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Obama's Despotism and Kill List

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Imagine the following situation: a brutal dictator of some Middle Eastern country has devised a type of hit list on which he is able to place individuals who are to be assassinated on the government's dime. There is no due process given to whatever victim is chosen with the assistance of a few politically chosen advisers. The target is unable to appeal his death warrant. Not only can this privilege of unchallenged execution be carried out domestically but all around the world. With one word, this oppressor quite literally holds millions of lives in his hand.

In our present day, would such vile and crude discretion over human life go unchallenged by busybody international bureaucracies like the United Nations? Would not the U.S. government, always on the unrelenting hunt for [imaginary hobgoblins](#) used to justify gargantuan defense spending, denounce such evil and pledge to eradicate it through awesome displays of force?

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has been violently clamping down government protestors and his regime stands accused of killing [thousands of civilians](#). Before a ceasefire was adopted between rebel forces and the Assad government back in April (the recent [Houla massacre](#) did away with that), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [described](#) the Syrian President as a “war criminal.” When Washington aided in the overthrowing of Libyan leader Muamar Gaddafi, President Obama [announced](#) victory by declaring “one of the world’s longest-serving dictators is no more.” And who could forget when George W. Bush [stated](#) on the eve of the invasion of Iraq,

Unlike Saddam Hussein, we believe the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty. And when the dictator has departed, they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation.

Indeed, Middle East dictators like Hussein, Assad, and Gaddafi committed plenty of atrocities. They will find their due justice somewhere in the after life. The real question is whether the United States government has the moral imperative to intervene in such affairs given its own conduct. When the President or gung-ho Congressmen go in front of the television camera and denounce the heinous killings conducted by tyrants, are they not guilty of the same atrociousness? One of the successes of the War on Perpetual Terror has been the still-widely believed fictive that the U.S. government wages war in a much more humane and “rights” sensitive manner than its enemies. Instead, the last decade has seen such a rise in the unchecked authority of the Chief Executive that the office is hardly indistinguishable from that of the dictators it supposedly stands in opposition to.

Today in the *New York Times*, some details behind the President’s secret “kill list” were finally revealed. In what can be construed as a blatant effort to appear “tough on terrorism” in an election year, Obama has crowned himself the sole decider in the determination process for who is placed on the list of future assassinations.

Mr. Obama has placed himself at the helm of a top secret “nominations” process to designate terrorists for kill or capture, of which the capture part has become largely theoretical. He had vowed to align the fight against Al Qaeda with American values; the chart, introducing people whose deaths he might soon be asked to order, underscored just what a moral and legal conundrum this could be.

“He is determined that he will make these decisions about how far and wide these operations will go,” said Thomas E. Donilon, his national security adviser. “His view is that he’s responsible for the position of the United States in the world.” He added, “He’s determined to keep the tether pretty short.”

Authoritarians traditionally coerce those unfortunate enough to reside within the national borders of the dictatorship. Only in some instances, usually involving border states, must they fear the leader of another country. But not in America; not in today’s context of ever-present threats. The U.S. President now has the assumed authority to order the killing of suspected terrorists in sovereign nations halfway across the globe. In essence, the office of the President is now the world’s foremost dictatorship. Every human being on the planet can be put to death upon the approval of just this one man.

Even more disturbing is the incredibly loose criterion used to judge if someone is suspected terrorist. From the *NYT* article:

It in effect counts all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants, according to several administration officials, unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent.

Counterterrorism officials insist this approach is one of simple logic: people in an area of known terrorist activity, or found with a top Qaeda operative, are probably up to no good. “Al Qaeda is an insular, paranoid organization — innocent neighbors don’t hitchhike rides in the back of

trucks headed for the border with guns and bombs,” said one official, who requested anonymity to speak about what is still a classified program.

Just from guilty by association, someone can find themselves on the end of CIA drone strike. This disgustingly loose standard for rendering what is an unquestionable death sentence has resulted in [hundreds](#) of civilian deaths in Pakistan alone; including [168 children](#). There are few estimates for civilian deaths in Yemen or Somalia caused by drone strikes. The CIA and top administration officials claim that “collateral damage,” the Orwellian term for unintended murder, is actually quite low. This presumption is doubted by experts however as the article explains:

This counting method may partly explain the official claims of extraordinarily low collateral deaths. In a speech last year Mr. Brennan, Mr. Obama’s trusted adviser, said that not a single noncombatant had been killed in a year of strikes. And in a recent interview, a senior administration official said that the number of civilians killed in drone strikes in Pakistan under Mr. Obama was in the “single digits” — and that independent counts of scores or hundreds of civilian deaths unwittingly draw on false propaganda claims by militants.

But in interviews, three former senior intelligence officials expressed disbelief that the number could be so low. The C.I.A. accounting has so troubled some administration officials outside the agency that they have brought their concerns to the White House. One called it “guilt by association” that has led to “deceptive” estimates of civilian casualties.

“It bothers me when they say there were seven guys, so they must all be militants,” the official said. “They count the corpses and they’re not really sure who they are.”

The *NYT* article is just a glimpse into the imperial, nontransparent, and frankly immoral methods by which the U.S. government now conducts war. Due process is a relic of the past. Little to no regard is given to those placed on the President’s “kill” list. There is [little effort](#) made to even determine if “suspected militants” are indeed militants after they are slaughtered by unmanned drones. After a [century and a half long](#) crusade, the United States President finds himself in a position to unilaterally render final judgment to anyone on Earth without repercussion. If that isn’t uncontrolled despotism, nothing is.

And yet none of these humanity crushing efforts will actually keep the country safe in the end. The constant bombing and killing of innocents only stokes the flames of hatred toward the U.S. As Glenn Greenwald [observes](#) in regard to the twisted logic behind American foreign policy:

*we have to keep doing things we know will result in large-scale civilian deaths in order to stop the Terrorists, who are really terrible because **they** keep killing civilians.*

War will always be a means for the state to ultimately usurp more power and wealth from the population. The patriotism invoked by campaigns for blood eases up the normal reluctance many have toward increased government pilfering. As long as public officials can convince the citizenry they are fighting to keep “the people” secure, the feeble-minded will happily pay more

taxes and suffer from the inflationary rising of prices. Their loyalty to the state makes them the perfect mules to be worked till exhaustion. Murray Rothbard was absolutely correct when he [described](#) the true nature of war:

In other words, if let's say, Paraguay and Brazil are going to get into a war, each State – the Paraguayan government and the Brazilian government – is able to convince their own subjects that the other government is out to get them and loot them and murder them in their beds and so forth, so they are able to induce their own hapless subjects to fight against the other State, whereas in actual practice, of course, it is the States that have the quarrel, not the people. The people are outside the quarrels of the State and yet the State is able to generate this patriotic mass war hysteria and to call everybody up to the colors physically and spiritually and economically and therefore, of course, aggrandize State power permanently.

Manufactured fear and apathy toward the rights of others have allowed the Office of the Presidency to become the judge, jury, and executioner to all the world. For those who mistakenly believed in the state as the enforcer of goodness and decency, they only need to blame themselves.

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