

Obama's "kill list" and the decay of democracy in America

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An extraordinary article appeared in the *New York Times* on May 29, which details how President Obama personally approves extrajudicial assassinations, including of US citizens, by CIA and US military drone aircraft in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and other countries.

Like a scene out of the *Godfather*, the president and his national security advisors gather in the White House situation room for weekly "Terror Tuesday" meetings where they review a "kill list" of potential targets. According to the *Times*, Obama "signs off on every strike in Yemen and Somalia and also on the more complex and risky strikes in Pakistan—about a third of the total."

Since the publication of the article, the president has added at least 30 more notches to his belt—30 more people to the list of those whose killing he has approved. In the latest incident, a drone fired a missile in Pakistan, killing at least 12, including mourners and rescuers who had rushed to the scene of a first missile strike that killed three. This was the eighth US drone attack over the past two weeks, despite nominal demands from Pakistan that they be stopped.

The *Times* article also noted that the administration deliberately concealed the number of civilians killed in drone strikes by asserting that any male victims of "combat age" are terrorists. Pakistani estimates put the real figure of civilian deaths at a minimum of 830, including 175 children, since 2004, with the majority murdered under Obama's term.

The article in America's "newspaper of record" was not meant as an exposé of these war crimes or the president's assertion of unchecked power to kill anyone he chooses. On the contrary, it was a sympathetic portrait written in close collaboration with administration officials. For the administration and the

ruling class that it serves, such a demonstration of illegality is considered to be a political strength.

In regards to Anwar al-Awlaki—the New Mexican-born cleric incinerated along with another US-born man in a September 2011 drone attack in Yemen—the *Times* noted that Obama virtually boasted that his decision to order the execution of US citizens was "an easy one."

Knowing full well that the president has no legal power to assassinate US citizens who are not charged, let alone convicted, of a crime, the administration has concocted a pseudo-legal cover for its violation of the US Constitution. The Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel provided the president with a memo—which the administration has kept secret—justifying such an attack on the grounds that, as the *Times* reports, "while the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process applied, it could be satisfied by internal deliberations in the executive branch."

The publication of the article produced widespread revulsion, including from readers of the *Times* who wrote letters denouncing the "open license to murder" and pointing to the dangers of a presidential dictatorship. The president was asserting his right to be "the jury, the judge and the executioner," without offering a shred of evidence against his victims.

The *New York Times*, however, quickly published an editorial saying the matter could all be fixed up if Obama published "clear guidelines" for targeted assassinations and allowed "an outside court to review the evidence before placing Americans on a kill list."

This is what American liberalism has degenerated to!

More than thirty years ago, Republican President Gerald Ford signed an executive order banning US assassinations after the exposures of CIA plots to assassinate political opponents, including Patrice

Lumumba in the Congo and Fidel Castro in Cuba.

Political assassination, of course, continued secretly. However, up until President Obama it has never been declared to be official US policy. The Democratic Party president has gone even further than his Republican predecessor, George Bush, in asserting unrestrained executive power.

Obama's pseudo-legal arguments have implications that extend far beyond the use of drones. The right to due process is a core principle aimed at protecting citizens from arbitrary arrest and other acts of state power. This concept goes back to the Magna Carta of the 13th Century, which asserted that kings could not simply impose their will without some oversight, and freemen could not be punished unless they violated the law of the land.

Now Obama is saying that due process—intended to be a constraint on executive power—can be satisfied by the deliberations of... the executive himself, that is, the president. And this from a supposed professor of Constitutional law!

The evisceration of this basic liberty undermines every other democratic principle. If the life of an individual can be taken without any restraint, then there is no right that remains protected. Eventually, such methods will be brought home to the United States.

The Socialist Equality Party has warned that the measures imposed in the name of the “war on terror”—including indefinite detention, military tribunals, a vast expansion of domestic spying, the waging of illegal wars and assassinations—are aimed above all at the American population itself.

Social inequality has reached levels not seen since the 1920s. Both corporate-backed parties are imposing ever-more unpopular measures—from austerity, to wage cutting, to plans for new and even bloodier wars. Under these conditions, the corporate and financial elite in the US is dispensing with basic democratic rights and seeking to criminalize dissent. In the recent NATO protests in Chicago, the FBI and police informers were used to frame up anti-war activists on terrorism charges.

The same is true throughout the world, from Greece to Quebec, where the powers of the state are being mobilize to crush strikes and protests, and impose the dictates of the financial aristocracy.

There is enormous opposition to war, the destruction

of jobs and living standards, and the erosion of democratic rights. But this sentiment can find no expression within the political system, which is controlled by the super-rich. That is why the issue of whether the president has the right to order assassinations is not being debated in the elections. Whether Obama or Romney wins, this criminal policy will continue.

The revelations about Obama's “kill list” are an exposure of the entire coterie of liberal and “left” supporter of Obama—from the *Times* itself, to the *Nation* magazine, to groups like the International Socialist Organization. In one form or another, all of these organizations are building up to promote Obama's election campaign in November. They bear full political and moral responsibility for its actions.

The silence of the ISO in particular is highly significant. The organization's website has yet to publish a single article on the recent revelations. This is no accident. With the appropriate amount of political duplicity, the ISO and similar organizations work quite consciously and deliberately to maintain the political domination of the Democratic Party.

Within the working class, however, there exists a deep and powerful attachment to fundamental democratic principles. The fight to defend these rights requires working people to impose our collective will over society and reorganize political and economic life in the interests of the vast majority, not the wealthy few. The genuine democratization of society can only be achieved by establishing a workers' government and socialism, to break the stranglehold of the corporate and financial elite and establish social equality.

That is the perspective that my running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are advancing in the 2012 elections. I urge every worker and young person who agrees with this to join and support our campaign.



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