

Brennan's Loose Talk on Iran Nukes

By [Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity](#)

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The Senate Intelligence Committee's hearing on John Brennan to head the CIA focused on lethal drones, but Brennan's loose talk lumping Iran with North Korea as nuclear threats could be even more worrisome, recalling Iraq WMD exaggerations, as Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity warn Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Due Diligence on John Brennan

We write to urge you to ensure due diligence regarding John Brennan's fitness to become CIA director before you make the next-to-the-worst mistake of your tenure on the Senate Intelligence Committee by endorsing Brennan. Your worst – perhaps you will now agree – was your vote to authorize war on Iraq.

With your vote in October 2002 on Iraq, you oddly parted company with most of your Democratic colleagues on the committee, including chairman Bob Graham. They saw through the flimsy intelligence. After a five-year committee investigation was completed in 2008, then-chairman Jay Rockefeller concluded:

“In making the case for war, the administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed.”

Brennan Now Taking Aim at Iran?

This recent history is highly relevant because, at the time, John Brennan had a ringside seat for this unconscionable charade as it was being acted out (more on that below). Of still more importance are recent signs that Mr. Brennan intends to ape his discredited mentor, former CIA Director George Tenet, by slanting intelligence to “justify” an even more catastrophic attack – this time, on Iran.

How else to explain why Brennan, in his prepared testimony to your committee on February 7, departed sharply from the longstanding position of U.S. intelligence on Iran's nuclear program. He said:

“And regimes in Tehran and Pyongyang remain bent on pursuing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile delivery systems.”

Whatever grounds there may be for suspicion that Iran might be seeking a capability that eventually would allow it to rapidly break out of Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) constraints on building a nuclear weapon, there is even less evidence that Iran is seeking an ICBM capability. Iran has never flight-tested a ballistic missile with ranges in excess of its 2200-kilometer range Sajjil MRBM. Nor has it launched a space rocket that would be a suitable model for an ICBM.

Conflating Iran and North Korea, as Brennan does, seems too clever by half. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a non-nuclear-weapons member of the NPT, not only denies any intent to pursue nuclear weapons, but also declares such an intent immoral. In contrast, North Korea withdrew from the NPT after President George W. Bush labeled it one of the three points on an “axis of evil” (together with Iraq and Iran). Pyongyang declares a nuclear weapons capability against the United States essential to deter the kind of attack inflicted on Iraq.

These issues have been on the front burner for years. Brennan’s statement is one of several that raise serious doubt regarding his suitability to head the CIA. It can be no secret to you and your committee colleagues that his statement deviates sharply from the unanimous, “high-confidence” judgment of all 16 intelligence agencies that Iran stopped working on nuclear weaponization at the end of 2003 and has not resumed that work. That key intelligence judgment, reached in 2007, has been revalidated by U.S. intelligence and reaffirmed by the Director of National Intelligence in sworn testimony before your committee every year since.

Fraudulent, Not Flimsy

“Fraudulent” is the inescapably appropriate adjective to describe the pre-Iraq-war intelligence conjured up by those (first and foremost George Tenet) who did the bidding of George Bush and Tony Blair. Former CIA colleagues who served under Brennan before and during the Iraq war tell us that, since he was such a close confidant of Tenet, Brennan almost certainly knew chapter and verse about the deliberate corruption of the intelligence on Iraq. And yet, we have no indication that you have investigated whether Brennan was part of that fateful conspiracy.

British documents leaked in 2005 – acknowledged as authentic by the UK government – detailed the hoax being prepared to “justify” war on Iraq. In a July 23, 2002 briefing to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the head of British intelligence reported that then-CIA Director George Tenet had told him at CIA headquarters three days earlier that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” for war on Iraq.

In the Loop vs. In the Chain

It is not too late for you to look into what role John Brennan played in these key events. Was he, for example, one of the small circle of senior CIA officials who met with the head of British intelligence on July 20, 2002? We don’t know the answer to that, but you might be able to find out if you ask. From our experience with such meetings, it seems likely that either Brennan or his boss A. B. “Buzzy” Krongard would have been among those taking part. You could ask each of them. You should be able to expect straight answers.

Whether Brennan was in the loop for the lies on Iraq is not an idle question, impinging as it does on his integrity. And yes, integrity matters. It matters a great deal. Why not instruct

your staff to determine how many fraudulent-intelligence-related memos Brennan received, just as they did in identifying at least 50 torture-related memos that show him to have been “in the loop” on that sensitive subject.

We strongly encourage you not to acquiesce again in the lame in-the-loop-but-not-in-the-chain-of-command alibi Brennan used on February 7, in answering questions regarding his contemporaneous knowledge of CIA waterboarding and other abuses, and what he did or did not do with that knowledge. Presumably, with your long tenure on the Intelligence Committee, you are thoroughly familiar with the guarded way in which very sensitive intelligence-related information is handled – first and foremost, the basic principle of “need-to-know.”

Need-to-Know

Brennan was kept informed of the torture because Tenet wanted him to be – that is, in Tenet’s view, Brennan had a need to know. That is why, as Sen. Saxby Chambliss pointed out, Brennan was “cc-ed” on “a minimum of 50 memos” dealing with waterboarding and other controversial interrogation techniques. Chambliss noted that Brennan’s boss, A. B. “Buzzy” Krongard, told the Wall Street Journal that Brennan had a role in setting the parameters of the program and “helping to seek Justice Department approval for the techniques.”

This is a far cry from what Brennan admitted to – namely, just having had “awareness that the agency was being asked to do this [and] was going forward on it. ... [and having] visibility into some of the activities there.” Again, on the basis of the fundamental principle of need-to-know, Brennan would have had zero “visibility” into the highly sensitive torture program, were Tenet not to have wanted him to be involved – or, at least, kept informed about it.

If CIA officials wrote memos on the sensitive issue of torture, it seems altogether possible that they wrote memos about warping intelligence, too, while restricting dissemination to those with a need-to-know. You may wish to try to get ahold of any such memos, in order to determine if either the “loop” or the “chain” included Brennan.

There is Still Time

By no means were you the only Congressperson to fall for what Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell’s chief of staff at the State Department, has branded the “hoax” on Iraq. But you are now chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Would it be asking too much to request that you take greater pains to exercise due diligence, this time around, regarding those playing fast and loose with key intelligence judgments that can lead to war?

First, please find out what evidence John Brennan is relying upon for his assertion that Iran is “bent on pursuing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile delivery systems.” Does he know something others should know? Or are we beginning to see the makings of another consequential hoax?

Second, please look closely into the role Brennan played at his mentor’s side, as George Tenet corrupted the intelligence process to service White House lust for war on Iraq. See what you can find out. If it turns out that those conjuring up “uncorroborated, contradicted, or even non-existent” intelligence kept Brennan in the loop (as the torture aficionados did),

the fact that Brennan did not blow the whistle is enough, in our view, to remove him from consideration as CIA director.

Drones and Dead Civilians

You began Brennan's confirmation hearing by stating that the number of civilian deaths caused by US drone strikes each year has "typically been in the single digits." This brought to mind the extraordinary public claim Mr. Brennan made on June 29, 2011, that "nearly for the past year there hasn't been a single collateral death" as a result of CIA drone strikes in Pakistan.

Could Brennan have forgotten the widely reported drone strike just three months earlier (on March 17) that killed 42 Pakistanis, most of them civilians? Could he have forgotten the strong protest that the Pakistani government lodged decrying those killings in the town of Datta Khel?

Just two days ago (February 20), Sen. Lindsey Graham publicly put at 4,700 the total number of those killed by U.S. drone strikes in the past decade. This is the first time a United States official has provided a casualty figure for U.S. drone attacks. Interestingly, Graham's estimate is very close to the high side of the estimated range given by the UK-based Bureau for Investigative Journalism for "total reported killed" in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia: 4,756.

What does John Brennan say about these inconsistencies? Have you checked back with those who told you the annual kill-rate for civilians has "typically been in the single digits?" We suggest that you ask Mr. Brennan to try to resolve these discrepancies before your committee takes further action on his nomination.

VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY, STEERING GROUP

Phil Giraldi, Directorate of Operations, CIA, retired

Larry Johnson, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA; Department of State; consultant, Department of Defense

Karen Kwiatkowski, Ph.D., retired Lt. Col., USAF

David MacMichael, PhD, CIA & National Intelligence Council (NIC) analyst

Tom Maertens, Foreign Service Officer and NSC Director for Non-Proliferation

Ray McGovern, US Army Infantry/Intelligence Officer, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA, retired

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, NIC

Coleen Rowley, former Special Agent and Minneapolis Division Counsel, FBI

Ann Wright, Col., US Army Reserve (ret.), former Foreign Service Officer, Department of State

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