

Obama orders assassination of US citizen

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For the first time in history, an American president has officially ordered the assassination of a US citizen.

President Barack Obama has approved the “targeted killing” of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US-born Muslim cleric who is reported to be in hiding in Yemen. No substantial evidence has been brought to bear against Awlaki, 38, who is accused of terrorism, and he will be afforded no legal recourse against the death sentence.

Word of Obama’s decision has been intentionally leaked by multiple intelligence officials to various media sources. Reuters and the *Wall Street Journal* published news articles on the story on Tuesday, and these were confirmed by stories in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* on Wednesday.

The killing of citizens declared by the executive branch to be “terrorists” was first announced as state policy by Obama’s director of national intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, in February congressional hearings. “We take direct actions against terrorists in the intelligence community,” Blair said. “If we think that direct action will involve killing an American, we get specific permission to do that.”

Awlaki, who was born in New Mexico, has been linked by e-mail communication to Nidal Malik Hasan, the army psychologist who gunned down 13 soldiers in a November rampage at Ford Hood, Texas. No evidence has been presented, however, to suggest that Awlaki in any way planned or ordered the attack.

There have also been allegations, so far entirely unsubstantiated, linking Awlaki to Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian youth who attempted to blow up an airplane as it approached Detroit on December 25, 2009. The failed attack was, in fact, made possible by the stand-down of the US intelligence apparatus—or its direct complicity.

Awlaki’s family have defended him. “I am now afraid of what they will do with my son, he’s not Osama Bin Laden, they want to make something out of

him that he’s not,” said his father, Dr. Nasser al-Awlaki, a US-trained scientist, in a January interview with CNN. “How can the American government kill one of their own citizens? This is a legal issue that needs to be answered.”

The public justification for killing Awlaki is based on bald assertions and hearsay from intelligence sources who refuse to even identify themselves. Typical is the following account from the *New York Times*: “American counterterrorism officials say Mr. Awlaki is an operative of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula ... They say they believe that he has become a recruiter for the terrorist network, feeding prospects into plots aimed at the United States and at Americans abroad, the officials said.”

The decision to kill Awlaki takes Washington’s lawlessness to a new level. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drone assassination program has killed between 400 and 500 “militants,” the vast majority in countries with which the US is not officially at war. The Bush and Obama administrations have declared the right to attack or invade countries Washington deems to be threats to US interests, and have institutionalized a worldwide regime of kidnappings and indefinite imprisonment without trial in the so-called “war on terror.”

But while Washington has long flouted the laws of war, there is no precedent for a president openly ordering the assassination of a US citizen he declares to be an enemy.

This is, however, a further extension of the claim asserted by Bush and continued by Obama that the president has the power to declare individuals, citizens as well as non-citizens, to be “illegal enemy combatants” and held indefinitely in military detention without being charged or given access to the courts. The Obama administration is moving to institutionalize the policy of indefinite detention by setting up a

military prison in Illinois, so-called “Guantánamo North,” where scores of Guantánamo detainees will be held indefinitely without trial.

The Obama administration justifies the policy of targeting US citizens for murder by citing the September 14, 2001 congressional act, the Authorization to Use Military Force. Passed three days after the September 11 attacks, the measure allowed the US president, from that moment forth, “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.”

Out of 531 senators and congressmen casting votes, only one opposed this sweeping measure that is now being invoked by Obama to kill a US citizen without charge or trial.

The Obama White House is evidently seeking a new pseudo-legal justification for the policy of state murder. “Officials now argue privately that Americans who side with the country’s enemies are not ultimately ‘entitled to special protections’,” the *British Telegraph* reported. The “special protections” to be discarded are none other than the liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, which the Founding Fathers installed precisely to provide the citizenry protection from the state.

There has been no evidence that suggests Awlaki represents any immediate threat to the US people. On the contrary, his killing will only provide new fodder for terrorist groups. The administration’s decision to kill Awlaki is largely motivated by the desire to establish a new precedent.

The implications are chilling. In principle, there is nothing in such a policy to stop intelligence officials from declaring political opponents of US imperialism within the 50 states to be terrorists and put on a list for liquidation. Neither Blair’s initial testimony nor subsequent media accounts have spelled out any limitations to the policy of assassinating US citizens beyond assurances that the measure is to be used only against “terrorists.”

The executive branch arrogates to itself the powers of judge, jury, and executioner, and those targeted for liquidation have no right to question the supposed evidence against them.

There is a deeper logic behind the order to kill Awlaki. Under conditions of economic crisis, the

methods of imperialist violence abroad must inevitably be visited upon the population at home. The turn toward war and increasingly dictatorial forms of rule both rise inexorably from the deepening crisis of US and world capitalism.

There has been no opposition within establishment political quarters to Obama’s order. The *New York Times* article on the decision reads as a legal brief defending it. “As a general principle, international law permits the use of lethal force against individuals and groups that pose an imminent threat to a country,” the leading organ of US liberalism writes. “People on the target list are considered to be military enemies of the United States and therefore not subject to the ban on political assassination first approved by President Gerald R. Ford.”

This underscores the fact that no section of the political establishment retains any serious commitment to the defense of democratic rights. Only through the independent political mobilization of the working class against both parties of US capitalism and the corporate-financial oligarchy which they represent can democratic rights be defended.

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