

On network news show, Nation editor rushes to the defense of Obama

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Appearing Sunday on the ABC News public affairs program “This Week with George Stephanopoulos,” Katrina vanden Heuvel, the editor and publisher of the left-liberal *Nation* magazine, defended the Obama administration and played down the significance of its attacks on democratic rights.

Vanden Heuvel’s appearance underscored the role of the *Nation* in providing a supposedly “left” rationalization for the reactionary policies, foreign and domestic, of Obama and the Democratic Party. That she is invited to appear on such programs reflects the recognition by the corporate media of the service to the ruling class rendered by the *Nation* in playing this right-wing role.

The Sunday news interview programs were dominated by the scandals surrounding the Obama administration. These include the Internal Revenue Service’s tagging of Republican-affiliated groups that applied for tax-exempt status, allegations that the White House orchestrated a cover-up related to the 2012 attack on the US consulate and a CIA outpost in Benghazi that killed the American ambassador to Libya and three other US personnel, and the administration’s secret seizure of the telephone records of Associated Press (AP) editors and reporters.

Of these three issues, the least attention is being given by the media and the two big business parties to the clearest and most brazen attack on democratic rights—the assault on press freedom carried out to intimidate and prosecute whistle-blowers and investigative journalists and stop them from exposing government secrets and crimes.

The Republicans are playing up the IRS issue for partisan political reasons and seeking to politically exploit the Benghazi debacle while concealing the real question it raises—the alliance between the US government and Al-Qaeda-linked groups in the neocolonial wars for regime-change in Libya and Syria.

On Sunday’s “This Week” program, vanden Heuvel’s

co-panelist, *Washington Post* columnist George Will, cited the IRS targeting of groups politically at odds with the administration—mainly but not exclusively Republican-allied—as an example of Obama using “the federal machinery to punish enemies of the administration.” He compared it to Nixon’s use of the IRS to attack political opponents and referred to the Watergate scandal that ended Nixon’s presidency.

To this, vanden Heuvel replied, “Watergate, seriously, George? I mean, Watergate was a scandal unique in its depths of criminality. You had a president at the heart of the White House directing the subversion of the FBI and other institutions including the IRS... Let us have an investigation, but let us not call it Watergate, because that demeans our history and the full nature of constitutional crisis.”

In other words, according to vanden Heuvel, there is no constitutional crisis under Obama. In fact, the current administration is carrying out an onslaught on civil liberties and the Bill of Rights that goes far beyond anything attempted by Nixon.

Obama has asserted the right to unilaterally and secretly order the drone assassination of anyone, including US citizens, anywhere in the world, including within the borders of the United States. His attack also includes warrantless domestic spying on a massive and unprecedented scale; indefinite detention of alleged terrorists, or their abettors, without charges or trial; and unlimited powers of the military and the executive branch to launch wars without congressional authorization.

Only last month, the federal government carried out a dry run of methods and means for imposing military rule in the lockdown of Boston in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings.

Only minutes after her defense of the White House in relation to the IRS affair, vanden Heuvel, speaking of the seizure of AP telephone records, made statements

implicitly contradicting her denial of a constitutional crisis under Obama. “This administration picked the baton from Bush,” she said, “and failing to uphold what it promised, has had the worst record on press freedom... This administration has prosecuted more people for leaks...than any others.”

In keeping with the dishonest and unprincipled journalism of her publication, vanden Heuvel thinks she can speak out both sides of her mouth and nobody will notice. But if, as she admits, Obama has carried out the most serious attacks on press freedom of any US government in history, then he is certainly involved in a historic assault on the Constitution, which he is pledged to defend, and guilty of impeachable offenses.

No doubt, as the editor and publisher of a news organization, vanden Heuvel felt obliged to criticize the White House for its attack on the AP, joining such organs of the ruling class as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. She was careful, however, to draw no serious conclusions from her own statements and limit herself to echoing the positions of the media establishment on the matter.

Indeed, she quickly jumped from criticizing Obama for attacking press freedom to giving out the White House and Democratic Party line on the scandals. “I would argue,” she said, “that the Republican Party is unified by its determination to obstruct President Obama... One of the terrible things this past week [is] to see again how it’s obstructing the confirmation of appointees needed to run a functional government.”

The *Nation* speaks and sets the political tone for a whole social layer of the upper-middle class “left,” including pseudo-socialist outfits such as the International Socialist Organization, which collaborates with and shares political platforms with leading *Nation* writers. All of these organizations, notwithstanding certain differences in rhetoric, serve as the left flank of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party.



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