

New Boss at the CIA: Brennan's "Legal Framework" for Drone Killings

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As the majority of Washington's political and media establishments concentrate their firepower on Senator Chuck Hagel's nomination for U.S. Defense Secretary, John Brennan is doing what he does best and slipping through the shadows. Rumored since President Barack Obama secured his second term in office, Brennan has finally [received a formal nomination](#) to replace the scandalized David Petraeus and advance his work at the CIA. Disturbingly but not surprisingly, many American pundits have welcomed Brennan's promotion as a logical choice for the CIA's Directorship and expect a smooth confirmation.

They generally avoid real discussions over the areas of operations affected (and afflicted) by U.S. counter-terrorism, instead preferring the glamorous statistics of high-profile kills and Brennan's alleged construction of a "legal framework" for drones – [as recently claimed](#) by the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York (SDNY).

Brennan's positives are easy to list: "More al Qaeda leaders and commanders have been removed from the battlefield than at any time since 9/11." He has applied his extensive influence to "literally building" and leading the National Counterterrorism Center, which entailed the coordination of various military, intelligence and civilian departments across the globe. In the process Brennan has become [one of Obama's most trusted advisers](#), so close that, "I don't think we've had a disagreement."

"For the last four years," Obama announced from the East Room, "as my Adviser for Counterterrorism and Homeland Security, John developed and has overseen our comprehensive counterterrorism strategy – a collaborative effort across the government, including intelligence and defense and homeland security, and law enforcement agencies."

However this fantasy hits a steel wall in Yemen, where Brennan and U.S. Ambassador Gerald Feierstein may be the most despised Americans to touch its soil. The immediate reaction to Brennan's promotion has been overwhelmingly negative for good reason, as he reinforces the single-mindedness and unaccountability that drives an assortment of U.S. counter-terrorism platforms being constructed around the nation. Brennan [now inherits Petraeus's "secret" agreement](#) with Yemen's former dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and was even deployed to Sana'a on multiple occasions during the country's ongoing revolution; he would assist Feierstein in facilitating the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) unpopular power-sharing agreement when a drone strike didn't require overseeing.

Brennan [told the Wilson Center](#) in April 2012, "Yemen was fortunate that they do – did have a degree of political pluralism there, Ali Abdullah Saleh in fact allowed certain political institutions to develop, and we were very fortunate to have a peaceful transition from the previous regime to the government of President Hadi now."

A known intimate of Saudi Arabia's royal circle, Brennan's promotion also corresponds to recent investigative reporting on Saudi bombings in Yemen. Now he's promoted less than a week later, highlighting the obvious favoritism and imperialism that assisted his rise atop the CIA.

Given that Brennan has been nominated, in part, to embed the CIA deeper into Yemen, his presence is ultimately counterproductive to defeating al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and improving relations with Yemen's people. "Traveling through the Arabian Peninsula where he camped with tribesmen in the desert" has done little to promote their human rights and dignity, which are trampled on daily by the national government and its foreign partners. Victims of drone strikes have no recourse, and Yemen's revolution has been blocked by opportunistic relations with the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and oppositional Joint Meeting Parties (JMP).

Washington's Pakistani "model" has been improved by establishing better relations with the transitional government, led by Saleh's former VP Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, but the same hostility is repeating within those who serve as the real front lines against AQAP.

A "keen understanding of a dynamic world" is noticeably absent from Yemen's counterterrorism operations. During a prolonged defense of the CIA's targeted killings, orchestrated throughout 2012 and Yemen's emerging bombardment, Brennan claimed that drones don't cause as much resentment as commonly believed. He never acknowledged a revolution amid the Obama administration's micromanaging of a "political crisis," and has no relationship with the people that are needed to stop AQAP at its roots.

What Brennan will ensure is that AQAP's status remains viable, and that Yemen remains under the firm grip of Washington and Riyadh.

To overrule these "results," as Obama calls them, flattery and hyperbole are piled onto Brennan's shoulders in an effort to democratize him, so to speak. Instead of a calculated killer that has taken his share of civilian life, Brennan is heralded as a "legendary, tireless patriot" and a model of American "integrity." Ethics and values are stressed as a counterweight to the perceived constitutional violations that drone warfare entails.

"There's another reason I value John so much, and that is his integrity and his commitment to the values that define us as Americans. He has worked to embed our efforts in a strong legal framework. He understands we are a nation of laws. In moments of debate and decision, he asks the tough question and he insists on high and rigorous standards. Time and again, he's spoken to the American people about our counterterrorism policies because he recognizes we have a responsibility to be [as] open and transparent as possible."

The SDNY recently refused to address the killing of 16-year old U.S. citizen Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, son of AQAP cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, on the grounds that the Obama administration never released information on his killing. Unlike his father, whose droned body was held aloft as a trophy by Brennan and company, Abdulrahman's murder was first denied, then silenced and finally labeled an "outrageous mistake" by an anonymous official more than a year later.

His or her statements [were planted within a glowing profile](#) of the CIA veteran.

Brennan was incapable of bringing a shred of peace to Yemen as Obama's counterterrorism adviser and remains helpless at the CIA - he can only deliver death and destruction. His

tireless drone fleet will always kill civilians in between terrorists and the process will stay classified to Americans and Yemenis alike. The Predator and its sole purpose of killing serves as a permanent symbol of U.S. imperialism, and lacks the ability to build relationships at the local level. Mere flyovers cause terror. This policy violates America's morals, the spirit of the Nobel and the strategic essence of counterinsurgency all at once. A plan that fails to kill more militants than it creates doesn't qualify for counter-terrorism or counterinsurgency - expedient recklessness is a more accurate definition.

"What scares me about drone strikes is how they are perceived around the world," retired general Stanley McCrystal [told Reuters](#) in a new interview, coincidentally implicating Brennan himself. "The resentment created by American use of unmanned strikes... is much greater than the average American appreciates. They are hated on a visceral level, even by people who've never seen one or seen the effects of one."

Until U.S. policy undergoes a radical shift in fundamentals, a change unlikely to occur under Brennan, America has already lost its small war in Yemen.

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