley provided the House and Senate Intelligence Committees with a summary of his investigation. That summary acknowledged that five CIA employees, two lawyers, and three information technology specialists improperly accessed or "caused access" to a database that only committee staff were permitted to use. Senators Mark Udall (D-Colo.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), both Intelligence Committee members, demanded Brennan's resignation that same day.

"I have no choice but to call for the resignation of CIA Director John Brennan," Udall said in a statement. "The CIA unconstitutionally spied on Congress by hacking into Senate Intelligence Committee computers. This grave misconduct not only is illegal, but it violates the U.S. Constitution's requirement of separation of powers. These offenses, along with other errors in judgment by some at the CIA, demonstrate a tremendous failure of leadership, and there must be consequences."

Other senators voiced their outrage over an executive branch agency spying on the Senate.

"This is very, very serious, and I will tell you, as a member of the committee, someone who has great respect for the CIA, I am extremely disappointed in the actions of the agents of the CIA who carried out this breach of the committee's computers," said Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), the committee's vice chairman.

The report clearly contradicted Brennan's denials after committee chair Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) earlier this year charged that the CIA had been tapping into Senate computers.

Feinstein stated, "The investigation confirmed what I said on the Senate floor in March: CIA personnel inappropriately searched Senate Intelligence Committee computers in violation of an agreement we had reached, and I believe in violation of the constitutional separation of powers."

Brennan briefed Feinstein and Chambliss on Buckley's findings two days earlier, according to a statement by agency spokesman Dean Boyd. The CIA chief apologized to the senators at that time and promised to submit the inspector general's findings to an accountability board chaired by retired



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Democratic Sen. Evan Bayh of Indiana, a former member of the Intelligence Committee.

Feinstein called Brennan's apology and his decision to submit Buckley's findings to the accountability board "positive first steps." "This IG report corrects the record and it is my understanding that a declassified report will be made available to the public shortly," she said in a statement.

The inspector general's summary did not say who ordered the hacking into the Senate panel's computers or when senior CIA officials learned of it. The investigation discovered that a CIA crimes report to the Justice Department alleging unauthorized taking of classified documents by members of the committee staff was based on "inaccurate information." Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) was emphatic in dismissing the notion that the hackers were acting in a mistaken belief that they were protecting the agency's security.

"I think it's very clear that CIA people knew exactly what they were doing and either knew or should've known," said Levin, adding that the matter should be turned over to the Justice Department. "Director Brennan should make a very public explanation and correction of what he said," added Levin. Other members also demanded that Brennan explain his earlier denial that the CIA had invaded the Senate committee database.

Some civil rights groups and privacy activists have called for further investigation, a move not favored by President Obama, who stands by his CIA chief. Press Secretary Josh Earnest issued a strong defense of Brennan in a White House news briefing, crediting him with playing an "instrumental role" in the administration's fight against terrorism. He also praised the director for ordering the inspector general investigation and said the decision to bring the issue to the accountability board will ensure that persons responsible for any wrongdoing will be "properly held accountable for that conduct."

The Senate Intelligence Committee plans to declassify and make public a 633-page report on the interrogation techniques used by the CIA during the years following the 9/11 attacks, when the Bush administration was vigorously pursuing the "War on Terror." Prolonged stress positions, sleep deprivation, and waterboarding, the latter of which subjects a prisoner to the sensation of drowning, are among the techniques the Bush administration denied were elements of torture, preferring the term "enhanced interrogation." President Obama, who has said that those techniques were abandoned when he came to White House in 2009, admitted bluntly in a Friday press conference that some of the terror suspects detained and questioned by U.S. agents were in fact tortured.

"We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured some folks," Obama said. "We did some things that were contrary to our values." By employing techniques "that I believe and I think any fair-minded person would believe were torture, we crossed a line," the president said. "And that needs to be understood and accepted."

Obama has often been criticized by human rights advocates for his unwillingness to prosecute those who used the harsh interrogation methods, or those authorized their use, under both U.S. and international laws against torture. He ruled that out shortly after assuming the presidency, saying he wanted to look forward and not back in the new administration.

"In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we did some things that were wrong," he said on Friday. "I understand why it happened. It's important when we look back to recall how afraid people were."

Senator Rand Paul, in calling for the resignation of CIA Director John Brennan, did not go as far as his father, former Texas congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul, did in calling last week for the abolition of the intelligence agency.



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In a column published July 29 on his Ron Paul Institute website, Dr. Paul called for abolishing the agency that was created in 1947 as the Cold War successor to the wartime Office of Strategic Services. Despite efforts by both the agency and the Bush administration to conceal both the nature of the “enhanced interrogation” methods and the frequency of their use, Paul wrote, “we later found out that the CIA had not only lied about the torture of large numbers of people after 9/11, but it had vastly exaggerated any valuable information that came from such practices.” The abuses were often carried out in secret prisons in other lands where suspects were taken in “extraordinary renditions.”

As a presidential candidate in both 2008 and 2012, Paul incurred the wrath of rival Republican contenders whenever he argued that attacks on the United States have come in response to U.S. actions against people and governments in other countries.

“Revelations of U.S. secret torture sites overseas and a new Senate investigation revealing widespread horrific CIA torture practices should finally lead to the abolishment of this agency,” he wrote last week. “Far from keeping us safer, CIA covert actions across the globe have led to destruction of countries and societies and unprecedented resentment toward the United States. For our own safety, end the CIA!”

Photo of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia



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