

Rand Paul Right On This One

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GREEN BAY - Yesterday, Rand Paul spent thirteen hours on the Senate floor conducting an old fashioned filibuster questioning the U.S. drone policy. Rand Paul has a lot of lame ideas, but on this one he was right on both questioning the policy and the method in which he did it.

In the first place, he had the guts to actually stand up on the Senate floor and speak his mind for as long as he could in a filibuster as intended by the framers of our Constitution. Of course, it was theatrics, but that's what a filibuster is. He did not hide behind the questionable rule commonly used in the Senate to stop discussion by merely saying you want to filibuster. He stood up and talked. He took responsibility for his words. It was a fundamental exercise in democracy that progressives should applaud.

But in a larger sense, in forcing a discussion of the Constitutionality of our government's use of drones to kill people without charge or even demonstration of just cause in a Court of law, Rand Paul has forced us to face a question we have dodged for over ten years. Under our Constitution, even in a time of fear, how do we keep our form of democratic government viable while still providing for our defense.

It is a thin line and delicate balance. As progressives, we all love President Obama and generally trust him to do the right thing. But our founders had just cause to fear too much arbitrary power in the hands of one leader, as in a King, and placed in our Constitution a division of power between three branches. A President could lead us in war, but only after the people through their representatives in Congress declared it a war, and even then the President's power was limited by the Courts and the law of the land.

On September 11, 2001 our nation was profoundly shocked by a dastardly attack by an international group of terrorists, and in the atmosphere of fear that followed President George W. Bush embarked our nation on a war-like foreign policy that lead to our invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and a number of policies on the treatment of combatants that clearly

stretched the limits of our law and national character. The Congress, too timid to appear to question the public mood, looked the other way rather than declare it a real war. The draft was gone, and the majority of people really didn't have to get involved. And the undeclared war against some shadowy, undefined terrorist enemy has continued for over ten years.

Osama bin Laden is dead, our adventure in Iraq has concluded, and the commitment of troops in Afghanistan is winding down. Our national treasury has been bled dry. The question now is "when does it all end?" When do we go back to being the nation of law and rules I remember as a boy?

Rand Paul has done us a service in pushing this debate, at least a little bit, back into our public consciousness. As citizens of a country we declare a democracy, we should not let it slip back under the rug.

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