

BIG-FOOTING SUPERPOWER STATUS ALSO ABOUT LEGALLY IMMUNE COMMANDER IN CHIEF(S)

In a piece making the obvious comparison between fugitive spy Robert Seldon Lady and accused Espionage fugitive Edward Snowden, Tom Englehardt writes off the press silence about presumed American assistance to Lady in fleeing an international arrest warrant as the reality of being the sole superpower.

It's no less a self-evident truth in Washington that Robert Seldon Lady must be protected from the long (Italian) arm of the law, that he is a patriot who did his duty, that it is the job of the U.S. government to keep him safe and never allow him to be prosecuted, just as it is the job of that government to protect, *not prosecute*, CIA torturers who took part in George W. Bush's Global War on Terror.

So there are two men, both of whom, Washington is convinced, must be brought in: one to face "justice," one to escape it. And all of this is a given, nothing that needs to be explained or justified to anyone anywhere, not even by a Constitutional law professor president. (Of course, if someone had been accused of kidnapping and rendering an American Christian fundamentalist preacher and terror suspect off the streets of Milan to Moscow or Tehran or Beijing, it would no less self-evidently be a different matter.)

Don't make the mistake, however, of comparing Washington's positions on

Snowden and Lady and labeling the Obama administration's words and actions "hypocrisy." There's no hypocrisy involved. This is simply the living definition of what it means to exist in a one-superpower world for the first time in history. For Washington, the essential rule of thumb goes something like this: we do what we want; we get to say what we want about what we do; and U.N. ambassadorial nominee Samantha Powers then gets to lecture the world on human rights and oppression.

This version of how it all works is so much the norm in Washington that few there are likely to see any contradiction at all between the Obama administration's approaches to Snowden and Lady, nor evidently does the Washington media.

Englehardt doesn't mention Sabrina De Sousa's claims about the CIA's kidnapping of Osama Mustapha Hassan Nasr (Abu Omar) and Italy's subsequent prosecution of those involved. Adding her in the mix makes it clear how closely immunity for the Commander in Chief and his top aides is part of this superpower big-footing.

De Sousa, who says she served as an interpreter for the kidnapers on a planning trip, but not in the operation itself, was convicted and sentenced in Italy in part because the government refused to invoke diplomatic immunity (she admits she worked for CIA, but was under official cover).

The kidnapping did not meet US standards for renditions, but Station Chief Jeff Castelli wanted to do one anyway, and pushed through its approval even without Italian cooperation.

Despite concerns with the strength of Castelli's case, CIA headquarters still agreed to move forward and seek Rice's approval, De Sousa said. She recalled

reading a cable from late 2002 that reported that Rice was worried about whether CIA personnel “would go to jail” if they were caught.

In response, she said, Castelli wrote that any CIA personnel who were caught would just be expelled from Italy “and SISMi will bail everyone out.”

Of her CIA superiors, De Sousa said, “They knew this (the rendition) was bullshit, but they were just allowing it. These guys approved it based on what Castelli was saying even though they knew it never met the threshold for rendition.”

Asked which agency officials would have been responsible for reviewing the operation and agreeing to ask Rice for Bush’s authorization, De Sousa said they would have included Tenet; Tyler Drumheller, who ran the CIA’s European operations; former CIA Director of Operations James Pavitt and his then-deputy, Stephen Kappes; Jose Rodriguez, then the head of the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center, and former acting CIA General Counsel John Rizzo.

De Sousa says the Italians and Americans colluded to protect the highers up, while prosecuting her and other lower level people.

De Sousa accused Italian leaders of colluding with the United States to shield Bush, Rice, Tenet and senior CIA aides by declining to prosecute them or even demanding that Washington publicly admit to staging the abduction.

Calling the operation unjustified and illegal, De Sousa said Italy and the United States cooperated in “scape-goating a bunch of people . . . while the ones who approved this stupid rendition are all free.”

Note, she doesn't say this, but some of the people in the chain of command for this kidnapping – in both the US and Italy – were also involved in planting the Niger forgeries used to start the Iraq War. And, of course, a number of the Americans were involved in the torture program and its cover-up.

Since then, De Sousa has used all legal avenues to blow the whistle on this kidnapping.

De Sousa said that she has tried for years to report what she said was the baseless case for Nasr's abduction and her shoddy treatment by the CIA and two administrations.

Her pleas and letters, however, were ignored by successive U.S. intelligence leaders, the CIA inspector general's office, members and staff of the House and Senate intelligence committees, Rice, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Attorney General Eric Holder, said De Sousa.

Assuming De Sousa's story is correct (and an anonymous source backs its general outlines), then it adds one more reason why Lady quietly got to return to the US while Snowden will be loudly chased around the world.

What Americans are buying off on – along with superpower status that may defund schools in exchange for empire – with their silence about the disparate treatment of Sady and Snowden, then, is not just the ego thrill of living in a thus far unrivaled state.

It's also, implicitly, the kind of immunity for the Commander in Chief and executive branch that shouldn't exist in democratic states.