

Obama's global Murder, Inc.

by Joe Kishore via stan - WSWS Thursday, Dec 29 2011, 9:21am

international / injustice/law / other press

The Obama administration has erected a vast apparatus of global assassination involving unmanned aerial drones operated by the CIA and the military. This network of "targeted killing" machines is run in secrecy, behind the backs of the American people and with virtually no congressional oversight.



The US drone program is the subject of an exposé published in the Washington Post on Wednesday, headlined "Under Obama, an emerging global apparatus of drone killing." While restrained in its presentation, the Post article is a chilling account of a government that has asserted for itself the right to kill anyone, anywhere in the world, without even a pretense of legal proceedings. The lives of thousands of people have been wiped out in this manner.

The US drone program, according to the Post, "involves dozens of secret facilities, including two operational hubs on the East Coast, virtual Air Force cockpits in the Southwest and clandestine bases in six countries on two continents."

A study by the Congressional Budget Office concluded that the US had 775 Predator and other drone aircraft, plus an unknown number operated by the CIA as part of covert operations. Not including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, assassinations have been carried out in at least three countries. The recent downing of a drone over Iran, however, points to much broader operations.

One of Obama's first actions as president was to order a Predator drone attack on Pakistan. Since then, nearly 240 attacks have been carried out against the country, killing thousands, mostly civilians. Some 15 strikes have been launched against Yemen, and several others in Somalia.

The Post provides a description of competing "kill lists" drawn up by the CIA and the military's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), with no publicly available information on the criteria used to select targets for assassination. The CIA's list is apparently shorter than the military's, which some in the drone program attribute to the fact that it has had less time to compile it. "Over time, officials said, the agency would catch up."

Among those killed have been three US citizens, including Anwar Al-Awlaki by the CIA on September 30 and his 16-year old son by the JSOC a few weeks later, both in Yemen. In the latter attack, the Post claims, the young Awlaki was not the intended target. "A US citizen with no history of involvement with al-Qaeda," he was, instead, "an unintended casualty."

In explaining the increase in drone assassinations, the Post cites the official closure of CIA detention programs and an end to new transfers to Guantanamo Bay. This left "few options beyond drone strikes..." In other words, instead of locking alleged "terrorists" in prison camps and torture centers, the Obama administration decided it would be more efficient to simply kill them in secrecy.

Separate congressional panels supposedly have oversight over these two different programs. However, "Neither panel is in a position to compare the CIA and JSOC kill lists or even arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the rules by which each is assembled," the newspaper reports.

Congressional leaders of both parties are entirely complicit, with leaders of intelligence and military committees submitting to restrictions on public discussion. "Senior Democrats barely blink at the idea that a president from their party has assembled such a highly efficient machine for targeted killing of suspected terrorists," the Post comments.

President Lyndon Johnson, coming to power in the wake of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, famously acknowledged that the CIA had been operating a "damned Murder, Inc. in the Caribbean," which included plots to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro. The Nixon administration was involved in many assassination plots, which contributed to the scandals and impeachment inquiries that eventually forced his resignation. Investigations by the US Senate's Church Committee in the mid-1970s led up to an executive order officially barring the practice of assassination.

The actions of the Obama administration, and the vast growth in the secret powers of the CIA and the military, go far beyond these past crimes.

Extra-judicial state-sanctioned killing is a metastasis of the global "war on terror," an escalation of international criminality that has included the launching of aggressive wars, indefinite detention, and torture. It has become a central component of US military policy, including the war in Libya, which was concluded with the US-backed assassination of Muammar Gaddafi. Obama has singled out the extra-legal killing of Osama bin Laden as a high point and defining moment of his administration.

Unbridled violence and the suppression of democracy are two sides of the same process. The revelations by the Post come less than two weeks after the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, which for the first time provides an explicit congressional imprimatur on the indefinite military detention of US citizens and non-citizens alike, at the discretion of the president. The act effectively abolishes the writ of habeas corpus and basic constitutional guarantees of due process.

The administration that is overseeing this assertion of quasi-dictatorial powers, headed by Obama, is essentially an alliance of powerful financial interests and the military-intelligence apparatus.

This government of extreme reaction has the crucial support of sections of the affluent middle class, which, on the basis of identity politics, has reconciled itself to policies that go beyond even those carried out by the Bush administration. Anything is acceptable, even "progressive," so long as it is carried out by an African-American president.

The operation of a global assassination network receives at most a pro-forma rebuke from the likes of the Nation and other “left” backers of the Democratic Party. One liberal commentator, Ta-Nehisi Coates, a senior editor for the Atlantic magazine, blithely commented in response to the Post piece: “Drones are the perfect weapons of democracy. One gets all the credit for killing the country’s enemies, and none of the blame for military casualties. The occasional slaughter of a 16-year-old boy is surely regrettable, but of almost zero political import.”

The defense of democratic rights and the defeat of American imperialism, along with the struggle against social inequality, depend on the emergence of a mass political movement of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. This movement will come into direct conflict with the Obama administration, the Democratic Party and its “left” apologists.

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