

# OBAMA ON DRONES: SILENCE

Karen DeYoung wonders something I have been wondering.

The Obama administration is still struggling with how to make good on the president's promise to ensure that its counterterrorism programs, including drone strikes, are "even more transparent to the American people and to the world."

After President Obama's pledge in his **State of the Union address** in mid-February, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. told a Senate hearing in early March that the president would publicly address the issue "in a relatively short period of time."

In the ensuing silence, only one U.S. drone attack has been reported, in Pakistan nearly a month ago.

[snip]

Remarks by Obama and Holder led many to think that the president was preparing to make a major speech on counterterrorism and drones. The president himself, senior administration officials have said, ordered a series of public speeches by Brennan and others in recent years outlining the drone program's legal framework and the care with which targets are chosen.

The question now is how much more the administration can say without violating secrecy restrictions on its own covert actions.

But she doesn't consider some of the possible explanations for Obama's silence.

First, Congress and the public got a look at the Administration's rationale for killing an American citizen. Not even the NYT's best efforts could make that look very good. Once I finally get done traveling I plan to lay out some evidence showing that that case is still more fragile than has been made public so far. So at the very least, I would imagine the Administration isn't going to let the President speak on this until they have a plan in place – perhaps a drone court, perhaps more friendly leaks to the press to pretend there's more evidence – that will make the case look less shitty.

Then there's the Administration's recent FOIA set-back in the courts. While I'm more skeptical than many that this will bring about real disclosures, I do think the Administration is trying to map out a new legal strategy in response to that set-back. And at the very least, the FOIA set-back increases the chance that we'll get to fact-check whatever Obama says publicly. Which is not how the Most Transparent Administration Evah™ prefers to work; they prefer pure information asymmetry on national security issues, with rampant leaks but no ability to check their rampant leaks.

And finally there are the pictures we'll get from Mark Mazzetti and Jeremy Scahill's new books, with Mazzetti's *Way of the Knife* officially released tomorrow and Scahill's *Dirty Wars* coming out April 23. The public understanding of drones and other counterterrorism programs will likely change significantly with these two books, with not just an enhanced understanding of the quid pro quo murders we committed to be able to drone our own targets, but also the real inefficacy of the drone war generally.

Back when Holder promised a speech from Obama, I think he – and the Administration – had an overconfident belief in their their legal and political stance with drones. That may be changing amid all the silence.