



Will John Brennan Be a Voice of Restraint in the CIA's Deadly Drone War?

A [story published Tuesday in the online Daily Beast](#) reassures readers that John Brennan (shown in thumbnail photo and standing second from right in photo about the bin Laden raid), President Obama's choice to replace David Petraeus as CIA director, is not a calloused killer, but a man who "passionately supports civil liberties and wants to fight terrorism within a framework of law." Brennan is so committed to safeguarding the due process rights of those targeted for assassination that many in the White House consider him an "often-moderating influence in the war on terror."



That dove-like description of Brennan's devotion to the rule of law doesn't square with his recent record.

For example, although the Obama administration has kept a tight lid on the details of its "death by drone" program, in April of last year Brennan [admitted for the first time publicly](#) to the extent of the use of drones in America's War on Terror. He said that the remote control killing of suspects on foreign soil who have been charged with no crime whatsoever, is "in full accordance with the law."

Then, without apparent awareness of the macabre irony of the statement, Brennan reminded the world that the United States "respects national sovereignty and international law."

In Daniel Klaidman's article in the Daily Beast, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper is quoted describing Brennan as "a pillar of courage" and one who will insist upon adherence to "American values and the rule of law."

The facts, again, don't support this claim.

Even the Klaidman piece admits that it was Brennan's patronage of the use of drones to track and kill terrorists that convinced President Obama to promote them to the weapon of choice in the War on Terror.

For example, just days after a deadly drone strike in Yemen was reported, Brennan took to the microphone once again to discuss the operation.

[During a conversation last August with Margaret Sanger at the Council on Foreign Relations \(CFR\)](#), Brennan defended his boss's remote-control elimination of those suspected of posing a threat to the security of the homeland. "So long as AQAP [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula] seeks to implement its murderous agenda, we will be a close partner with Yemen in meeting this common threat," Brennan said.

When asked about the collateral deaths of innocent civilians during these attacks on "militants," Brennan said that the American "pilots" controlling the drones "make every effort" to avoid killing



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innocents. Said Brennan:

Today I'd simply say that all our CT [counterterrorism] efforts in Yemen are conducted in concert with the Yemeni government. When direct action is taken, every effort is made to avoid any civilian casualty. And contrary to conventional wisdom, we see little evidence that these actions are generating widespread anti-American sentiment or recruits for AQAP. In fact, we see the opposite, our Yemeni partners are more eager to work with us. Yemenese citizens who have been freed from the hellish grip of AQAP are more eager, not less, to work with the Yemeni government. In short, targeted strikes against the most senior and most dangerous AQAP terrorists are not the problem, they are part of the solution.

What special understanding of the situation in Yemen would qualify Brennan to recommend that the United States insert itself into the middle of a civil war? According to the Daily Beast article:

Nowhere were the subtleties in Brennan's worldview more obvious than in Yemen, a country he had long personal ties to from his days as CIA station chief in Saudi Arabia. The CIA operated mostly in Pakistan, which was viewed by the administration as an extension of the Afghan theater. But the agency wasn't the only wing of the government involved in targeted killings. The military had its own lethal program, and it was operating in countries, including Yemen, where the United States was not officially at war.

There is more to this excerpt from Brennan's foreign service résumé than meets the eye.

Once again, Brennan's respect for the rule of law allows for the United States to be involved in undeclared, unconstitutional wars, killing people — including American citizens — without due process. And, it allows the inference that Yemen might not be the only country “where the United States was not officially at war” where the president and the CIA are killing people in the name of the United States. After all, Brennan [did promote the covert drone war in Yemen](#) as a model for future interventions.

Remarkably, rather than confronting these facts head-on, Klaidman supports his “Brennan as peacemaker” thesis with immaterial details from Brennan's life and even his way of pronouncing “Al-Qaeda.”

“He spoke fluent Arabic and had a subtle feel for Muslim societies. (Brennan pronounces ‘al Qaeda’ with the soft guttural of the Arabic he learned as a student at the American University in Cairo.),” writes Klaidman.

Then there is the assertion that Brennan believes the infamous White House Rule Book for drone strikes is “finely grained” because it would exempt an al-Qaeda “driver or cook” from being purposefully targeted for assassination.

The book Klaidman refers to is a death-by-drone rulebook reportedly prepared by President Barack Obama in anticipation of a potential Election Night defeat, according to a [report in the New York Times](#). According to the article, the book would provide guidelines for the targeting of “terrorists” by the White House aimed at justifying the summary execution of those identified as threats to national security.

Beyond the rulebook and Brennan's reputed devotion to the rule of law and his familiarity with the region, there have been earlier attempts to tie these deadly drone assaults — [at least 2,939 people have been killed by American drones since 2006](#) — to some sort of code of conduct that would provide legal cover fire to protect the program from attacks by human rights and civil liberties groups.

In March 2012, for example, [Attorney General Eric Holder spoke at Northwestern Law School](#),



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regarding the source of the president's authority to order the targeted killing of Americans living abroad whom he suspects of posing an extraordinary threat to the security of the homeland. Holder said, "Any decision to use lethal force against a United States citizen — even one intent on murdering Americans and who has become an operational leader of al-Qaeda in a foreign land — is among the gravest that government leaders can face. The American people can be — and deserve to be — assured that actions taken in their defense are consistent with their values and their laws."

It would seem, then, due process is not one of those values so cherished by Brennan. The truth is that drone-delivered assassinations are carried out without affording those obliterated by drone-fired missiles even the lowest, most perfunctory level of due process protection.

Finally, when push comes to shove and the president asks for a list of those marked for assassination, he relies on Brennan to make sure the killings are "justified." How does Brennan keep innocents off the kill list? Daily Beast describes the process:

Targeted killings undertaken by the Pentagon would be subjected to vigorous interagency vetting. Dozens of officials from across the national security bureaucracy would gather on a secure video conference to hash out the security, policy, legal, and humanitarian considerations.

Perhaps neither the president nor John Brennan (who are described as making the decision to pull the trigger "together") are bothered by the fact that there is already a process for vetting those suspected of committing crimes — due process.

It seems that despite Daniel Klaidman's attempt to rehabilitate John Brennan and portray him as a law-abiding, peace-loving, perfect person to lead the CIA, the facts point in another direction, and should he be confirmed by the Senate, Brennan will surely continue walking hand in hand with the president on the road toward tyranny, where Americans everywhere are subject to assassination at the hands of their own government without regard to the Constitution or the rule of law.

Senate Intelligence Committee hearings on Brennan's nomination are [scheduled to begin Thursday](#).

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