

Democrats, Republicans criticize leaks, not drone murders

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At an extraordinary press conference Thursday, the top Democrats and Republicans on the House and Senate intelligence committees denounced leaks to the press about US drone missile attacks and other covert actions. They objected, not to the violations of international law being carried out by the Obama administration, but to media reports making these violations known to the American people.

The bipartisan backing for censorship and cover-up followed a closed-door briefing for selected senators and congressmen by James R. Clapper, the director of national intelligence, and Robert S. Mueller, director of the FBI. The briefing reportedly focused on several recent leak-based stories in the major US media:

- * A May 9 report in the Associated Press, the *Wall Street Journal* and other publications that a US double agent in Yemen had exposed and disrupted Al Qaeda plans to bomb targets in the United States

- * A May 16 report in the *Washington Post* about the Obama administration sanctioning secret arms transfers to the Syrian “rebels” and providing them military training

- * A May 29 report in the *New York Times* detailing President Obama’s personal role in approving a “kill list” of targets for US drone missile strikes

- * A May 29 report in *Newsweek* magazine excerpting more details about the drone missile attacks reported in a book by *Newsweek* staffer Daniel Klaidman

- * A June 1 report in the *New York Times* confirming US-Israeli collaboration in devising the Stuxnet worm and introducing it into the computer systems of Iran’s nuclear program, causing considerable damage.

These press reports cited as sources top US intelligence and military officials, as well as White House aides, all speaking anonymously, all presenting these covert operations as successful efforts by the

Obama administration to target the enemies of American imperialism.

The four legislators who held the press conference Thursday were Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Diane Feinstein, a Democrat; the Republican vice-chairman, Saxby Chambliss; Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Mike Rogers, a Republican; and the ranking Democrat on the committee, C. A. Ruppertsberger.

A joint statement issued by the four on Wednesday declared, “In recent weeks, we have become increasingly concerned at the continued leaks regarding sensitive intelligence programs and activities including specific details of sources and methods... The accelerating pace of such disclosures, the sensitivity of the matters in question, and the harm caused to our national security interests is alarming and unacceptable.”

All four reiterated this position at their joint press conference Thursday, denouncing the leaks as a threat to US national security, while endorsing the operations detailed in those leaks, which constitute a series of war crimes under international law.

The US operations against Syria and Iran are both brazen acts of international aggression, while the use of drone-fired missiles to assassinate targeted individuals as well as groups of unidentified but “suspected” terrorists is nothing short of murder.

The description in the *New York Times* of the White House decision-making process in selecting targets for drone attacks could be entered as evidence in a future war crimes tribunal. According to the *Times* account, Obama has established the principle that any military-age male in a target zone may be killed as a presumed terrorist, regardless of his actual status. Such deliberate and indiscriminate targeting of civilians is a flagrant

violation of the Geneva Conventions.

The remarks of the senators and congressmen, Democrats and Republicans alike, focused on the damage that these news report had done to ongoing US covert operations—including, no doubt, murderous activities that these four plugged-in officials know about but which have not yet been made public.

The Democrats were vociferous. Feinstein declared, referring to the leaks, “This has to stop.” Ruppertsberger said, “This is one of the most serious breaches in the last couple articles that have come out that I have seen. It puts us at risk. It puts lives at risk.”

The operations detailed in these press reports have caused the deaths of hundreds if not thousands of innocent people in Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan and other countries. But that is not what concerns the Democratic and Republican officials.

The joint statement instead warned, “Each disclosure puts American lives at risk, makes it more difficult to recruit assets, strains the trust of our partners, and threatens imminent and irreparable damage to our national security in the face of urgent and rapidly adapting threats worldwide.”

Despite the fulminations on Capitol Hill, the news reports of the past few weeks hardly amount to an exposure of US covert operations. Most of the articles are written in an entirely supportive, even fawning, tone, and give details that present the US government and its most murderous agencies in an entirely favorable light. Moreover, those details could only have been provided by intelligence and military operatives and close personal aides of Obama, who were the driving force of the press revelations.

This reality has led sections of the Republican Party to complain that Obama is using the CIA and military actions to boost his reelection campaign—a charge that is certainly true, since the media barrage began with the White House celebration of the first anniversary of the Navy Seals raid that killed Osama bin Laden on May 2.

One prominent Democrat, Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, denied that “the public had to know” about the Stuxnet software virus, despite admitting that it was a “fundamental national security issue.” He came close to characterizing the *Times*’ report as treasonous, saying, “I don’t see how the public interest is well served by it. I do see how other interests outside the

United States are well served by it.”

The response of the *Times* to such bullying was to grovel. Managing Editor Dean Baquet issued a statement Wednesday defending publication of the Stuxnet story and revealing the role of the newspaper as a virtual organ of the intelligence apparatus. “As always with sensitive stories,” he wrote, “we described the piece to the government before publication. No one suggested we not publish.”

The two Democrats and two Republicans on the intelligence committees called on the Obama administration to crack down on unauthorized leaks, saying they intend to “press the executive branch to take tangible and demonstrable steps to detect and deter intelligence leaks, and to fully, fairly, and impartially investigate the disclosures that have taken place.”

They are knocking on an open door, since the Obama administration has already launched more investigations and prosecutions of supposed leakers than all previous US governments combined.

The most notorious and reactionary case is the persecution of Army Private Bradley Manning, accused of supplying the WikiLeaks web site with after-action reports and gun-camera footage documenting American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables detailing the machinations of US imperialism around the world. A military judge was scheduled to rule Friday on defense motions to dismiss 10 of the 22 charges against Manning.



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