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America's disastrous policy of assassination

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President Obama's Justice Department recently feigned outrage when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the planned assassination of a U.S.-born Muslim cleric, insisting that the president, not the courts, should have the only say in the assassination of American citizens.

A far cry indeed from Executive Order 12333, signed in December of 1981 by President Ronald Reagan, which read, "No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination."

This was the sort of plainspoken language President Reagan became famous for--leaving no wiggle room for interpretation--and it is exactly the policy America so desperately needs today.

Just 29 years after this executive order America has become, simply put, assassination-happy. President Obama claims not only the right to assassinate foreigners abroad without charges, but American citizens as well. The legal basis for these claims is so murky that the Justice Department insists that even presenting this case would be a threat to national security that would force it to divulge secrets.

Yet extralegal assassinations, whether by means of federally employed assassins or the aerial bombardment of nations with which the United States is not at war, remains a terrifying fact of life. The WikiLeaks documents revealed, among other things, that the U.S. Army had an active assassination team operating in southern Afghanistan, and that the team has killed a number of innocent civilians in its heedless operations.

But the Army's assassins are small potatoes compared to the CIA, which was revealed in Bob Woodward's new book *Obama's Wars* to have an active team of 3,000 trained assassins operating in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Combined with the CIA's constant drone strikes, the number of civilians killed by these plans since President Obama took office is well into the thousands.

How do things go so tragically wrong in just 29 years? How did America go from a nation which so bristled at the idea of overseas assassination that three consecutive presidents, Ford, Carter and Reagan, each saw the need to issue more harshly worded bans against the policy, to a nation which is so comfortable with the idea that its Justice Department can claim, with no fear of backlash, that it is outrageous to even seek judicial oversight over the process?

From the wars of Clinton to the wars of Bush and now the wars of Obama, U.S. Presidents have been claiming ever increasing amounts of power over life and death. In just a few short years this has brought America far over the cliff from a nation of law and order to a nation in which presidents feel justified in solving any of their problems with murder. The Reagan standard, weakened by Bush, has been obliterated by Obama.

Yet this does not appear to be the destination on the road of increasingly dictatorial presidents, but merely another stop-off. The situation is continuing to worsen and remains disastrously under the radar of most Americans.

Candidate Obama was a critic of detainee abuse and detention without charge. President Obama has not only shrugged that off with alarming alacrity, but become the president of the assassination, ordering more extrajudicial killings than any who came before him. And he's not even halfway through his first term.

Organizations like the ACLU will no doubt continue the fight against extending the president's killing power, but until the American public genuinely cares about what is happening and makes it clear they will not tolerate mass murder as official policy they will only be slowing the inexorable growth of the Obama Administration's body count.

America must return to sanity, and soon, before this sort of thuggery stops feeling like a novel, troubling new policy and starts becoming the new American way of life.