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Barack Obama: The Cowboy President

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4/11/2010



The United States of America has reached a new level in its discredited War on Terror just when we thought it could not sink any lower.

And what makes this even more tragic is that the new depths being plumbed are on the express orders of Barack Obama ... a US President who promised the world so much and has delivered on so little.

That he is a Nobel Peace Prize recipient makes this all the more shocking.

President Obama has authorized the assassination of a Muslim scholar by the name of Anwar al-Awlaki. But what is really breath-taking is that Al-Awlaki is an American citizen, born in Las Cruces in the state of New Mexico of Yemeni parents.

He has now become the first US citizen placed on a targeted killing list. His nationality should not really be an issue because in the eyes of most right minded people extra-judicial killing is wrong, it is an action which puts the killer above the law – and no one, not even the President of the United States should think himself above the law.

Wasn't Obama supposed to be more principled than his predecessor?

I can almost hear the laughter ringing out loud from the Texan village of Crawford now that its idiot has been returned.

George W Bush brought us the War on Terror and during a bloody decade he brought us a new language with words like rendition and waterboarding becoming commonplace.

He quickly squandered the good will of the rest of the world after the horrific events of 9/11 by carpet bombing freedoms and liberties along with hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children who got in the way of his military in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When he left the White House it marked the end of an era and those of us who believe in equality, justice and human rights for all breathed a sigh of relief.

A new man was at the helm ... a man who promised transparency, the closure of Guantanamo and an end to torture among many other things.

Yes, we all placed our trust in the new man sitting in the Oval Office. He had, after all, come from an honourable background as an ambitious civil rights lawyer. Such a man would have convulsed at the thought of anyone imposing an extra-judicial death penalties on anyone, let alone a US citizen who hasn't had the chance of a trial.

What happened to that lawyer? On his journey to Washington what changed in him that he could squander the freedoms and liberties as set out in the American Constitution?

Surely the correct and honourable way of dealing with Imam Anwar al Awlaki would be to charge him in his absence and then ask the Yemeni government to arrest him and extradite him. This is the legal thing to do, this is the right thing to do and it is the civilized thing to do.

I have read rumours that al Awlaki is supposed to be an al-Qaida recruiter but like all of these rumours they are short on fact and evidence. I know that he has inspired a generation of converts around the world by his tapes. I have listened to one series and I can tell you that those tapes sound completely different to the ones released on the web today.

But I digress – we are not putting him on a trial by media for the truth is none of us has any concrete evidence although there's lots of hearsay in the usual minor league blogs and chatrooms.

If the evidence was out there, he would have been charged – and extradited. The Yemeni authorities did have him locked away at the request of the US for a some time in 2007.

So we are now entering the world of secret evidence ... a process so flawed and discredited in Britain already although there are still men in British jails who are being held without trial or charge because of it.

Could it be that Obama has simply signed off the Imam's execution because there isn't enough solid evidence to indict him and he doesn't want to go down the embarrassing route of opening yet another Guantanamo?

And it seems he has signed off the order in the same casual manner that Bill Clinton signed off permission for the bombing of the aspirin factory in Khartoum, Sudan.

Who remembers that one? I've walked through the rubble of that factory where a night watchman, a family man, paid the ultimate price for merely doing his job.

Clinton boasted to the world that US missiles had taken out an al-Qaida chemicals factory. There's that noun again al-Qaida ... which has essentially become a rubber stamp for the US doing whatever it likes.

Call it al-Qaida and no one will ask questions.

Yes, it seems the rules of the game are changing yet again, but what makes it more sinister is that the rules are now being written by an intelligent lawyer and not some monsyllabic Republican with the IQ of a baked bean.

The President's men will no doubt justify the assassination of al-Awlaki by claiming that international law allows the killing of individuals who pose an imminent threat to a country.

You see, when it suits, international law is cited even though the US has run rough shod over it with alarming regularity since 9/11. However, I believe it is debatable if such an assassination would be legitimate under international law and it is certainly not permissible under the US Constitution.

Both the Sixth and 14th Amendments clearly require due process of law. The Fifth Amendment includes this: "*No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime,*

unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger . . .”

Apart from those ordinary decent Americans who will be appalled at what is being done in their name, what sort of message will Obama’s actions send to the rest of the world?

Islam Karimov, a leader who routinely boils alive pious Muslims in vats of scalding water, has already justified the work of those who torture for the Uzbekistan state by citing the actions of the Bush torturers and interrogators from Bagram, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

The US President has, like Islam Karimov and other vile little tinpot dictators, set himself above the law and the American courts can not do a thing because judges will never be called upon to decide if such an extra-judicial killing is legal or not. Why? Because as I write this, al-Awlaki has not been indicted and charged and most certainly never will be.

And just in case you’re in any doubt that the US President has signed off his death warrant without realizing the full consequences, a few weeks ago Dennis Blair, the director of national intelligence told a congressional panel that there were certain counterterrorism cases that could involve killing an American citizen.

Then he emphasized that it would require a special process through the National Security Council — for safeguards after saying: "We take direct actions against terrorists in the intelligence community. If we think that direct action will involve killing an American, we get specific permission to do that."

For decades, the CIA was suspected of covertly plotting political assassinations, but the practice was stopped by President Gerald Ford.

No one would have been really surprised had George W Bush resurrected such a policy but the fact that the Obama Administration has just sanctioned state sponsored assassinations has left some human rights groups reeling.

This is not about the rights and wrongs of the alleged actions of some Muslim cleric in Yemen this has far wider repercussions like the moral issue of political assassination as official US policy for dealing with those perceived to be enemies.

Now that Obama has decided to dispense with judge and jury he is returning the US to the days of the Wild West ... which could make him more of a cowboy president than Bush ever was.