

McCollum amendment to FY14 defense appropriation bill prohibits funds for CIA's lethal drone program

Written by

Thursday, 20 June 2013 09:57



Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), a member of the House Appropriations Committee, is offering an amendment to the fiscal year 2014 defense appropriations bill to end funding for the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) program that kills targets with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones. The amendment gives sole responsibility for any lethal military action using UAVs to the Department of Defense, specifying that operations must be conducted by "members of the Armed Forces under the authority provided pursuant to title 10, United States Code."

During the past decade the CIA has conducted hundreds of lethal drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia against terrorists or individuals presumed to be involved in terrorism. During the decade long program as many as 3,500 people have been killed. Estimates provided by journalists and non-governmental monitors cite as many as 771 civilians, including 200 children, killed by U.S. drone strikes.

During his confirmation hearing, CIA Director John Brennan stated, "The CIA should not be doing traditional military activities and operations."

The FY14 defense appropriations bill provides \$598.3 billion for the Department of Defense,

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intelligence agencies, and to fund war operations in Afghanistan. The CIA is funded in this bill but the amount and purpose of appropriated funds is classified.

The "McCollum amendment" will be debated and voted on in the full House Appropriations Committee today.

The following statement was made by Rep. McCollum during debate on the amendment:

Mr. Chairman, within the classified portion of this bill hundreds of millions of dollars, perhaps billions, are appropriated for a targeted killing program operated by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The CIA operates a fleet of weaponized drones armed with laser guided Hellfire missiles. They conduct lethal air strikes against targets in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. The program's targets are identified terrorists or they are unidentified individuals targeted and killed based on a pattern of behavior.

My amendment places sole responsibility for conducting lethal military action using weaponized drones in the hands of the Department of Defense conducted by members of the Armed Forces under the authority of Title 10 of the U.S. Code.

The CIA's use of drones to conduct surveillance and intelligence gathering in support of Defense Department lethal action continues under my amendment.

Some of our colleagues do not believe that the Pentagon is not up to the task of carrying out this responsibility. I disagree with that.

The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is conducting drone strikes now. The Air Force and the Army possess and operate weaponized drones. They operate within a clear chain of command and legal accountability. Lethal military operations using sophisticated weapons systems should be in the hands of the Secretary of Defense and military commanders who are accountable to Congress.

CIA strikes have been effective. Terrorists have been killed. But they are not secret. The whole world knows these are CIA strikes operating on behalf of the American people, without transparency, accountability or oversight.

There are costs associated with these targeted killings. Hundreds of innocent civilian have been killed. There are legal questions, human rights concerns, foreign policy implications and ultimately moral issues.

You could dismiss all of these concerns because the program is killing terrorists.

But in the near future, as armed drone technology proliferates, if we dismiss these concerns I can guarantee you that China, Iran, Russia and other nations will also dismiss these concerns when they are capable of conducting targeted killings. Why, because we are setting the

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example.

If we want other countries to use these technologies responsibly, then we must use them responsibly. What's at stake is our country's moral authority.

The Obama Administration is not leading on this issue of ensuring transparency, accountability and oversight. The president claims these CIA strikes are within "clear guidelines, oversight and accountability" that his administration determined all by itself – without input or even the consideration of Congress.

And Congress has done less. In fact Congress has done nothing except write a black check that allows a paramilitary force of CIA officers and civilian contractors to kill suspected terrorists and anyone else unlucky enough to be in the vicinity – including women and children – using one of the most sophisticated weapons platforms in our military arsenal. For this Congress and this committee to passively allow the CIA to fire laser guided missiles at human targets in countries in which we are not at war without demanding oversight or accountability is a complete abdication of our sworn obligation to the Constitution and our citizens.

This is not intelligence gathering, these are military operations that should be conducted by our Armed Forces and with direct oversight by Congress.

Our country is at war with Al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. I trust the members of our Armed Forces to do their job, defeat the enemy, and protect our nation. The drone strike program is a military program and Congress should demand that it be conducted within the same legal framework as any other military operation during a time of war.