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Obama's National Security State

Systemic Integration of (Military) Power

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by NORMAN POLLACK

The militarization of intelligence is not a new development. *That* had always been its primary if not also integral function from the start. E.g., the CIA did not and does not, to my knowledge, focus its resources on, or preoccupy itself with, compiling baseball stats or tables of comparative annual rainfall, but rather, has proven its adeptness at assassination, the broader range of regime-change activities, and now, with JSOC forces and private contractors, it fulfills, under Obama's aegis, an enlarged operational role beyond strict intelligence of planning and executing drone killings (even possessing its own fleet of drones).

To this obviously military dimension, especially of foreign policy, along with that of the intelligence sections of the individual military-service branches, in what amounts to a holding pattern of business as usual, one finds something new and, I believe, more sinister, added under his watch. Obama has raised the military-factor in the intelligence realm a significant notch over

even that of his predecessors by means of combining its military and civilian aspects under a unified command structure.

This auspicious move, as reported by David Sanger and Thom Shanker in their *New York Times* article, “Obama to Keep Security Agency and Cyberwarfare Under a Single Commander,” Dec. 13, represents a militarization not only of intelligence, but also of government itself. It is the concentration of such power via fusing, under one “military official,” the National Security Agency and the Pentagon’s cyberwarfare division, which (a) brings the intelligence community under military leadership, and directs its operational role into more aggressively oriented functions, and (b) with this military emphasis, serves both to enlarge Executive Power and inscribe a geopolitical strategy at its heart, as in Obama’s war-prone Pacific-first strategy vis-à-vis China.

With Obama, so much becomes interconnected, and, from the standpoint of government transparency, as befitting a democratic society, utterly *impenetrable*, so that the militarization of government itself has as its leading edge the massive surveillance of the American people falling increasingly within the military orbit—a double whammy leading through the backdoor to a stronger, less responsible, more remote presidency.

Welcome, then, to Fortress America, Obama’s Kafkaesque Castle, in which the impenetrability of government is intimately associated with secretiveness (I surmise, domestically, to cover over extreme partiality to corporate and banking interests through a studied policy and program of deregulation, and more broadly, *cover up* war crimes, as in drone warfare and attendant “collateral damage,” abrogation of habeas corpus rights for detainees, and the nuts-and-bolts of counterterrorism, such as “enhanced interrogation,” as well as on a global front the whole body of Snowden’s revelations) and the short-circuiting of popular governance, the better to conduct military and trade operations close to the chest, as now, in the negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Eavesdropping on world leaders, if not a global citizenry as well, grandiose and insidious into the bargain, testifies further to the expansion, of course, of both the intelligence function and Executive Power, and arguably, these, and the foregoing (if I may use the term) *abuses* would hardly be possible without the driving spirit of global hegemony and the will fortified and made practicable in the first place by the centrality of the military orientation to national and international policy and the actual battle strength and readiness underneath it.

Now, down to brass tacks. From the Sanger-Shanker article we learn that Obama is firmly in charge of the decision to unify what have become in practice complementary functions, to wit, intelligence and cyberwarfare, a decision knowingly concentrating power in a single official *and* somewhat through sleight-of-hand ensuring that he wears a military hat. Upon the retirement next year of Gen. Keith Alexander, who already holds both commands, Obama “must appoint a four-star military officer,” because “[o]nly a military commander can run Cyber Command, which is responsible for defending the military’s computer and sensor systems and carrying out *offensive computer-network attacks*.” (Italics, mine)

Such cyber attacks are becoming increasingly important (perhaps an Obama signature which may succeed that of drone assassination), but also noteworthy is the tail wagging the dog, cyberware the portal through which the military takes control of the National Security Agency. (Yes, Alexander now, but succeeding him with another general, as Obama plans, confirms the pattern, parallel to the way expanding the “hit lists” under John Brennan was intended by Obama to create the precedent for drone attacks binding future administrations—Obama, and those around him, conscious of making precedent-setting measures, as, e.g., Espionage Act prosecutions, often of a questionable nature.) Thus, they write: “But that also means the N.S.A. will be run by someone who has spent a career in the military culture, with the mind-set that engenders.”

No argument from Obama on that, although “[s]everal members of an advisory committee that submitted the report to Mr. Obama...expressed the view that the two organizations should be split, in part to assure civilian control of the N.S.A.” Because the report—more secretiveness—will not be made public “until next month,” this required real legwork from the reporters. There is much at stake here; in a Times article on Dec. 14, Mark Mazzetti and Michael Schmidt’s, entitled “Officials Say U.S. May Never Know Extent to Snowden’s Leaks,” to which I will recur, one sees Obama’s reasoning on the present case, the need to throw a safe blanket over N.S.A. to prevent further leaks. As Sanger and Shanker continue: “The agency is responsible for electronic intelligence gathering and has been at the center of the revelations about government surveillance.”

When I say, the militarization of intelligence, this signifies not only its broadly-conceived aims, but its literal envelopment within a command structure presumed less easy to penetrate. In proper-Washington doublespeak, Caitlin Hayden, National Security Council spokesperson, stated that Obama decided that “keeping the positions of N.S.A. director and Cyber Command

commander together as one, dual-hatted position is the most effective approach to accomplishing both agencies' missions.”

To hear her, one would think domestic massive surveillance and global eavesdropping were nonexistent or mere sideshows of NSA, and that its chief function was to assist the Cyber Command: “N.S.A. plays a unique role in supporting Cyber Command’s mission, providing critical support for target access and development, including linguistics, analysts, cryptanalytic capabilities and sophisticated technological infrastructure.” True, and not irrelevant for its own spying, or related espionage activities through joint efforts with the Cyber Command, as in what the reporters call attention to, “the ‘Olympic Games,’ the cyberattacks launched against Iran’s nuclear program.” (But they make no mention of the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, possibly in collaboration with Mossad.)

The table of organization, however, becomes part of the (to me) frightening interconnections I mentioned, for as the reporters relate: “From its creation in 2009, Cyber Command has had a complicated organizational relationship within the military and intelligence community. It is not a stand-alone military command, but is subordinate to the Strategic Command in Nebraska, which has authority over America’s nuclear arsenal. But it is physically located at Fort Meade, in Maryland, alongside the National Security Agency.” Next-door neighbors, but now together with SAC and the “nuclear arsenal”—under military leadership, which POTUS prefers that way.

So does SD Hagel (no one wants to discuss or identify the nuclear arsenal in this context), and, still not issuing an “official statement on the decision to retain the current structure,” he—the reporters write—is relying on the judgment of “senior Pentagon officials” that NSA-Cyber Command unity “was based on an assessment that the military’s global combatant commanders rely heavily on both the security agency and Cyber Command for *real-time support*.” (Italics, mine) Last month, Hagel previewed the decision about not separating NSA and Cyber Command leadership, “in particular in measuring any changes against the risks to carrying out military operations around the globe.”

Is there any doubt that the militarization of intelligence (NSA), conjoined as it is to the military proper, is a fact of life? Hagel: “I listen to our combatant commanders very carefully on this, because they’re probably as big a user on a day-to-day basis of the benefits of having these two commands together as anyone. And we charge them—America charges them, the Congress, the president, I do—in each of their combatant commander responsibilities, to keep their areas safe, but also keep us all safe.” The same can be said for the other functions of NSA and Cyber

Command, as well as, in light of the “military culture,” drone assassination, torture, sanctions and embargoes, poised confrontations, etc., etc. Gen. Dempsey, chair of the Joint Chiefs, echoed the sentiment for combination: “My interest is in assuring that the intelligence that the National Security Agency gathers is responsive to the needs of those out in the *tactical level fighting our wars*.” (Italics, mine) The friendly folks monitoring all US communications, implicitly making each of us potential terrorist suspects, are on the frontline “keep[ing] us all safe”—even presumably from ourselves.

For supplementary insight on the joint structure of NSA and Cyber Command, Mazzetti and Schmidt in The Times provide indispensable background on current Washington paranoia, thanks to Mr. Snowden. In effect, the National Security State must be made secure, and although they do not say it, intelligence firmly under military command supposedly will ensure its protection. At this point, no one seems able to determine how much he “extracted from classified government computers before leaving the United States, according to senior government officials.”

They further explain: “Investigators remain in the dark about the extent of the data breach partly because the N.S.A. facility in Hawaii where Mr. Snowden worked—unlike other N.S.A. facilities—was not equipped with up-to-date software that allows the spy agency [at least they call it *that*] to monitor which corners of its vast computer landscape its employees are navigating at any given time.” A more efficient command structure, one guesses, would prevent this and Snowden’s “cover[ing] his tracks by logging into classified systems using the passwords of other security agency employees, as well as by hacking firewalls installed to limit access to certain parts of the system.”

USG is desperate, if not also embarrassed: “That Mr. Snowden was so expertly able to exploit blind spots in the systems of America’s most secretive spy agency illustrates how far computer security still lagged years after President Obama ordered standards tightened after the WikiLeaks revelations of 2010.” Never again, one can almost hear him say. Too, Snowden’s disclosures, speaking of embarrassment (an almost mortal blow to this thin-skinned POTUS, who guards his image like no other), set off a national debate about the expansion of the N.S.A.’s powers to spy both at home and abroad, and have left the Obama administration trying frantically to mend relations with allies after [Snowden’s] revelations about American eavesdropping on foreign leaders.” (From general experience, one can suggest that putting intelligence under the military places criticism off-limits, as when we speak of our “warriors” when discussing service members.)

In any case, the disclosures *must* stop, some officials even willing to grant Snowden amnesty, in exchange for remaining documents.

Rick Ledgett, who heads the NSA's task force on the leaks, stated that amnesty is "worth having a conversation about. I would need assurances that the remainder of the data could be secured, and my bar for those assurances would be very high." Under DOJ indictment for espionage and stealing government property, I suspect even full disclosure and self-abasement, particularly with the decision resting on a vindictive Obama, would not result in amnesty for Snowden, nor would he avail himself of the opportunity should it ever come. Principled action is not taken lightly, given his personal sacrifice (and the utter lack of comprehension on the part of Authority), nor would he permit the burying of subsequent disclosures.

The reporters write that the investigation continues, DOJ, with the FBI's Washington field office in the lead, the NSA task force, a presidential advisory commission which just submitted its report—the wheels grind on in the effort to halt the disclosure of classified documents, already begun in 2010, with Chelsea Manning's release of military chat logs and diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks. By "executive order" Obama established, in 2011, "a task force [led by the attorney general and the director of national intelligence] charged with 'deterring, detecting, and mitigating insider threats, including the safeguarding of classified information from exploitation, compromise, or other unauthorized disclosure.'"

Why the frantic efforts at damage control? Why NSA's huge organization, "approximately 35,000 employees," larger than "any intelligence agency"? And probably greater still, taking into account both necessary auxiliary positions and the need for secrecy and to allay suspicions about the scope of spying activities. But for our purposes, WHY the combined civilian-military structure under the latter's command, its ramifications for the wholesale destruction of civil liberties and the quelling of dissent, simultaneous with offering the rationale for a counterterrorism policy tightly pinned to securing global hegemony and—apparently its helpmate—the expansion of Executive Power? The answer to all three speaks for itself—the eclipse of democracy.