

Revealed: leaked Obama 'Kill Lists' clever Executive tactic

by Chris Floyd via reg - Empire Burlesque *Tuesday, Jun 12 2012, 9:51pm*

international / imperialism / commentary

The turbulent ramifications of last week's [New York Times](#) story detailing the operations of Barack Obama's White House death squad continue to reverberate across the country today, sending shock waves through Washington and bringing crowds of outraged protestors to the



Just kidding! As we all know, there have been no "ramifications" at all from this shocking story, no scandal whatsoever surrounding the fact that the President of the United States and his aides meet every week to draw up lists of people to be killed all over the world -- even people who are completely unknown, who might simply be "behaving" in unspecified ways that some desk jockey somewhere has decided might possibly be indicative of malign intent. No scandal, no consequences, no imbroglio, no brouhaha; the caravan moved on -- and the dogs didn't even bark.

But wait, that's not quite true. There was one minor scandal issuing, in part, from the story. Republicans seized the opportunity to accuse Obama, again, of leaking classified matters for his own political gain. (Yes, they were shocked -- shocked! -- to find gambling going on in this establishment.) Obama was then forced to deny authorizing the leaks from his closest advisors and friends, and promised to investigate how in the world his closest advisors and friends happened to leak this top-secret information without his knowledge. This was followed by bipartisan Congressional calls to cloak the government's atrocities in even thicker clouds of murk.

Thus the only consequence from the revelation that the U.S. government not only asserts the arbitrary right to kill anyone on earth but actually has a formal process to carry out this serial murder is that it will now be harder than ever to expose any of the crimes and corruption and sinister follies of the vast national security apparatus.

But as for the -- how to put it? Well, let's be quaint and old-fashioned, shall we? -- the "moral content" of the murder program, there has been no scandal at all. Yes, there have a few furrowed brows here and there from the progressosphere, some tsk-tsks, a few sad head-shakes -- before our Netroots nationalists plunge right back into campaign arcana, railing against some rightwing misinformation or partisan attack that might hurt the electoral chances of a man running a death squad that has killed hundreds of innocent civilians and fomented more terrorism, hatred, war and chaos. Because really, what is the shredded corpse of a drone-blasted child next to yet another

birther outburst from that awful Donald Trump? Can you imagine the nerve of that guy?

Now to be fair, *The Nation* -- redoubtable flagship of American liberalism for yonks on end -- did sally forth with a bracing editorial against Obama's kill list. In no uncertain terms, it denounced the "corrupting logic" of the War on Terror, which leads "otherwise morally responsible leaders to do unspeakable things," such as Obama's "kill lists and drone assassinations."

This does, of course, lead one to wonder just who these "morally responsible leaders" are who are doing such unspeakable things. After all, there have been only two leaders during the War on Terror: Bush and Obama. No *Nation* reader (or any other sentient being) would ever consider the former to be a "morally responsible" leader. But as Obama has been ordering "drone assassinations" from the very moment he took office -- while resolutely defending and extending his predecessor's other War on Terror policies -- it is hard to see how his moral responsibility has somehow been eroded by his season in power. Should we not say instead with Shakespeare: "Man, he did make love to this employment."

There is also the strange notion that the "War on Terror" itself is somehow an abstract, outside force or entity which compels these individuals to violate their free consciences and do "unspeakable things." This childish concept -- "The War on Terror made me do it!" -- is of course a surreptitious (or perhaps self-deceiving) way for the editors of *The Nation* to retain their support for Obama even while criticizing him. They know that, deep down, he really is morally responsible -- a good man who has been "led" by the "logic" of the Terror War to do "unspeakable things" against his will and certainly against his inclinations. The "things" he does might be "unspeakable" -- that is to say, evil -- but he himself is not evil. He has simply been led astray, and may one day be led back to the right path of peace-loving progressivism -- just as long as peace-loving progressives don't abandon him, and let those truly evil Republicans return to the White House. (Where they might do unspeakable things like drawing up kill lists and launching drone assassinations.)

But again, let's give credit where it is due. *The Nation* makes many good arguments against the murder program. (And they have published some excellent work on the actual, real-life effects of the Terror War, in the stories of Jeremy Scahill.) They lay out the heinous nature of this barbaric operation with admirable clarity. But what do they conclude from all this? That the program is ... "troubling." And that since liberals "raised a ruckus" about Bush's -- crimes? atrocities? mass murder? -- no, his "abuses," they should not be "silent" now.

But what liberals should say when breaking their silence is not addressed. Should they say, "We will not support a man who commits mass murder"? (For as *The Nation* tells us, in Pakistan alone "witnesses have attested to hundreds of civilian deaths.") Or would *The Nation* have them say, "My word, these 'abuses' are troubling. I certainly will not feel the same enthusiasm when I vote for Obama this time around!" The latter seems far more likely.

But the restrained editorial positively blazes with Luther-like moral fury when compared to some of the reader comments. Here you will find self-proclaimed "good liberals" who, far from being "troubled" by Obama's killing spree, cheer it to the rafters as a mark of moral goodness. Consider the reaction of this "lifelong Democrat, lifelong liberal" to "signature strikes" -- the blind blunderbuss launched against unknown people doing unknown things for unknown purposes:

"When nameless individuals are assassinated over 'patterns of behaviour' that support terrorist enemy combatants, I cheer, since there is alive one less potential attacker of my country."

After all, our leaders would never lead us astray. And they know more than we do -- they even know

more than, say, the grandmother holding the bloody corpse of her grandchild in her arms:

"Neither the Pakistani government nor the hundreds of witnesses to US strikes is privy to the US intelligence. How could either possibly know whether or not innocent civilians are included in the death toll? I, for one, put the burden of proof on the other side, and I further place faith in my country to minimize collateral damage as best they can in a combat situation."

Who are you going to believe, Granny? The PowerPoint presentations of the White House "Tuesday Terror" team -- or your own lying eyes? I mean, how could you possibly know little Hamza wasn't a terrorist? Do you have access to Washington's omniscient SIGNIT and HUMINT? I thought not. So shut up already.

Or how about the disquisition of this learned Theban:

"Of course it's immoral and against human dignity to have a 'kill' list. On the other hand, times have changed ... These days our enemies come as thieves in the night, stealthily and under pretense. They have no qualms about killing innocent people, including men, women and children. Their morals allow them to hijack and fly planes into office buildings killing thousands of innocent Americans, going about their capitalist business. I even understand their objection to our way of life. Capitalism, democracy and freedom empower individual people till they no longer can be controlled under a rigid theocratic ideology. This is a threat to those who would hold absolute dominion over others. These pathological radical religious and political dictators see the handwriting on the wall and are using every immoral and hateful means to hold out to the last insane mind.

"So yes, I believe 'kill' lists, drones, intense surveillance and every other means is available on a temporary basis to return to these maniacs the same punishment they meet [sic] out to others."

One might argue that there are other actors in the War on Terror who, as the NYT story shows, "come as thieves in the night" (with remote-control drones) and "have no qualms about killing innocent people, including men, women and children." And that they do this repeatedly, day after day, year after year. But of course, this doesn't matter. Because those we kill are, of necessity, insane maniacs trying to impose absolute dominion over others. Even the innocent men, women and children we kill. Even the people we kill whose names we don't know doing things we don't know for reasons we don't know.

And so it goes. For this Theban, and for so many other "good liberals" and staunch progressives, a five-year-old girl with her guts gouged out by some coward with a joystick 10,000 miles away is an "immoral and hateful maniac" who deserves to die, and whose very presence on the face of the earth justifies any and all repressive measures to keep "our way of life" intact. "On a temporary basis," of course. Just until all the maniacs have been killed. Just until we "exterminate all the brutes."

This is the spectrum of liberalism in 2012. On one end, "troubled" by state murder -- but not sickened, not outraged, not driven to furious rejection of those who perpetrate such "unspeakable things." On the other end, gleefully, joyfully accepting of the murder program, exulting even in the killing of absolute strangers. After all, every defenseless child eviscerated stealthily by a presidential drone is "one less potential attacker of my country." The Leader protects us! The Leader knows best! You go, Barry!

II.
There is, of course, another view of these matters. You won't find it in the venerable journals of liberalism or amongst the fierce dissidents of the Netroots Nation. (As John Caruso points out, here

is the rigorous moral compass of the founding father of the Netrooters in action: "I'll tell you what. If [Obama] shows that he's going to fight for the things that I care about, I will fight twice as hard for him.' And if he doesn't? 'Then I'll vote for him,' says Moulitsas.") It is apparent by now that for the vast bulk of the progressosphere, there is literally nothing that Obama can do to lose their support, however "troubled" or grudging that support might be.

No, for an alternative view, we must turn once again to Arthur Silber, who this week continues his examination of Obama's death squad. This piece begins to get at some of the deeper dynamics at work not only in the murder program itself but also in the mass indifference to its exposure in the Times story and elsewhere, the lack of outrage, the shrugging acceptance (or, as seen above, the wiggly, giddy embrace) of this "unspeakable thing."

Once again, you should read the whole of Silber's essay, but here are a few excerpts particularly pertinent to our theme:

It is one thing for the ruling class to target the general domestic population on economic matters, as it has by systematically squeezing every last bit of wealth and opportunity out of "ordinary" Americans and shoveling all of it into the drooling maw of the rulers (and for many Americans, these methods of brutalization are already catastrophic in the extreme). It is very different when the ruling class announces to the world that it considers every human being on Earth not favored by power and privilege to be fair game in a neverending campaign of slaughter.

Yet there are no crowds in the street. Forget howls of fury; you can listen with the greatest concentration of which you are capable, and you will detect barely a whimper. Life goes on precisely as before, as if nothing of great moment has happened. With very rare exceptions ... even the harshest critics of the murder campaign so thoughtfully detailed in the NYT will not say:

These people are monsters. This is profoundly evil. All these people, all those who collaborate and assist in such a program, have placed themselves far beyond any limit of what can be designated as civilization.

... Be sure to understand this issue. The claim of absolute power -- the claim of dominion over all of human life itself, and the assertion of a damnable "right" to unleash death whenever and in whatever direction they wish -- is not remotely equivalent to any dispute over lowering Social Security benefits, raising the retirement age, or any similar question, at least it is not equivalent to any sane person. The claim of absolute power is sui generis; it is a claim unlike any other. It is not -- I repeat: it is not -- simply another "question of policy." It is certainly possible that, in particular cases, the deprivation of medical benefits (as just one example) may ultimately result in a person's death sooner than would have occurred otherwise. But for some period of time, however brief, the persons so affected are left with the possibility of action; they can still try to save themselves, even if those efforts are finally unsuccessful. But the claim of a "right" to dispense death arbitrarily -- the claim that the State may murder anyone it chooses, whenever it desires -- constitutes a separate category altogether, a category of which this particular claim is the sole unit. When death is unleashed, all possibility of action is ended forever.

Yet you can read various harsh denunciations of this policy, and you will almost never encounter language of the kind I employ here. Even for the most vehement of "dissenters," the assertion of absolute power is treated as another in a list of wrongs, perhaps an especially egregious wrong, but not a claim which demands a fundamentally different response. For such writers, it is certainly nothing to take to the streets about; it is no cause for withdrawing one's support in every way possible from a system of evil dedicated to death. This, too, is a measure of how profoundly damaged

our culture is. With regard to almost all "dissenting" writers, and if I may express the point more personally and informally, I often think that I have never seen such a collection of gutless wonders.
...

Not infrequently, I think that what may doom us is not the immense evil to which the State devotes itself, but the quality of the opposition -- those who are, in Thoreau's formulation, the State's "most conscientious supporters, and so frequently the most serious obstacles to reform." ...

Although the NYT article did not disclose new information with regard to the essentials of the State's program of death, its length, detail and prominence constitute a significant ratcheting up of the State's claim of absolute power. Most crucial is the statement in the article that much of the content is derived from interviews with "three dozen of [Obama's] current and former advisers." As I pointed out in Part I, this in effect announces the identity of the article's true author: the author is the U.S. government, the State itself. Through these "advisers," the highest levels of the U.S. government have told the story they want to tell. And what is that story? It is simply this:

The State is become death. Our target can be anyone we choose. Yes, this means you. No, there is nowhere to run.

Here is no shuffling, no weasel-wording, no wiggle room for self-deception. Here we look at the mephitic heart of the matter, the burning, rotten core. In this political year, with an election looming, let no one be mistaken on this point: When you get down with Obama, however grudgingly or reluctantly, you are dancing on the killing floor. You are, to use The Nation's terms, following the logic of the Terror War into complicity and collusion with unspeakable things.

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