

Time for CIA's Brennan to Go

More than five years into his presidency, Barack Obama has yet to undertake a major reform of U.S. intelligence, even letting CIA Director John Brennan, who was implicated in Bush-Cheney abuses, block reports on those offenses. That must change, says ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

CIA Director John Brennan has become an embarrassment to President Barack Obama and should resign immediately. Brennan has clearly worn out his welcome with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), and recent history tells us that when a CIA director is found in the crosshairs of the committee it is time to go.

In the 1980s, CIA Director William Casey was found to be lying to the committee on Iran-Contra, and even such Republican members of the committee as Sen. Barry Goldwater wanted his resignation. In the 1990s, CIA Director Jim Woolsey angered SSCI chairman Dennis DeConcini, D-Arizona, and other key members of the committee, and the Clinton administration persuaded Woolsey to resign.

Brennan's resignation would allow the Obama administration to release a sanitized version of the SSCI's report on CIA detention and rendition policy and thus avoid a prolonged battle with the Congress over this issue. The fact that Brennan has crossed swords with the chairman of the committee, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, who was an advocate for Brennan and the CIA at his confirmation hearing last year is more than enough reason for Brennan to go.

Feinstein has been an advocate for the intelligence community during her stewardship, defending the massive surveillance of the National Security Agency, the use of the drone and targeted assassinations by the Central Intelligence Agency, and the implementation of the Patriot Act by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There has never been a chairman of the SSCI more supportive of the intelligence community than Feinstein until now.

Brennan never should have been appointed CIA director in the first place. During the presidential campaign in 2007-2008, Barack Obama spoke out against the militarization and politicization of the intelligence community, and indicated that an Obama administration would demand more transparency in the community and an end to intelligence abuses.

Even before his election, however, Obama appointed an intelligence advisory

staff that was headed by former associates of George Tenet, whose failed stewardship of the CIA included phony intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq War and the cover-up of intelligence failures for 9/11. Tenet's deputy, John McLaughlin, who supported CIA programs of renditions and detentions, was part of the advisory group.

Immediately after the election, Obama appointed one of Tenet's proteges, John Brennan, to head the transition team at CIA. Brennan, as Tenet's chief of staff, was part of the corruption and cover-up at CIA. He was slated to become Obama's director at CIA, but Brennan removed his name from consideration when it became clear that he would have serious difficulty in the confirmation process because of his support for CIA detentions and renditions.

Brennan's route to the CIA directorship was like the path followed by Robert Gates, who had to withdraw his nomination in 1987 because of his dissembling over Iran-Contra, but then laundered his credentials to become confirmed four years later. Brennan too laundered his credentials for a successful bid to become CIA director in 2013.

It should not be forgotten that, during the Tenet era at CIA, Brennan was the chief of staff and deputy executive director under George Tenet, and provided no opposition to decisions to conduct torture and abuse of suspected terrorists and to render suspected individuals to foreign intelligence services that conducted their own torture and abuse.

Brennan had risen through the analytic ranks at the CIA, and should have been aware that analytic standards were being ignored at the Agency. Brennan was also an active defender of the program of warrantless eavesdropping, implemented at the National Security Agency under the leadership of one of Tenet's successors, Gen. Michael Hayden, then director of NSA.

President Obama will not be able to change the culture of the intelligence community and restore the moral compass of the CIA unless there is a full understanding and repudiation of the operational crimes of the post-9/11 era. If the President wants to roll back the misdeeds of the Bush administration, restore the rule of law at the CIA, and create the change that Americans want, he should not be relying for advice on the senior officials who endorsed the shameful acts of the past.

The resignation of John Brennan and the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report would be a good place to start.

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