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October 24, 2008

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## Who Watches the Home Front?

Posted November 14, 2006 | 08:07 PM (EST)

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Oversight is the rallying cry of the new Democrat Class of '06. But there's a danger that the policy area most obviously in need of real accountability - our domestic national security agenda - will get short shrift in the rush to address the Iraq debacle.

Legislators moved quickly on Iraq. Legislation to revive the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction [has already been flagged](#) for the lame-duck Congress. Inquiry into the myriad iniquities that make out America's Iraq policy is a no-brainer for the new Congress. And Rumsfeld's "resignation" is a sure sign that the Administration is battoning down the hatches in preparation for some heavy weather.

While Iraq is of unquestionable importance, there's also a pressing need for oversight on domestic security issues: How are our intelligence agencies and military behaving closer to home? So far, too little attention has been paid to this question.

For at least the past three years, the American public has been hearing stories of torture, the "extraordinary rendition" of suspects to torture, disappearance, detention, and warrantless surveillance. But to date, Congress has conducted no substantial inquiry into the full facts around any of these policy areas. In consequence, the executive branch has been able to control the narrative.

For example, with respect to torture, a plethora of internal executive branch investigations have produced fragmentary, and likely misleading, reports on the connection between political appointees in Washington, who developed legal justifications for torture, and interrogators out in the field, who put those justifications into practice. There is a need for sustained oversight that goes beyond the current quagmire in Iraq. We need to know not only how we have gone wrong - and violated core individual rights - of innocent men and women over the past five years, but also how we can avoid those same mistakes in the future.

This oversight is especially important because the policies at issue - torture, "extraordinary rendition," wiretapping - were fashioned without congressional input or oversight: So they will likely continue unabated, with the attendant harms this causes, until Congress steps in.

At a minimum, we need serious and substantial inquiries soon into the following topics:

- The activities of all military intelligence gathering agencies in the United States. It's not just the NSA we need to worry about. Several months ago, Walter Pincus of the Washington Post wrote a series of superlative articles about a military agency called CIFA, or the "Counter-Intelligence Field Activities." This agency had been collecting reams of data on civilians in the United States, including anti-war protesters. There has never been a full accounting of CIFA's role or responsibilities - let alone the kind of synoptic overview of what military intelligence is doing in the United States, which the American public are long overdue.
- The actual interrogation policies of the CIA, and any military intelligence agencies that are engaged in detention and interrogation policies. Startling, the White House continues to resist disclosure of even the most generic documents on this matter, documents whose disclosure poses no risk of compromising national security. For example, there is an August 2002 Justice Department memo, a sibling to the infamous "torture memo" of the Office of Legal Counsel, which analysis a series of specific interrogation tactics (Waterboarding? Cold cell? "long time standing"? Is this where the Vice President gets his impression that waterboarding is just dandy--and legal?). Did the Justice Department find these tactics all legal? Ethical? Did it even ask the ethical question? We don't know until we see the memo and see how it was operationalized.
- Our relations with foreign intelligence agencies: The Who's, the What's, and the How's. It is by now clear that the United States maintains standing relationships with the world's most brutal and anti-democratic intelligence agencies, including Syria's, Egypt's, and Jordan's. There has been virtually no disclosure - and scant public debate - about what we are doing supporting the least democratic elements in countries we are supposed to be supporting democracy in.

These are the tips of the proverbial iceberg. Finding out how deep the iceberg runs is the task of oversight. It's about time we started getting some answers.

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