



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 18, 2013

Obama Nominates Former Pentagon Official as DHS Secretary

Speaking at a public ceremony in the White House Rose Garden on Friday afternoon, President Obama nominated Jeh Johnson (shown), a former General Counsel for the [Defense Department](#), to become the next secretary of the Homeland Security Department.



Obama called Johnson a “critical member” of his national security team, saying that Johnson had “demonstrated again and again ... a deep understanding of the threats facing the United States,” reported the [Washington Examiner](#).

“He’s respected across our government as a team player,” Obama continued, adding that Johnson had “earned a reputation as a cool and calm leader.”

“I urge the Senate to confirm Jeh as soon as possible,” said the president. The nominee’s first name is pronounced “Jay.”

The *Examiner* report noted that during his position of General Counsel at Defense, Johnson played an important role in departmental policy decisions, including “the expansion of the administration’s overseas drone strikes, rules governing the use of military commissions at Guantanamo Bay and the repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’ ”

“For those service members who are gay and lesbian, we lifted a real and personal burden from their shoulders,” Johnson said last year at the ceremony recognizing the repeal of the policy. “They no longer have to live a lie in the military.”

A [CBS News report](#) on the announcement said that Obama commended Johnson for his legal work that helped to repeal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Obama said that Johnson, “believes in a deep and personal way that keeping America safe requires us upholding the values and civil liberties that make America great.”

The president did not explain why he believes that allowing homosexuals to serve openly in the military would help keep America safe.

CBS also noted that in an interview with talk show host Charlie Rose in May, Johnson said that the Obama administration’s policies have resembled the Bush administration’s second-term policies, but mentioned some differences, saying, “We started from fundamentally different places.”

For example, when Johnson asked Defense Department lawyers trained during the Bush administration about the legality of certain policies, they would tell him, “there’s nothing that prohibits it.”

Noting a different approach under Obama, Johnson said: “The question that would be asked in the Obama years is ... what authorizes this.... What authorizes this specific activity in international law and domestic law?”



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While claiming that the Obama administration is more apt than its predecessor to ask whether actions are authorized under international or domestic law, [Fox News reported](#) that during his position at Defense, Johnson “oversaw the escalation of the use of unmanned drone strikes [and] the revamping of military commissions to try terrorism suspects rather than using civilian courts.”

A Reuters report in the *Chicago Tribune* [quoted a statement](#) from former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta: “As a senior member of my management team at the Pentagon, Jeh worked on every major issue affecting America’s security, including border security, counterterrorism, and cyber security. I urge the Senate to act quickly to confirm him.”

If confirmed by the Senate, Johnson, will fill the vacancy left by Janet Napolitano, who resigned in July to take a position as president of the University of California system. Both Napolitano and Johnson are members of the internationalist-minded policy organization the Council on Foreign Relations.

Friday’s [New York Times](#) quoted from a speech Johnson made at Oxford University shortly before leaving his Pentagon position in December 2012. In the speech, Johnson foresaw a day when al-Qaeda would be so depleted that the United States could relax its hard-line policies and end the military’s legal authority to kill and detain terrorism suspects.

“I do believe that on the present course, there will come a tipping point — a tipping point at which so many of the leaders and operatives of al Qaeda and its affiliates have been killed or captured and the group is no longer able to attempt or launch a strategic attack against the United States,” said Johnson in that speech.

Earlier in 2012, reported the *Times*, Johnson delivered a speech at Yale Law School defending the legality of targeting and killing American citizens who join al-Qaeda.

But in another speech at Fordham this year, Johnson also charged that government secrecy about the drone strikes fuels suspicion by Americans.

“The problem is that the American public is suspicious of executive power shrouded in secrecy,” said Johnson during that speech. “In the absence of an official picture of what our government is doing, and by what authority, many in the public fill the void by imagining the worst.”

A report in [USA Today](#) on October 17 quoted Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), who criticized the president for nominating a “loyalist and fundraiser” to head what he called a “mismanaged” department.

“This is deeply concerning,” Sessions said. “This huge department must have a proven manager with strong relevant law enforcement experience, recognized independence and integrity, who can restore this department to its full capability.”

While Sessions enjoys a reputation as a “conservative,” a strict constitutionalist would favor the abolition of Homeland Security, rather than its restoration.

For example, during the 2007 GOP Values Voter Presidential Debate on Sep 17, 2007, [Ron Paul was asked](#): “You say that you would eliminate the IRS, the CIA, the Federal Reserve, the Department of Homeland Security, Medicare. You used to want to end the FBI. But if you get rid of the CIA, let alone the FBI, how would President Paul have any idea, any intelligence of what our enemies, foreign and domestic, are up to?”

Paul replied: “Well, you might ask a better question. Before 9/11, we were spending \$40 billion a year, and the FBI was producing numerous information about people being trained on airplanes, to fly them but not land them. And they totally ignored them. So it’s the inefficiency of the bureaucracy that is the



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problem. So, increasing this with the Department of Homeland Security and spending more money doesn't absolve us of the problem. Yes, we have every right in the world to know something about intelligence gathering. But we have to have intelligent people interpreting this information."

Paul was asked similar questions at the 2007 Republican Debate in South Carolina on May 15, 2007: "You would eliminate the Department of Homeland Security?" He replied: "DHS is a monstrous type of bureaucracy. It was supposed to be streamlining our security and it's unmanageable. I mean, just think of the efficiency of FEMA in its efforts to take care of the floods and the hurricanes."

A follow-up question asked: "You would eliminate DHS in the midst of a war?" To which Paul replied: "We should not go to more bureaucracy. It didn't work. We were spending \$40 billion on security prior to 9/11, and they had all the information they needed there to deal with the threat, and it was inefficiency. So what do we do? We add a gigantic bureaucracy, which they're still working on trying to put it together."

John F. McManus, president of The John Birch Society, who served as an officer in the Marine Corps, had this to say about his concept of homeland security: "The proper way to secure the homeland from external threat is the U.S. military. The federal government has no authority under the Constitution to implement internal homeland security, which should be handled by local law enforcement. The Department of Homeland Security that has been put in place is totally unconstitutional."

Photo of Jeh Johnson with President Obama: AP Images



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