

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

http://www.salon.com/2013/01/09/5_ways_obama_has_doubled_down_on_george_w_bushs_policies/

5 ways Obama is just like George W. Bush

From drone strikes to proxy detentions to warrantless wiretapping, he's kept the U.S. on permanent war footing

BY ALEX KANE, ALTERNET

1/9/2013

On President Barack Obama's second full day in the Oval Office in 2009, he signed important executive orders that signaled a clear break with the excesses of George W. Bush's "war on terror." Obama decreed that the Guantanamo Bay prison camp would be closed in a year and that the United States would no longer perpetrate torture. No longer would men, some of them innocent, languish without charges in what has been described as an American gulag by Amnesty International. No longer would men be subjected to brutal interrogation tactics that clearly amounted to torture, like water boarding.

The orders would "restore the standards of due process and the core constitutional values that have made this country great even in the midst of war, even in dealing with terrorism," said Obama.

Fast-forward to today. Guantanamo remains open, warrantless wiretapping continues, and drone strikes have accelerated, leading to the deaths of innocent civilians and a burst in support for anti-American forces in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia. Instead of breaking with the Bush era, Obama has codified and permanently institutionalized the "war on terror" framework that has characterized American foreign policy since the September 11, 2001 attacks. And they have done all of this largely in secret, refusing to open up about how drone strikes are decided on. So

while torture has been thrown out of the American playbook, other black marks remain. Obama has done everything but restore “core constitutional values” to how the U.S. conducts itself around the world.

Perhaps the most potent symbol of Obama’s willingness to institutionalize Bush-era frameworks for dealing with terrorism is his January 2013 appointment of John Brennan as new Central Intelligence Agency director. Brennan was a key supporter of many Bush-favored tactics used by the CIA, including torture and extraordinary rendition. When Obama first contemplated appointing Brennan in his first term to the post he’s been appointed to now, the outcry was swift and Brennan pulled out from consideration. Now, the reaction has been meek—a symbol of how Bush-era military and intelligence tactics have become normalized to the extent that nobody bats an eye when a man with a sordid record at the CIA is appointed to head up the entire agency.

Obama has kept the U.S. on a permanent war footing with no end in sight through a variety of methods. Here are five ways the Obama administration has institutionalized the never-ending war on terror.

1. Drones

The image of the gray, pilotless aircraft flying through the sky to eventually rain hellfire down will be indelibly tied to Obama. His administration has made drone strikes in countries like Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan the weapon of choice when it comes to dealing with suspected militants. You have to look at the numbers of drone strikes under the Bush and Obama administrations to truly appreciate how Obama has taken this Bush tool and increased its use exponentially.

The first drone strike in U.S. history occurred in 2002, when a CIA-operated drone fired on three men in Afghanistan. The drone strikes have since migrated over to battlefields away from U.S.-declared wars. In Pakistan, the Bush administration carried out a total of 52 strikes, according to the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, which closely tracks drone strikes. That led to the deaths of an estimated 438 people, including 182 civilians and 112 children. But the Obama administration has ordered at least 300 drone strikes in Pakistan—and Obama’s second term has yet to begun. Those strikes have killed about 2,152 people, including 290 civilians, of whom 64 were children.

The drone strikes also have a devastating impact beyond the deaths reported. As a New York University/Stanford University study on drone strikes stated, the constant buzzing of drones in the sky “terrorizes men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities. Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment, and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves.”

Instead of looking forward to how this permanent drone war might end, the Obama administration has decided to institutionalize the process. In October 2012, the *Washington*

Post revealed that the administration had undertaken a two-year long strategy to institutionalize what has become known as the “kill list,” or the list of suspected terrorists the Obama administration unilaterally decides to kill by drone strikes. The administration calls it the “disposition matrix,” which refers to the different plans the administration has to “dispose” of suspected militants. The *Post* described the “matrix” as part of “the highly classified practice of targeted killing, transforming ad-hoc elements into a counterterrorism infrastructure capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war.”

2. Warrantless Wiretapping

One of the enduring scandals of the George W. Bush years was that administration’s practice of wiretapping American citizens with no warrant in order to spy on suspected terrorists. The *New York Times*, which broke the story in 2005, reported that “months after the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush secretly authorized the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on Americans and others inside the United States to search for evidence of terrorist activity without the court-approved warrants ordinarily required for domestic spying.” The move raised concerns that the Bush administration was crossing constitutional limits on wiretapping Americans.

But the outcry from those concerned with civil liberties has largely been muted in the Obama era. In late December 2012, President Obama signed an extension of a law that allows the U.S. to “eavesdrop on communications and review email without following an open and public warrant process,” as NPR summed it up. The law was an extension of the 2008 law that legalized the Bush administration’s wiretapping of American citizens.

As national security blogger Marcy Wheeler notes in a recent piece for the *Nation*, the president’s signature on the new bill on wiretapping means that the U.S. “has nearly unrestrained authority to eavesdrop on those who communicate with people outside the country. The government doesn’t even need to show that these foreign targets are terrorists or that the conversations center around a plot. This means any international communication may be subject to wiretapping.”

3. Proxy Detentions

Under the Bush administration, the process of “extraordinary rendition” involved abducting people accused of terrorism and shipping them off to another country where they were interrogated and tortured. The Obama administration has continued to use foreign countries to detain and interrogate suspects, but the details of how they do it are changed from the Bush era. Still, the overall practice of using other security forces to do your dirty work remains in place.

The *Washington Post* reported on January 1 that “the Obama administration has embraced rendition — the practice of holding and interrogating terrorism suspects in other countries without due process — despite widespread condemnation of the tactic in the years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.” While the *Post* used the term “rendition,” the more accurate term would be “proxy detention,” as *Mother Jones* pointed out.

The most recent iterations of the practice of using other countries to detain suspects the U.S. wants to interrogate have been in countries like Djibouti and Nigeria. The *Post* reported on one December 2011 case in which an man from Eritrea “revealed that he had been questioned in a Nigerian jail by what a U.S. interrogator described as a ‘dirty’ team of American agents who ignored the suspect’s right to remain silent or have a lawyer, according to court proceedings.”

Other cases have been publicized by *Mother Jones*. The magazine reported on the case of Yonas Fikre, a Muslim-American from Oregon who was detained in the United Arab Emirates. There, Fikre and his lawyers claim, he was beaten and held in stress positions. He claims there was cooperation between the FBI and UAE security forces. So the FBI was using the UAE forces to detain people the U.S. wanted to interrogate.

4. Guantanamo

Although the continued operation of the Guantanamo Bay camp is hardly the sole fault of President Obama, it does symbolize the abject failure to reject the Bush administration’s approach to terrorism.

While it’s important to note that the Republican Party has blocked Obama’s desire to close Guantanamo, he has not expended political capital on closing the prison and has signed bills that restrict his ability to do so. The most recent bill concerning Guantanamo Bay crossed his desk at the beginning of the year.

Despite threatening to veto the bill because it restricted the executive branch’s authority, Obama signed it, and curtailed his own ability to move ahead on closing the infamous camp, where people have languished without charge for years on end. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2013, where the Guantanamo provisions are included, restricts “the transfer of detainees into the United States for any purpose, including trials in federal court. It also requires the defense secretary to meet rigorous conditions before any detainee can be returned to his own country or resettled in a third country,” according to the *Washington Post*.

Human rights activists blasted the move. “Indefinite detention without trial at Guantanamo is illegal, unsustainable and against U.S. national security interests, and it needs to end,” Human Rights Watch’s Andrea Prasow told the *Post*. “The administration should not continue to just blame Congress. President Obama should follow through on his earlier commitments and make the effort to overcome the transfer restrictions.”

5. Indefinite Detention

This issue, over all the others, says loud and clear that the Obama administration is preparing for an endless war on terror.

Domestically, indefinite detention reared its ugly head back in December 2011, when President Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012, a defense funding bill. Included in the bill was a provision allowing for indefinite military detention without charge or trial.

Despite concerns raised by civil liberties activists, Obama signed the bill into law, although an executive signing statement vowed that the president would “not authorize the indefinite military detention without trial of American citizens.”

That has not allayed the concerns of civil liberties groups. The American Civil Liberties Union states: “The NDAA’s dangerous detention provisions would authorize the president — and all future presidents — to order the military to pick up and indefinitely imprison people captured anywhere in the world, far from any battlefield....Under the Bush administration, similar claims of worldwide detention authority were used to hold even a U.S. citizen detained on U.S. soil in military custody, and many in Congress now assert that the NDAA should be used in the same way again.”

While no American citizens have been detained under the law yet, indefinite detention has been a hallmark of the war in Afghanistan. Thousands of detainees have remained in Bagram Air Field, including non-Afghan detainees. Picked up on the battlefield in Afghanistan, they have been held for years without charge or trial.

“Since 2002, the U.S. government has detained indefinitely thousands of people there in harsh conditions and without charge, without access to lawyers, without access to courts, and without a meaningful opportunity to challenge their detention,” the ACLU notes.

So as the Obama administration fills out its cabinet posts and prepares for another four years, the permanent war on terror will stay with us. From drones to proxy detentions to indefinite detention, the constitutional lawyer in the Oval Office has institutionalized and expanded some of the worst hallmarks of the lawless Bush era.