**Just Foreign Policy News, July 3, 2013
If They Can Lie About NSA/Snowden, They Can Lie About Syria & Iran**

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**I) Actions and Featured Articles**

**If They Can Lie About NSA/Snowden, They Can Lie About Syria and Iran**If DNI Clapper can lie to Congress about the NSA’s data collection on millions of Americans and face no consequences, what’s to stop him from lying to Congress about military escalation in Syria or Iran?
[http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/17369-if-they-can-lie-about-nsa-snowden-they-can-lie-about-syria-and-iran](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=Ekf4SucDN0GiQ65N0Dn6Z1HDHXBuD7Ke)

**\*\*Action:** **Tell your Senators and Rep. to Assert Syria War Powers**
The Obama Administration has announced that the U.S. would arm Syrian rebels and consider imposing a no-fly zone over Syria, which would mean bombing Syria. Congress has neither authorized arming Syrian rebels nor imposing a no-fly zone. A bipartisan group of Senators (Udall/Paul S. 1201) and Representatives (Gibson/Welch H.R. 2494) have introduced legislation that would prohibit U.S. military intervention in Syria without explicit Congressional authorization. Urge your Senators and Rep. to co-sponsor.
[http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/act/syria-war-powers](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=WWwixTmGPhuEoYlPXbMjWVHDHXBuD7Ke)

**Guardian LiveBlog: Edward Snowden not on Bolivian president's diverted plane**Bolivia furious after president's plane diverts to Austria
Foreign minister: France and Portugal denied airspace permits
Snowden apparently not on board after Vienna landing
Bolivia accuses United States of 'hostile act'
[http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/03/edward-snowden-asylum-live](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=URNi7Bcs%2BjDA7RgnBAe6jlHDHXBuD7Ke)

**Yemen's "Schoolhouse Rock" vs. the "War on Terror": A Conversation with Baraa Shiban**Reprieve’s Baraa Shiban on efforts by Yemen's National Dialogue Conference – Yemen's Constitutional Convention – to prohibit drone strikes in the country.
[http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/17291-yemens-schoolhouse-rock-vs-the-war-on-terror-a-conversation-with-baraa-shiban](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=cX8s9Fspvi%2FIziZzm%2BOK9lHDHXBuD7Ke)

**Celebrities, Whistleblowers Lead Petition to Ecuador for Snowden's Political Asylum
Petition Has Over 25,000 Signers**
Oliver Stone, Michael Moore, Danny Glover, John Cusack, Amber Heard, Shia LaBeouf, Roseanne Barr, and musician Boots Riley have joined Vietnam War whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg and Iraq War whistle-blower Joe Wilson, author Noam Chomsky and many other prominent whistle-blowers, activists, former intelligence and military officers, academics and others in calling on Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa to grant whistle-blower Edward Snowden political asylum.
[http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/act/snowden](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=2zBWxGJNpigwoQrK%2BmvLD1HDHXBuD7Ke)

**Human Rights Watch: Statement on Protection of Whistleblowers in Security Sector**"There is no doubt that the substance of the latest disclosures made by Edward Snowden of massive NSA data collection from Verizon, and the cooperation of major communications companies in the NSA’s intelligence-gathering, is a matter of widespread public interest… These disclosures have already impelled legislators to introduce bills to limit the secrecy of the Foreign Intelligence Service Act processes; prompted new revelations on the scope of dragnet surveillance orders and the evolution of these practices and prompted the NSA to disclose more to legislators who have expressed surprise that surveillance exceeds even what has been publicly exposed… In the case of Edward Snowden, the material he has reportedly shared so far with the Guardian and the Washington Post has revealed that US agencies have exploited security laws to conduct massive data surveillance that intruded on the rights of millions of people around the world, including many US citizens ..."
"In light of these specific facts, Human Rights Watch urges the Obama administration not to prosecute Edward Snowden or other national security whistleblowers until it is prepared to explain to the public, in as much detail as possible, what the concrete and specific harms to national security his disclosures have caused, and why they outweigh the public’s right to know. If the administration truly welcomes a debate on issues of privacy, rights, and security, as President Obama has said it does, then prosecuting the man who sparked the debate is not the way to show it."
[http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/18/us-statement-protection-whistleblowers-security-sector](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=uAmtUesm0QdBuw3nvffLLVHDHXBuD7Ke)

**Video: Glenn Greenwald: Speaking on NSA stories, Snowden and journalism**While you’re celebrating Independence Day, check out this video of Glenn Greenwald speaking on the NSA scandal, Snowden, establishment journalism, and the ability of individuals to resist the culture of fear. Inspiring, passionate, and hilarious.
[http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jun/29/speech-nsa-snowden-journalism](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=4BJne9yzPhvHHJuCPEYh227qVuW5AxIc) **Summary:**[**U.S./Top News**](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#13fa6f8691960621_13fa6ed9c32939f0_13fa65f5d30355f5_july3w1)
1) The US authorities’ relentless campaign to hunt down and block whistleblower Edward Snowden’s attempts to seek asylum is deplorable and amounts to a gross violation of his human rights, Amnesty International said. "The US attempts to pressure governments to block Snowden’s attempts to seek asylum are deplorable," said Michael Bochenek, Director of Law and Policy at Amnesty International. "It is his unassailable right, enshrined in international law, to claim asylum and this should not be impeded." Senior US officials have already condemned Snowden without a trial, labelling him both guilty and a traitor, raising serious questions as to whether he’d receive a fair trial, Amnesty noted.

2) A bipartisan group of lawmakers is pushing a resolution that would prevent President Obama from arming the Syrian rebels without congressional approval, AP reports. "If we intervene militarily, we will exacerbate the situation," said Rep. Chris Gibson, R-N.Y., who served more than two decades in the Army with multiple tours to Iraq and deployments to Kosovo and Haiti. Democratic Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont said everyone recognizes that Syria is a humanitarian crisis. He warned, however, about "Americanizing a civil war." The lawmakers cited Libya, where U.S. involvement left a lawlessness reflected in the deadly assault in Benghazi last September that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens.

3) Broad majorities of Democrats and Republicans alike disagree with President Obama's decision to supply arms to rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President Assad, CBS News reports. 70 percent of Americans polled by Pew said they oppose doing so. The survey reflected very little partisan divide in attitudes about the civil war: 74 percent of independents, 71 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of Democrats said they're against the US and its allies sending arms to Syria.

4) it has been undeniably clear that James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, outright lied to the US Senate when he said "no, sir" in response to this question from Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden: "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?" writes Glenn Greenwald at the Guardian. Intentionally deceiving Congress is a felony, punishable by up to 5 years in prison for each offense, Greenwald notes. Beyond its criminality, lying to Congress destroys the pretense of oversight. Obviously, members of Congress cannot exercise any actual oversight over programs which are being concealed by deceitful national security officials.

Wyden issued a statement denouncing the Administration’s misleading statements, Greenwald notes, explaining that the Senate's oversight function "cannot be done responsibly if senators aren't getting straight answers to direct questions", and calling for "public hearings" to "address the recent disclosures," arguing that "the American people have the right to expect straight answers from the intelligence leadership to the questions asked by their representatives."

5) A who's who of Hollywood’s progressive activists -- including director Oliver Stone and stars John Cusack and Danny Glover -- have joined a cadre of anti-war intellectuals petitioning Ecuador President Rafael Correa to grant political asylum to fugitive National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, the Hollywood Reporter writes. Other entertainment industry figures who are asking Correa to grant Snowden a refuge include Amber Heard, Roseanne Barr, Shia LaBeouf and musician Boots Riley. Peace activists Tom Hayden, Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame, former U.S. ambassador Joseph Wilson -- who is married to ex-CIA agent Valerie Plame -- and linguist Noam Chomsky also support Snowden's request.

**[Yemen](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1" \l "13fa6f8691960621_13fa6ed9c32939f0_13fa65f5d30355f5_july3w2)**
6) On June 9, a suspected U.S. drone killed a 10-year-old boy in Yemen, writes Cora Currier for ProPublica. It’s the first prominent allegation of a civilian death since President Obama pledged in a major speech in May "to facilitate transparency and debate" about the U.S. war on al Qaida-linked militants beyond Afghanistan. He also said "there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured" in a strike. So what does the administration have to say in response to evidence that a child was killed? Nothing. National security spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden would not comment on the June 9 strike. But in his Senate confirmation hearing, CIA chief John Brennan said the U.S. should acknowledge publicly when it kills civilians by mistake.

[**Afghanistan**](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#13fa6f8691960621_13fa6ed9c32939f0_13fa65f5d30355f5_july3w3)
7) A study conducted by a US military adviser has found that drone strikes in Afghanistan from mid-2010 to mid-2011 caused 10 times more civilian casualties than strikes by manned fighter aircraft, Spencer Ackerman reports in the Guardian. The new study contradicts claims by US officials that the robotic planes are more precise than their manned counterparts, Ackerman notes. "These findings show us that it's not about the technology, it's about how the technology is used," said Sarah Holewinski of the Center for Civilians in Conflict. "Drones aren't magically better at avoiding civilians than fighter jets."

**Contents:
U.S./Top News**
1) USA must not persecute whistleblower Edward Snowden
Amnesty International, 2 July 2013
[http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/usa-must-not-persecute-whistleblower-edward-snowden-2013-07-02](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=g6x0iVC%2FzQDJWvYiMzexzG7qVuW5AxIc)

The US authorities’ relentless campaign to hunt down and block whistleblower Edward Snowden’s attempts to seek asylum is deplorable and amounts to a gross violation of his human rights Amnesty International said today.

"The US attempts to pressure governments to block Snowden’s attempts to seek asylum are deplorable," said Michael Bochenek, Director of Law and Policy at Amnesty International. "It is his unassailable right, enshrined in international law, to claim asylum and this should not be impeded."

The organization also believes that the National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower could be at risk of ill-treatment if extradited to the USA.

"No country can return a person to another country where there is a serious risk of ill-treatment," said Bochenek.

"We know that others who have been prosecuted for similar acts have been held in conditions that not only Amnesty International but UN officials considered cruel inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of international law."

Senior US officials have already condemned Snowden without a trial, labelling him both guilty and a traitor, raising serious questions as to whether he’d receive a fair trial. Likewise the US authorities move to charge Snowden under the Espionage Act could leave him with no provision to launch a public interest whistle-blowing defence under US law.

"It appears he is being charged by the US government primarily for revealing its - and other governments’ - unlawful actions that violate human rights," said Bochenek.

"No one should be charged under any law for disclosing information of human rights violations. Such disclosures are protected under the rights to information and freedom of expression."

Besides filing charges against Snowden, the US authorities have revoked his passport – which interferes with his rights to freedom of movement and to seek asylum elsewhere.

"Snowden is a whistleblower. He has disclosed issues of enormous public interest in the US and around the world. And yet instead of addressing or even owning up to these actions, the US government is more intent on going after Edward Snowden."

"Any forced transfer to the USA would put him at risk of human rights violations and must be challenged," said Michael Bochenek.

2) Bipartisan group opposes arming Syrian rebels
Donna Cassata, AP, June 27, 2013
[http://news.yahoo.com/bipartisan-group-opposes-arming-syrian-rebels-162400583.html](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=TWj4ok7j81F39jxpJCL2olHDHXBuD7Ke)

Washington - A bipartisan group of lawmakers is pushing a resolution that would prevent President Barack Obama from arming the Syrian rebels without congressional approval.

Countering the loud Senate voices clamoring for action, the libertarian Republicans and liberal Democrats told a Capitol Hill news conference that they fear the United States being dragged into the deadly civil war that has killed more than 100,000 based on the latest estimates.

"If we intervene militarily, we will exacerbate the situation," said Rep. Chris Gibson, R-N.Y., who served more than two decades in the Army with multiple tours to Iraq and deployments to Kosovo and Haiti. He said he was concerned about the U.S. getting "sucked into a very difficult situation" when budget cuts have hit the military hard.

Democratic Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont said everyone recognizes that Syria is a humanitarian crisis as rebels have fought the regime of President Bashar Assad for more than two years. He warned, however, about "Americanizing a civil war."
[...]
The lawmakers cited Libya, where U.S. involvement helped oust strongman Moammar Gadhafi but left a lawlessness reflected in the deadly assault in Benghazi last September that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens.

Joining Gibson and Welch on the resolution were Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, Republican Rep. Walter Jones of North Carolina and Democratic Rep. Rick Nolan of Minnesota.

Asked about the legislative effort, House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said it was too soon to discuss such a vote. "I think that the United States has a strategic interest in what happens in Syria. We all would like to see Assad go. We'd also like to see a democratically elected government there," Boehner told reporters at a separate news conference. "And so for our interests and to support our allies in the region, I'm going to continue to work with the president on responsible steps that we can take to protect our interests."

On the resolution, he said, "I don't know that we are ready for that conversation because the president has not suggested any specific steps forward at this point and so there is really nothing yet to vote on."

Separately, Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Fla., a member of the House Intelligence Committee, and Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, head of the Homeland Security panel, have introduced similar legislation that would block the administration from providing weapons to the rebels unless it gets congressional approval first.

3) Most Americans oppose arming Syrian rebels, poll shows
Lindsey Boerma, CBS News, June 17, 2013
[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-250\_162-57589693/most-americans-oppose-arming-syrian-rebels-poll-shows/](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=TIRBEBC3wikexLefD0DSKVHDHXBuD7Ke)

Broad majorities of Democrats and Republicans alike disagree with President Obama's decision to supply arms to rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, according to a Pew poll out Monday.

Following the president's announcement last week that the United States would provide military support to opposition forces in the war-torn country amid mounting evidence that Assad used chemical weapons against them, 70 percent of Americans polled said they oppose doing so. About two-thirds argued the U.S. military is stretched too thin; 60 percent said they worry the rebels may not be an upgrade from the Assad regime.

The survey reflected very little partisan divide in attitudes about the civil war: 74 percent of independents, 71 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of Democrats said they're against the United States and its allies sending arms to Syria.

[...]

On Sunday, House Intelligence Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Mich., predicted members of Congress weren't likely to get behind the president's request without a comprehensive plan of what the administration hopes to accomplish in Syria: "What is the plan? Where are we going in Syria?" he asked on "Face the Nation."

4) James Clapper, EU play-acting, and political priorities
Fixations on denouncing Edward Snowden distract, by design, from the serious transgressions of those who are far more powerful
Glenn Greenwald, Guardian, Wednesday 3 July 2013
[http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jul/03/clapper-lying-snowden-eu-bolivia](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=%2FqdI3YYeUfdxH9KABnzkd1HDHXBuD7Ke)

The NSA revelations continue to expose far more than just the ongoing operations of that sprawling and unaccountable spying agency. Let's examine what we have learned this week about the US political and media class and then certain EU leaders.

The first NSA story to be reported was our June 6 article which exposed the bulk, indiscriminate collection by the US Government of the telephone records of tens of millions of Americans. Ever since then, it has been undeniably clear that James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, outright lied to the US Senate - specifically to the Intelligence Committee, the body charged with oversight over surveillance programs - when he said "no, sir" in response to this question from Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden: "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?"

That Clapper fundamentally misled Congress is beyond dispute. The DNI himself has now been forced by our stories to admit that his statement was, in his words, "clearly erroneous" and to apologize. But he did this only once our front-page revelations forced him to do so: in other words, what he's sorry about is that he got caught lying to the Senate. And as Salon's David Sirota adeptly documented on Friday, Clapper is still spouting falsehoods as he apologizes and attempts to explain why he did it.

How is this not a huge scandal? Intentionally deceiving Congress is a felony, punishable by up to 5 years in prison for each offense. Reagan administration officials were convicted of misleading Congress as part of the Iran-contra scandal and other controversies, and sports stars have been prosecuted by the Obama DOJ based on allegations they have done so.

Beyond its criminality, lying to Congress destroys the pretense of oversight. Obviously, members of Congress cannot exercise any actual oversight over programs which are being concealed by deceitful national security officials.

In response to our first week of NSA stories, Wyden issued a statement denouncing these misleading statements, explaining that the Senate's oversight function "cannot be done responsibly if senators aren't getting straight answers to direct questions", and calling for "public hearings" to "address the recent disclosures," arguing that "the American people have the right to expect straight answers from the intelligence leadership to the questions asked by their representatives." Those people who have been defending the NSA programs by claiming there is robust Congressional oversight should be leading the chorus against Clapper, given that his deceit prevents the very oversight they invoke to justify these programs.

But Clapper isn't the only top national security official who has been proven by our NSA stories to be fundamentally misleading the public and the Congress about surveillance programs. As an outstanding Washington Post article by Greg Miller this week documented:

"[D]etails that have emerged from the exposure of hundreds of pages of previously classified NSA documents indicate that public assertions about these programs by senior US officials have also often been misleading, erroneous or simply false."

Please re-read that sentence. It's not just Clapper, but multiple "senior US officials", whose statements have been proven false by our reporting and Edward Snowden's disclosures. Indeed, the Guardian previously published top secret documents disproving the claims of NSA Director Gen. Keith Alexander that the agency is incapable of stating how many Americans are having their calls and emails invaded without warrants, as well as the oft-repeated claim from President Barack Obama that the NSA is not listening in on Americans' calls without warrants. Both of those assertions, as our prior reporting and Miller's article this week demonstrates, are indisputably false.

Beyond that, the NSA got caught spreading falsehoods even in its own public talking points about its surveillance programs, and were forced by our disclosures to quietly delete those inaccuracies. Wyden and another Democratic Senator, Mark Udall, wrote a letter to the NSA identifying multiple inaccuracies in their public claims about their domestic spying activities.

Defending the Obama administration, Paul Krugman pronounced that "the NSA stuff is a policy dispute, not the kind of scandal the right wing wants." Really? In what conceivable sense is this not a serious scandal? If you, as an American citizen, let alone a journalist, don't find it deeply objectionable when top national security officials systematically mislead your representatives in Congress about how the government is spying on you, and repeatedly lie publicly about resulting political controversies over that spying, what is objectionable? If having the NSA engage in secret, indiscriminate domestic spying that warps if not outright violates legal limits isn't a "scandal", then what is?

For many media and political elites, the answer to that question seems clear: what's truly objectionable to them is when powerless individuals blow the whistle on deceitful national security state officials. Hence the endless fixation on Edward Snowden's tone and choice of asylum providers, the flamboyant denunciations of this "29-year-old hacker" for the crime of exposing what our government leaders are doing in the dark, and all sorts of mockery over the drama that resulted from the due-process-free revocation of his passport. This is what our media stars and progressive columnists, pundits and bloggers are obsessing over in the hope of distracting attention away from the surveillance misconduct of top-level Obama officials and their serial deceit about it.

What kind of journalist - or citizen - would focus more on Edward Snowden's tonal oddities and travel drama than on the fact that top US officials have been deceitfully concealing a massive, worldwide spying apparatus being constructed with virtually no accountability or oversight? Just ponder what it says about someone who cares more about, and is angrier about, Edward Snowden's exposure of these facts than they are about James Clapper's falsehoods and the NSA's excesses.

What we see here, yet again, is this authoritarian strain in US political life that the most powerful political officials cannot commit crimes or engage in serious wrongdoing. The only political crimes come from exposing and aggressively challenging those officials.

How is it anything other than pure whistleblowing to disclose secret documents proving that top government officials have been systematically deceiving the public about vital matters and/or skirting if not violating legal and Constitutional limits? And what possible justification is there for supporting the ability of James Clapper to continue in his job despite what he just got caught doing?

Then we come to the leaders of various EU states. These leaders spent the last week feigning all sorts of righteous indignation over revelations that the NSA was using extreme measures to spy indiscriminately not only on the communications of their citizens en masse but also on their own embassies and consulates - things they learned thanks to Edward Snowden's self-sacrificing choice to reveal to the world what he discovered inside the NSA.

But on Tuesday night, the governments of three of those countries - France, Spain and Portugal - abruptly withdrew overflight rights for an airplane carrying Bolivian President Evo Morales, who was attempting to fly home from a conference in Russia. That conduct forced a diversion of Morales' plan to Austria, where he remained for 13 hours before being able to leave this morning.

These EU governments did that because they suspected - falsely, it now seems - that Morales' plane was also carrying Snowden: the person who enabled them to learn of the NSA spying aimed at their citizens and themselves that they claim to find so infuriating. They wanted to physically prevent Bolivia from considering or granting Snowden's request for asylum, a centuries-old right in international law. Meanwhile, the German government - which has led the ritualistic condemnations of NSA spying that Snowden exposed - summarily rejected Snowden's application for asylum almost as soon as it hit their desks.

A 2013 report from Open Society documents that Spain and Portugal were among the nations who participated in various ways in rendition flights - ie kidnapping - by the US. In particular, the report found, "Spain has permitted use of its airspace and airports for flights associated with CIA secret detention and extraordinary rendition operations." Similarly, "Portugal has permitted use of its airspace and airports for flights associated with CIA extraordinary rendition operations." The French judiciary previously investigated reports that the French government knowingly allowed the CIA to use its airspace for renditions.

So these EU states are perfectly content to allow a country - when it's the US - to use their airspace to kidnap people from around the world with no due process. But they will physically stop a plane carrying the president of a sovereign state - when it's from Latin America - in order to subvert the well-established process for seeking asylum from political persecution (and yes: the US persecutes whistleblowers).

All of this smacks of exactly the kind of rank imperialism and colonialism that infuriates most of Latin America, and further exposes the emptiness of American and western European lectures about the sacred rule of law. This is rogue nation behavior.
[...]
As the Index on Censorship said to EU states this morning: "Members of the EU have a duty to protect freedom of expression and should not interfere in an individual's attempts to seek asylum. Edward Snowden is a whistleblower whose free speech rights should be protected not criminalised."

As usual, US officials and their acolytes who invoke "the law" to demand severe punishment for powerless individuals (Edward Snowden, Bradley Manning) instantly exploit the same concept to protect US political officials, their owners and their allies from the worst crimes: torture, warrantless eavesdropping, rendition, systemic financial fraud, deceiving Congress and the US public about their surveillance behavior. If you're spending your time calling for Ed Snowden's head but not James Clapper's, or if you're obsessed with Snowden's fabricated personality attributes (narcissist!) but apathetic about rampant, out-of-control NSA surveillance, it's probably worth spending a few moments thinking about what this priority scheme reveals.

5) Edward Snowden: Hollywood Joins Asylum Petition to Ecuador
Oliver Stone, John Cusack, Roseanne Barr and other celebrities say the NSA leaker should be given protection from prosecution in the United States.
Tina Daunt, Hollywood Reporter, 7/1/2013
[http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/edward-snowden-hollywood-joins-asylum-578123](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=Y7402%2BUS6Sdka4f9pm8FxFHDHXBuD7Ke)

A who's who of Hollywood’s progressive activists -- including director Oliver Stone and stars John Cusack and Danny Glover -- have joined a cadre of anti-war intellectuals petitioning Ecuador President Rafael Correa to grant political asylum to fugitive National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.
[...]
Other entertainment industry figures who are asking Correa to grant Snowden a refuge include Amber Heard, Roseanne Barr, Shia LaBeouf and musician Boots Riley. Peace activists Tom Hayden, Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame, former U.S. ambassador Joseph Wilson -- who is married to ex-CIA agent Valerie Plame -- and linguist Noam Chomsky also support Snowden's request.
[...]

**Yemen**
6) Boy’s Death in Drone Strike Tests Obama’s Transparency Pledge
Cora Currier, ProPublica, July 1, 2013, 12:10 p.m.
[http://www.propublica.org/article/boys-death-in-drone-strike-tests-obamas-transparency-pledge](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=754gTml9FU3zFyljgQc4QFHDHXBuD7Ke)

On June 9, a U.S. drone fired on a vehicle in a remote province of Yemen and killed several militants, according to media reports.

It soon emerged that among those who died was a boy – 10-year-old Abdulaziz, whose elder brother, Saleh Hassan Huraydan, was believed to be the target of the strike. A McClatchy reporter recently confirmed the child’s death with locals. (Update: The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism today reported that there was "strong evidence" it was a U.S. drone strike, but it could not confirm the fact.)

It’s the first prominent allegation of a civilian death since President Obama pledged in a major speech in May "to facilitate transparency and debate" about the U.S. war on al Qaida-linked militants beyond Afghanistan. He also said "there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured" in a strike.

So what does the administration have to say in response to evidence that a child was killed?

Nothing.

National security spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden would not comment on the June 9 strike or more generally on the White House position on acknowledging civilian deaths. She referred further questions to the CIA, which also declined to comment.

The president’s speech was the capstone on a shift in drone war policy that would reportedly bring the program largely under control of the military (as opposed to the CIA) and impose stricter criteria on who could be targeted. In theory, it could also bring some of the classified program into the open. As part of its transparency effort, the administration released the names of four U.S. citizens who had been killed in drone strikes.

An official White House fact sheet on targeted killing released along with the speech repeated the "near-certainty" standard for avoiding civilian casualties. Secretary of State John Kerry reiterated it a few days later, when he told an audience in Ethiopia: "We do not fire when we know there are children or collateral - we just don't do it."

[...]

At the hearing, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., asked Brennan if the U.S. should acknowledge when it "makes a mistake and kills the wrong person."

"We need to acknowledge it publicly," Brennan responded. Brennan also proposed that the government make public "the overall numbers of civilian deaths resulting from U.S. strikes."

Neither overall numbers nor a policy of acknowledging casualties made it into Obama’s speech, or into the fact sheet. Hayden, the White House spokeswoman, would not say why.

The government sharply disputes that there have been large numbers of civilian deaths but has never released its own figures. Independent counts, largely compiled from news reports, range from about 200 to around 1,000 for Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia combined over the past decade.
[...]

**Afghanistan**
7) US drone strikes more deadly to Afghan civilians than manned aircraft – adviser
Study focusing on one year of conflict contradicts claims that robotic planes are more precise than manned counterparts
Spencer Ackerman, Guardian, Tuesday 2 July 2013 08.00 EDT
[http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/02/us-drone-strikes-afghan-civilians](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=JrrFoxXy8%2F%2F3DUhg83r%2ByVHDHXBuD7Ke)

New York - A study conducted by a US military adviser has found that drone strikes in Afghanistan during a year of the protracted conflict caused 10 times more civilian casualties than strikes by manned fighter aircraft.

The new study, referred to in an official US military journal, contradicts claims by US officials that the robotic planes are more precise than their manned counterparts.

It appears to undermine the claim made by President Obama in a May speech that "conventional airpower or missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage".

Drone strikes in Afghanistan, the study found, according to its unclassified executive summary, were "an order of magnitude more likely to result in civilian casualties per engagement."

Larry Lewis, a principal research scientist at the Center for Naval Analyses, a research group with close ties to the US military, studied air strikes in Afghanistan from mid-2010 to mid-2011, using classified military data on the strikes and the civilian casualties they caused. Lewis told the Guardian he found that the missile strikes conducted by remotely piloted aircraft, commonly known as drones, were 10 times more deadly to Afghan civilians than those performed by fighter jets.

Lewis, an adviser to the military's Joint Staff, conducted six previous studies of civilian casualties and other episodes in Afghanistan for the military.

"The fact that I had been looking at air operations in Afghanistan for a number of years led me to suspect that what I found was in fact the case," Lewis said.

But "the potential for [citizens to be] surprised" by the higher rates of civilians killed by drones led Lewis and his co-author, Sarah Holewinski of the non-governmental organization Center for Civilians in Conflict, to refer to Lewis' findings in an article for Prism, a journal published by the Center for Complex Operations at the Defense Department's National Defense University.

Lewis said he could not provide specific figures about the numbers of civilian casualties caused by drones and manned aircraft in Afghanistan, citing classified information. Nor does the Prism article specifically refer to the finding that drones are 10 times likelier to kill civilians than manned aircraft are.

Holewinski said the disparity reflected greater training by fighter pilots in avoiding civilian casualties.

"These findings show us that it's not about the technology, it's about how the technology is used," said Holewinski. "Drones aren't magically better at avoiding civilians than fighter jets. When pilots flying jets were given clear directives and training on civilian protection, they were able to lower civilian casualty rates."

Yet the demand for additional drone strikes by commanders in the war zone creates pressure to reduce training, Holewinski and Lewis note.

"Adding or improving training on civilian casualty prevention is a resource decision in direct tension with the increasing demand for more UAS [unmanned aerial systems] and more operations, since additional training on civilian protection means time must be taken from somewhere else including the mission itself," Lewis and Holewinski write in their Prism article.

[...]

"This data from Afghanistan, if accurate, suggests that the precision may be overstated in some contexts, and requires us to dig deeper into strike practices," said Sarah Knuckey, an adviser to the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, who is currently investigating the impact of drone strikes on civilians.

"The key question raised is: What explains the discrepancy between civilian casualties from UAV [unmanned aerial vehicles] and manned aircraft strikes? To enable fair external assessment, the government should release the underlying data, redacted as necessary."

[...]

The air war in Afghanistan has declined significantly since Petraeus' departure and the end of the troop surge he implemented. But Afghanistan still remains the central battleground for US drone strikes. As of 6 December 2012, the US launched 447 drone strikes in Afghanistan that year, up 5% from 2011. By contrast, there were 48 drone strikes in 2012 in Pakistan, according to a tally kept by the New America Foundation think tank.

"Under the laws of war, if there are two weapon systems that offer roughly equal capacity to overcome an adversary, the weapon which could be expected to inflict the least civilian casualties must be employed," said Ryan Goodman, a professor at New York University school of law. "This is a widely understood rule in the laws of war."

Lewis and Holewinski were reluctant to draw conclusions about the rates of civilian casualties caused by drones outside of Afghanistan.

But Holewinski noted that it is far easier for US forces in Afghanistan to conduct post-strike investigations that determine whether it killed militants or civilians than it is in Pakistan, Yemen or anywhere else the CIA and the military conducts drone strikes.

In those areas, "the only information you're really getting is from the drone," Holewinski said. "You're looking from 10,000 feet or wherever the drone is, and counting the bodies or the cars destroyed. How do you know who was in them, [and] whether they were civilians or combatants?"

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