

US - Afraid on Command

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A Nation At War With An Illusion

We are a country at war, President Obama reminded us in his notable May 23 speech about “contemplating the future of warfare here in the 21st century.”

The war we’re waging is an undeclared war that began for all practical purposes on September 11, 2001. It is the war on 'terror.' It is a war on a word, an abstraction, tactically set, an idea that lends itself to open accusation, it is a convenient label, able to be tagged on anyone or everyone or no one at any time! We are waging a war on 'terror' as we embody terrorism. No wonder we seem sometimes to be at war with ourselves, and have been for most of the 21st century.

“We have now been at war for well over a decade,” the president said in a statement so simple and broad as to include all the devastation we’ve wrought in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria for no good purpose but for profit. We continue the (mass) murder today right down to the latest drone strike against some person we decided fits today’s enemy description.

That much is obvious to almost everyone. Less obvious is that the same war has been turned inward, waged against Americans at home – increasingly prisoners of the homeland and increasingly surrounded by homeland security, whether it’s needed or not. The unchecked expansion of a Police State since 9/11, too vast to be easily or briefly described, continues because we are at war.

No American Under 12 Has Lived In A Country At Peace

If the United States is at war, as generally defined by history and our constitution, then we must have enemies who can be identified, or so one might think. So who are the enemies of the United States? Officially, in the President’s words, “the United States is at war with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces.” This is the term or the President uses to maintain the fiction that our seemingly endless war against a concept is actually legal.

OK, so what does that mean? “Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces”?

Al-Qaeda is a brand name, but there’s little public evidence that it’s actually a significant corporate entity. Al-Qaeda may or may not be one thing or many things, and American actions may or may not be killing Al-Qaeda members faster than it creates them. Whatever the U.S. government knows, or thinks it knows, is not widely shared with most of its citizens.

The Taliban appears to be a real, regional entity with real regional goals that mostly have never had anything much to do with the United States except when the U.S. invaded the region. If the Taliban has ever posed a serious threat to the United States, the evidence for that remains secret.

America’s Main Enemy Is Nameless, Shapeless, “Associated Forces,” an abstraction!

That leaves “their associated forces,” in the President’s phrase, that exercises presumably a purposeful threat, inflated by the term “forces,” which refers to what we have no reason to believe

are more than assorted gangs of malcontents with a range of grievances, many of which are legitimate and long-standing.

And who are these “associated forces”? The government won’t say, can’t say. The country may be at war, but most of the names of our enemies are classified, and ‘subject to change without notice.’

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on May 16, a week before the President’s speech, the committee chairman, Sen. Carl Levin, a Democrat from Michigan, questioned Michael Sheehan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, about designating enemies with no more Congressional authority than the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed by Congress three days after the 9/11 attacks and giving the President effectively unlimited discretion to wage the war on terrorism, ‘wherever he might imagine it to be.’

Senator Levin Asks Questions, the Pentagon Take Evasive Action

At the May 16 hearing, Senators were making an effort to develop a more firm, reliable basis in fact and law for killing foreigners (mostly), a basis that has been absent from the AUMF since it became law in September 2001. One of those questions of fact and law was the determination of who decides who is an enemy:

Chairman LEVIN. Now, under the definition of “enemy,” do you agree that mere sympathy with al-Qaeda is not sufficient to be an associated force for purposes of the AUMF?

Mr. SHEEHAN. Yes, Senator. Sympathy is not enough. As Jay Johnson and others have mentioned in public, it has to be an organized group and that group has to be in co-belligerent status with al-Qaeda operating against the United States.

Chairman LEVIN. Is there any good reason why both Congress and the public should not be informed of which organizations and entities the administration has determined to be co-belligerents of al-Qaeda and to promptly be informed of any additions or deletions from that list?

Pentagon Says: Congress Has Oversight Role, But No Right To Know Facts

Mr. SHEEHAN. Senator, I think that the appropriate role for the Congress is in its oversight regarding the designation of groups. A lot of these groups, as you know, Senator, have very murky membership and they also have very murky alliances and shifting alliances. And they change their name and they lie and obfuscate their activities. So I think it would be difficult for the Congress to get involved in trying to track the designation of which are the affiliate forces. We know when we evaluate these forces what they are up to, and we make that determination based on their co-belligerent status with al-Qaeda and make our targeting decisions based on that criteria rather than on the shifting nature of different groups and their affiliations.

Chairman LEVIN. Is there a list now? Is there an existing list of groups that are affiliated with al-Qaeda?

Mr. SHEEHAN. Senator, **I am not sure there is a list per se.** I am very familiar with the organizations that we do consider right now are affiliated with al-Qaeda, and I could provide you that list of organizations. [Emphasis added.]

Chairman LEVIN. Would you give us that list?

Mr. SHEEHAN. Yes, sir. We can do that.

Guess What Happened When Pro Publica Asked To See The List?

Pro Publica defines itself as “an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Our work focuses exclusively on truly important stories, stories with ‘moral force.’” Pro Publica reported on July 26 that it had requested the Pentagon list of America’s “enemies” from Sen. Levin’s office – “but Levin’s office told Pro Publica they aren’t allowed to share it.”

Pro Publica reported that it then asked the Pentagon for the American enemies list, only to have Lt. Col. Jim Gregory say that revealing the list could cause “serious damage to national security.” How is it that people suffering drone strikes can threaten national security by having their purported identities revealed to the public half a world away?

Col. Gregory explained: “Because elements that might be considered ‘associated forces’ can build credibility by being listed as such by the United States, we have classified the list. We cannot afford to inflate these organizations that rely on violent extremist ideology to strengthen their ranks.”

The American Enemies List Is Decided Anonymously and Secretly

So who, exactly, is deciding who the enemy is? Not the President, according to Sheehan’s testimony in May: “The issue of affiliated force has not gone to the presidential level, Senator. That issue is managed at a much lower level.”

So according to the public record, the President decides whether or not to kill people with drone strikes, but he has no direct role in deciding who those people might actually be.

Although Sheehan’s testimony (above) equivocates regarding Congressional oversight, he was later more direct about the determination of who’s an enemy: “I would think that that is a decision better for the executive branch. As I mentioned to the chairman, these organizations right now are quite savvy in regards to how they are perceived overseas, and so they are always shifting their rhetoric, their names and affiliations. And I think that is better left to the executive branch.”

So that’s where the United States stands today, officially, a country at war with people whose names can’t be shared with the American people, and whose enemy status is determined by someone other than the Congress, or even the President, and that secrecy is necessary because these people might not know we think they are co-belligerents and that might inflate their egos or their numbers, or both, and besides they’re “murky” and change their names and lie and obfuscate – national security is at stake, trust us. Isn’t that about it?

U.S. Foreign Missions Are Being Closed Because Of Dangerous “Chatter”

And some of those enemies “chatter.” There’s been a lot of media chatter lately about the terrorists’ chatter that led the State Department to shut down 9 embassies or consulates over the weekend of August 3-4, and another 19 until August 10, three days after the end of Ramadan.

“The one thing we can talk about is the fact that there’s been an awful lot of chatter out there,” said the highest ranking Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee on talking head TV at the time of the closings. And just to make sure the fear card was fully played, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia added that the recent chatter of our enemies, whom he did not name, is “very reminiscent of what

we saw pre-9/11.”

Chambliss did not explain why, if the current chatter is reminiscent of 9/11, the American response was limited to closing embassies overseas. And of course he wasn't asked any probing questions.

“This is the most serious threat that I've seen in the last several years,” Chambliss asserted, pretty much contradicting all the Republican huffing and puffing about Benghazi. He wasn't asked about that, either.

The Political Version Of A Drug Mule, Chambliss Ferries Propaganda

Of course Chambliss was appearing on NBC's Meet The Press to shill for the official line with the full cooperation of host David Gregory. This is Saxby Chambliss, remember, the top Republican on the Intelligence Committee in recent years who, when Sen. Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, was trying to warn the country about National Security Agency (NSA) spying on Americans, said nothing.

As soon as news of the embassy closings broke, the news was full of skeptical voices saying how convenient that seems for the Obama Administration, changing the subject from NSA law-breaking to something somewhat scary. And Chambliss helped with that, making a breathtakingly dishonest comment about the NSA spy programs:

"These programs are controversial. We understand that. They're very sensitive. But they're also very important, because they are what lead us to have the — or allow us to have the ability to gather this chatter that I referred to. If we did not have these programs, then we simply wouldn't be able to listen in on the bad guys. And I will say that it's the 702 program that has allowed us to pick up on this chatter. That's the program that allows us to listen overseas, not on domestic soil, but overseas."

In other words, according to Chambliss, the legal NSA program of gathering intelligence overseas gathered some intelligence overseas, even if it was just "chatter."

But as to the NSA's illegal behavior in the homeland, never mind.

And especially never mind the breaking news from Reuters on August 5, that the NSA is — presumably with no known legal authority — sharing phone data with another element of the homeland security state, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which in turn misleads the courts, prosecutors, and defense attorneys as to the source of their information. How is this not a criminal conspiracy? It becomes abundantly clear that criminals are running the country!

Because we're a country at war, and that war is a fabrication; the enemy can't be named publicly because the enemy includes you!

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[Edited.]

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