

The Nation defends John Brennan, Obama's nominee for the CIA

By Joseph Kishore
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The *Nation* magazine is home to a particularly odious group of journalists. The “left” publication speaks on behalf of a privileged layer of the upper middle class, deeply complacent, lacking political principles and more and more integrated into the military and political establishment.

Even by these standards, a column penned by the *Nation*'s Robert Dreyfuss January 22, “Brennan at the CIA Might Surprise Us,” stands out. Dreyfuss is no casual commentator. He is the *Nation*'s chief foreign policy correspondent. The article thus presents the magazine's more or less official position in defense of John Brennan, nominated by President Barack Obama to head the CIA.

As Obama's homeland security and counterterrorism adviser, Brennan played the principal role in vastly expanding the administration's drone assassination program. He oversaw the development of the “disposition matrix” to permanently institutionalize the practice of extrajudicial murder—disposing of human beings—in the name of the “war on terror.”

Before serving under Obama, Brennan was the director of the National Counterterrorism Center in the Bush administration, where he was implicated in torture and illegal domestic spying. In sum, this is a man with a great deal of blood on his hands.

This is Obama's second attempt to nominate Brennan for the top post in America's spy network. When the president first tried to do so in 2009, the nomination came under criticism from his liberal supporters. Brennan eventually withdrew his nomination.

This time around, there has been much less criticism. The Democratic Party and its milieu have moved even farther to the right over the past four years. Some voices have been raised, however, including from a few

liberal commentators cited by Dreyfuss. The *Nation* responds by offering its services as a lawyer for Brennan and the Obama administration.

“Were you a terrorist or member of Al Qaeda, you wouldn't want to meet John Brennan in a dark alley,” Dreyfuss begins. “He's an Irish tough guy, and he doesn't apologize for wanting to obliterate Al Qaeda. For four years, as Obama's top adviser on counterterrorism, that's been his job... Often innocents have died.”

“But Brennan may surprise us.”

In the end, the massacre of thousands of civilians by US drones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and other countries is of little concern to Dreyfuss. “Maybe, just maybe, John Brennan won't be a bad CIA director,” he writes. What, one might ask, is a *good CIA director*? The notion that the *Nation* might take a principled stand in opposition to the American government's chief spying and dirty tricks agency does not cross Dreyfuss's mind.

The article resorts to lawyerly sophistry. There are “widespread accusations, not necessarily accurate, that he [Brennan] supported torture during the George W. Bush administration.” He “may or may not have objected to the use of waterboarding and other violent techniques.” To claim that he is “a supporter of torture,” is “an accusation without proof.”

Really? Brennan is on record as declaring in 2007, “There has been a lot of information that has come out from these interrogation procedures that the [CIA] has, in fact, used against the real hard-core terrorists. It has saved lives.” We must “take every possible measure” against those “determined to destroy our nation,” he declared in another interview given at that time.

As for drones, Dreyfuss goes on, “it's a mixed bag.” He boasts that “on several occasions, I met and

interviewed Brennan.” In these discussions, the *Nation* assures its readers, Brennan came off as a principled man, even “left,” animated by a belief that “the military is the wrong instrument in fighting terrorism.” He quotes an article in the *Washington Post* portraying Brennan as guided by a “moral compass” in his selection of drone targets.

Parroting the line of the Obama administration, Dreyfuss insists that Brennan has sought “to limit, not expand, drone warfare.” This can only be taken as an endorsement of the “disposition matrix.”

Dreyfuss refers to claims that Brennan has lied about the impact of the administration’s drone killing, asserting that it has not killed any civilians. However, Dreyfuss observes, “Brennan made clear that he was talking about a specific stretch of time” of about a year—suggesting by implication that the hundreds of people killed during this period all deserved to die. The administration automatically categorizes any adult-aged male it happens to kill as a “terrorist.”

If this defense does not suffice, Dreyfuss has another one prepared. “To be sure,” he writes, “as the White House’s counterterrorism chief and as a spokesman for the administration, Brennan has no choice but to defend the administration’s policy of carrying out a global drone warfare program.” Brennan, after all, was just following orders.

The attitude of Dreyfuss and the *Nation* magazine toward basic democratic rights is summed up in the comment’s treatment of the administration’s policy of assassinating US citizens. Mention of this violation of fundamental constitutional principles is confined to the final paragraphs, in which Dreyfuss notes that “Senator Ron Wyden says he wants answers about the administration’s legal justification for killing American citizens via drone attacks.”

The confirmation hearings next month, Dreyfuss assures us, “should be seen as an opportunity to get answers to all these questions, on the record.”

This is an obvious fraud. Dreyfuss is well aware that the administration has adamantly refused to make available its pseudo-legal justifications for assassinating American citizens, successfully blocking in court efforts to force it to do so.

Dreyfuss personifies a social layer that, through the mechanism of the Obama administration, has reconciled itself to imperialism, becoming in fact one

of the most adamant supporters of American aggression. There is nothing remotely left-wing about these forces. They are capable of supporting and defending any crime.

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