

Obama Sends a Signal to the Few Remaining Suckers Who Believe in the Rule of Law

Written by Chris Floyd
Monday, 03 August 2009 22:29

For anyone still harboring a few scraps of vestigial hope that the change of administration effected by the 2008 election would restore even a thin, weak, straggly lineament thin of the rule of law in the United States, [the recent opinion piece](#) by Barack Obama's hand-picked CIA chief, the doleful Establishment water-toter Leon Panetta, will tell you all you need to know.

In the friendly confines of the authoritarian newsletter known as the Washington Post -- Panetta, the weak reed appointed precisely because of his weakness and reedness by Obama, [who then surrounded the little puppet](#)

with some of the most complicit torture mavens of the Bush Regime to really run the CIA show -- delivered himself of one of the most cringe-worthy performances by a high public official since the ritual abasements of Stalin's 1930s show trials. In this case, however, Panetta was not making a ludicrous, outrageous confession of false crimes he never committed; instead, he was making a ludicrous, outrageous defense of *real*

crimes committed by Obama's predecessors -- and in the process justifying his boss's craven (if entirely predictable) failure to faithfully execute the laws of the United States, as he swore to do in front of so many swooning millions just a few months ago, and prosecute the top Bushists for their manifest (not to mention openly confessed) high crimes.

In the piece, Panetta followed the Dick Cheney party line that the Obama Administration has adopted whole cloth. Anyone fooled by the stilted kabuki theater staged in the past few months -- i.e., a purported "great conflict" between Obama and Cheney over torture and other Terror War issues -- has, as they say, rocks in the head. For Obama has pushed the Cheney line at every turn -- in speeches, in policy decisions and in court actions. And what is that line? In brief, that Bush and Cheney were noble public servants whose every possible excess can be excused by their zealous love and concern for the American people. That's the broad overview; getting down to brass tacks, the Cheney line is that any act of the Bush Administration that on the surface appears to be a flagrant violation of settled U.S. law was in fact perfectly justified by legal memos written, to order, by White House lawyers.

This is the sum total of the arguments advanced by Cheney and various other Bush apologists in recent months. Can anyone deny that these are the precise positions also taken by the Obama Administration? Well, if it wasn't specific enough for you before, Panetta has made it crystal clear. He writes:

The time has come for both Democrats and Republicans to take a deep breath and recognize the reality of what happened after Sept. 11, 2001. The question is not the sincerity or the patriotism of those who were dealing with the aftermath of Sept. 11. The country was frightened, and political leaders were trying to respond as best they could. Judgments were made. Some of them were wrong. But that should not taint those public servants who did their duty pursuant to the legal guidance provided.

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The only minor point of disagreement between Cheney and Obama on this point can be found in Panetta's milksop concession the "some" of the "judgments" made by the Bush Administration were "wrong." But this is simply the usual factional quibbling seen around any imperial court. The core argument is the same: the attacks on September 11 justified any and all reactions in response, however illegal, heinous, murderous and atrocious.

(I would just like to interject a personal note here. I am an American citizen, and I was not "frightened" after the September 11 attacks. Nor was I "frightened" by the London attacks on July 7, 2005, even though I was in London that day. I have never been so "frightened" of terrorist attacks -- not even in the first minutes and hours after September 11 -- that I was willing to jettison the U.S. constitution, not to mention all rational judgment and common and moral sense, and let the government do "whatever it takes" to protect me. I have always deeply resented this constant imputation of base cowardice to the entire American people by American leaders year after year. I have no doubt whatsoever that the coddled, well-waddled sons of bitches who feed at public trough in Washington are themselves base cowards of the highest order; but Jesus Herbert Walker Christ, I do get tired of them projecting their own wiggly fears onto me.)

Look, it's very simple. The American republic ended for good a long time ago, more than a decade before I was born. Its last vestiges were wiped out with [the creation of the National Security State](#) signed into being by President Harry S Truman in 1947, and strengthened in a series of directives in the subsequent months. Such as the secret National Security Council directive NSC 10/2, signed in June 1948, which, a [s James Douglass notes](#), gave the newly created American security apparat the power to carry out "propaganda, economic warfare, preventive direct action including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures, subversion against hostile states including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerillas and refugee liberation groups." It also directed that these covert ops were to be "so planned and executed that any US government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons, and that if uncovered the US government can plausibly deny responsibility for them."

In other words, Panetta's CIA -- and the plethora of other secret agencies and armies that have sprung up in [the blood-drenched muck](#) of the National Security State -- is specifically empowered to break the law and lie about it.

So what are we to make of Panetta's rationalization of Obama's cowardice in confronting the crimes of his predecessor, when he says:

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...the Obama administration made policy changes in intelligence that ended some controversial practices... Yet my agency continues to pay a price for enduring disputes over policies that no longer exist.

Let's leave aside the glaringly obvious fact that an alleged cessation of a crime in no way mitigates or absolves its past commission. Or to put it another way: if a serial killer stops killing people, he is still culpable for the murders he committed before he "reformed." Yet we are constantly told that the government could fall and the world could end if anyone in power acknowledges this simple, self-evident fact.

But as I said, put that aside for the moment, and consider this: When the head of an agency that was created and empowered specifically to break the law and tell lies about it tells us that his agency no longer breaks the law -- are we supposed to believe him? Should such a person from such an agency be given the benefit of the doubt? Or should not our first, rational, logical, and fully justified-by-history reaction be: "This guy is lying, and I will continue to assume that he is lying -- since that is his job -- until he proves, conclusively, otherwise."

This operation of reason and logic is given the pejorative term "cynicism" these days, especially among those of "progressive" hue, some of whom are still painfully contorting themselves in order to "give Obama a chance." We also hear sometimes that, like John Kennedy, Obama must move carefully against powerful, entrenched interests in the military-industrial-security complex. But there is no indication that Obama is in the least interested in moving "against" this complex; on the contrary, there are relentless, manifold indications that he eagerly *embraces* the National Security State and the militarist empire for which it stands, and seeks to extend its power. The op-ed by Panetta is yet another chunk in this mountain of evidence. For again, does anyone out there seriously believe that Panetta would be green-lighted to publish such a piece if it did not reflect the views of Barack Obama?

So you want to know what Obama thinks? He thinks, like Cheney, that you are a sniveling little coward who was glad to sign over your liberties to an authoritarian regime. He thinks, like Cheney, that any crime -- torture, murder, aggressive war -- can be countenanced if the Leader and his minions order it to be done. He thinks, like Cheney, that the decades-old National Security State must be protected -- *at all costs* -- from any vestige or ghostly revenant of the vanished Republic and its laws.

That is what Barack Obama believes. That is what his policies imply. And that is what his shallow mouthpiece, Leon Panetta, has just told you, openly, brazenly, to your face.

Note: Stephen Webster [has more at Raw Story.](#)