Obama and Guantánamo

Barry Grey
10 March 2011

President Obama's order Monday resuming the drum-head military tribunals at Guantánamo and institutionalizing indefinite detention is but the latest demonstration of the continuity between his policies of militarism and authoritarianism and those of his predecessor.

The order reversing his pledge to close the US torture center came just five days after his administration added new charges in the court martial of alleged WikiLeaks source Private Bradley Manning, including the capital charge of "aiding the enemy." That same day the military intensified the abuse of the 23-year-old soldier by requiring that he sleep without any clothing.

Under Obama, an American citizen who is merely awaiting trial—for the "crime" of exposing US war crimes and conspiracies around the world—is now forced to stand naked in front of his maximum custody cell every morning at 5 AM. The forms of sadistic torture associated with Abu Ghraib have, under Obama, come home to America.

As a result of Obama's order, 124 of the remaining Guantánamo detainees face the possibility of being tried by military commissions that lack even the due process protections of regular military courts martial. The other 48 have been singled out for indefinite detention because, as the government admits, they have been so brazenly tortured that the evidence against them could not stand up even before a military commission.

Among those named as likely to be brought before a military commission is Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, a Saudi accused of plotting the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen. The CIA has acknowledged that he was waterboarded. Other detainees include alleged Al Qaeda leaders Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was waterboarded 183 times, and Abu Zubaydah, who was waterboarded at least 83 times.

Citing the window dressing of periodic administrative reviews of those condemned to indefinite detention without trial, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared, "The steps we take today are not about who our enemies are but about who we are: a nation committed to providing all detainees in our custody with humane treatment."

The level of hypocrisy defies description. The Obama administration has refused to investigate or prosecute any of those in the Bush administration guilty of ordering and overseeing the systematic use of torture—in Iraq, in Afghanistan and in secret CIA black sites around the world. Bush himself, in his book *Decision Points* published last fall, boasted of personally ordering the waterboarding of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. This self-indictment prompted no response from the Obama administration—and was barely noted by the establishment media.

Obama has not only shielded Bush officials, he has continued and in many cases expanded all of the police-state agencies and measures inaugurated under Bush in the name of the "war on terror," including the Patriot Act, the Department of Homeland Security and the Pentagon's Northern Command. He has used the claim of state secrets to block victims of torture and domestic spying from seeking redress in the courts. He continues to assert the "right" of the president to order the indefinite military detention of any individual by declaring him or her to be an "unlawful enemy combatant." He has maintained the practice of kidnapping suspected terrorists and "rendering" them to foreign countries to be interrogated under torture. And he has expanded the policy of targeted assassinations in Pakistan and elsewhere, including of US citizens.

With its globally organized witch-hunt of WikiLeaks and the web site's co-founder Julian Assange, and the

© World Socialist Web Site

persecution of Private Manning, the Obama administration has escalated the assault on freedom of the press.

Monday's executive order, by institutionalizing the denial of the fundamental right of habeas corpus Obama, further erodes the core civil liberties laid down in the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution.

All of these attacks on democratic rights are inseparably bound up with the continuation of the Bush administration's policy of aggressive war, as well as the stepped-up assault on the jobs and living standards of the American working class.

Obama won election by appealing to the mass anti-war sentiment of the American people and their revulsion at the criminality and authoritarianism of the Bush years. Campaigning in 2008, Obama denounced Bush for running prisons "which lock people away without ever telling them why they're there or what they're charged with." Once in office, he ditched his promises and maintained all of Bush's anti-democratic policies, while continuing the US occupation of Iraq and escalating the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In an editorial Tuesday on Obama's order to resume the military trials in Guantánamo, entitled "Obama Ratifies Bush," the *Wall Street Journal* gloated, with justification, "No one has done more to revive the reputation of Bush-era anti-terror policies than the Obama administration."

Obama's ability to continue and expand the militarist and anti-democratic policies of Bush is in no small measure due to the complicity of the protest organizations that headed up the mass antiwar demonstrations during the Bush years. A major reason why the US ruling class consensus lined up behind Obama in the 2008 election was the calculation that a Democratic president—all the more, an African-American Democratic president—would not face a mass antiwar movement.

This was based on a clearheaded assessment of the left-liberal and pseudo-socialist milieu that dominated the anti-war movement. Oriented to the Democratic Party and wedded to identity politics, these forces could be counted on to wind up the antiwar protests and line up behind US imperialism in Afghanistan and elsewhere under a black Democratic president.

That is precisely what they have done. They are chiefly responsible for stifling the continuing mass antiwar sentiment and giving Obama a free hand to escalate the war in Afghanistan, prepare new wars in Libya and elsewhere, and intensify the assault on democratic rights.

Despite their best efforts, however, there will be a renewal of popular opposition to war and repression, this time under conditions of a growing movement of the working class against unemployment, wage-cutting and the destruction of social services. It is critical that the movement against war be revived consciously on the basis of a socialist program linking the struggle against militarism with the fight for jobs and the social rights of the working class—the right to health care, education, decent housing, and a secure retirement.

All attempts to subordinate the movement to the Democratic Party must be rejected. The fight against war and dictatorship is a fight against the capitalist system, which is defended by the Democrats no less than the Republicans. The Obama administration has demonstrated that the interests and desires of the broad mass of people can find no expression within the existing political and economic set-up.

A mass socialist movement must be built to fight for workers' power and the transformation of economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit. This is the only way to break the grip of the financial oligarchy and end the imperialist wars carried out in its interests.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site