In wake of Bin Laden killing: US targets American citizen in Yemen

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Barely five days after the commando raid that killed Osama bin Laden, the US launched a Predator drone strike aimed at assassinating an American citizen in Yemen.

The May 5 drone attack, which took place in Yemen's Shabwa province, was planned as a targeted assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki, a New Mexico-born Islamic cleric with US citizenship, according to US and Yemeni officials cited Friday evening by the *Wall Street Journal*.

According to media reports last year, Obama placed Al-Awlaki on a "targeting list" after his administration asserted a right not even claimed by the Bush White House—to carry out the extra-judicial execution of any US citizen deemed by the president to be a "specially designated global terrorist", without presenting any evidence or securing any judicial sanction. Al-Awlaki—who has made anti-American videos and tapes justifying Islamist terrorism—has never been indicted for any crime in the United States.

The missile fired with the intent of killing Al-Awlaki instead took the lives of two brothers, identified by the Yemeni defense ministry as Musaid Mubarak and Abdullah al Daghari. The car they were driving was struck by a Hellfire missile, killing them instantly and wounding a bystander.

"We knew the government would allow the US to attack our areas after the death of Bin Laden," a local tribal leader told the *National*, a United Arab Emirates daily.

The killings came on the eve of one of the largest demonstrations yet in the three-month-old Yemeni popular uprising against the US-backed government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. In the capital of Sana'a, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators turned out in a steady rain, filling the main thoroughfare with a crowd that stretched for miles.

Saleh, who has ruled for nearly 33 years, has defied the demands for his ouster, unleashing brutal repression that has killed at least 140 Yemenis. The dictatorial president has balked at signing an agreement, brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council, calling for his resignation within 30 days. Oppositionists have charged that Washington is backing his regime and political analysts have warned that, in the wake of the Osama bin Laden killing, they expect the US administration to increase its support.

It was the first known missile attack on Yemen since May 2010, when a US strike killed one of Yemen President Saleh's envoys and a number of other people. Another strike, with a cruise missile, claimed the lives of more than 40 civilians in December 2009.

Also late on Thursday, the US launched its first drone missile attack in Pakistan since the killing of bin Laden. The attack killed at least 15 people in North Waziristan. A hail of eight missiles struck a hotel, a seminary and a vehicle in the village of Watio in the Datta Khel area.

The strike came immediately after warnings by the Pakistani government and military against any further unilateral American military operations on its soil, and demands for the US to drastically reduce the number of American military and CIA operatives deployed in the country.

Meanwhile, there are growing indications that Washington is preparing to escalate its military intervention in Libya. Speaking in Rome, where the US and its NATO allies held their second summit on the Libyan operation, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton demanded that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi cease all military operations against the so-called rebels that are backed by the US, Britain, France and Italy and give up power, vowing "we will continue to strike his forces," until he complies.

Utilizing the upheavals in the Middle East as cover, the US and the Western European powers have fomented a civil war in Libya with the aim of installing a more pliant regime in Tripoli that would guarantee unfettered control of the country's oil wealth to the major Western energy conglomerates.

With the military effort on the ground stalled, there are increasing demands for the use of greater force. The *New York Times* published an editorial Friday demanding that NATO "summon the unity and will" to "tip the balance" in the civil war. It called on the Pentagon to send A-10 and AC-130 flying gunships back into Libya and advocated more "bombing strikes against military command centers, including Gaddafi compounds," such as the one last week that murdered the Libyan leader's son and three of his grandchildren.

What emerges is a global escalation of US imperialist criminality, with the ongoing wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq spreading to country after country.

This is conscious policy that is being aggressively promoted by the Obama administration, particularly in the wake of last Sunday's "kill operation" against Bin Laden.

The US President spent much of Friday at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, meeting with members of the Navy Seal unit that executed Bin Laden and killed at least three other men and one woman in the raid on a compound in the Pakistani city of

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Abottabad. According to US officials, only one of the men was armed and was quickly killed before the others were systematically shot to death.

After awarding a presidential unit citation to the Seals at a private meeting, and also meeting behind closed doors with an Army Special Forces unit and a special operations aviation unit involved in the raid, Obama spoke publicly in front of an audience of soldiers recently returned from Afghanistan.

He described the days since the raid in Pakistan, which many have referred to as a "victory lap" by the US president, as a "historic week in the life of our nation."

Obama claimed that the success of the assassination squad's mission represented "The essence of America, the values that have defined us for more than 200 years—they don't just endure, they are stronger than ever."

Nothing the US president could say could more graphically illustrate the huge lurch to the right being undertaken by his administration. The "essence of America" is defined not as the liberties and democratic principles defined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but as the embrace of militarism and the will to utilize armed force and carry out criminal actions abroad, including extra-judicial executions of American citizens.

What is taking place is a rebranding of Obama and his administration that has been prepared over the two-and-a-half years since his election. During that period, the administration has continued and escalated the war in Afghanistan while spreading it increasingly into Pakistan, continued the illegal detentions at Guantanamo, and pursued an economic and social policy that has showered trillions of dollars on Wall Street and the major banks, while denying any significant relief to millions who have lost their jobs, homes and incomes.

The net result of these policies has been to politically demoralize those who had looked to Obama as someone who would fulfill his empty promise of "change", disabusing them of the illusions promoted at the time of his election in November 2008.

Now he is jettisoning even the pretense of a break with the policies pursued by the Bush White House and associating himself and his administration unreservedly with wars, military actions and cold-blooded killings.

Within the whole "left"-liberal milieu, this shift is being hailed as a tactical masterstroke that will disarm the Republican Party and pave the way for a Democratic victory in 2012.

Summing up this approach, Leslie Gelb, the former *New York Times* correspondent and Carter administration State Department official, wrote in *Newsweek*: "The skilled killing of bin Laden has united the nation behind Obama. It gives him the power to get hard things done. Just as 9/11 transformed an unpopular and divisive President George W. Bush and empowered him enormously, so 5/1 hands President Obama the rarest of chances to lead."

But to lead where? Identifying himself and his administration with "skilled killing" and promoting national unity on such a basis is aimed at a definite audience. Obama is attempting to forge a solid political base among the military, the CIA and the most reactionary sections of finance capital—the same political forces upon which right-wing sections of the Republican Party have traditionally rested.

With each passing day, it has become increasingly clear that domestic considerations played the overriding role in the decision to kill Bin Laden, a man whose whereabouts had long been known to both US and Pakistani intelligence.

Faced with a deepening economic and social crisis, combined with a sharp fall in support for the administration, the White House feared the spread of open opposition from working people, already apparent in the mass demonstrations that erupted in Wisconsin earlier this year.

The persistence of high unemployment, which rose once again to 9 percent this week, the steady erosion of real wages, unprecedented social inequality and a frontal assault on social conditions being carried out in the name of deficit reduction have generated growing popular anger. It is becoming increasingly clear that the US economy is poised to plunge deeper into recession, posing an even greater danger of mass social unrest.

The killing of bin Laden was seen as a means of strengthening the administration, something that could be used, on the one hand, to divert this anger and social tension. On the other hand, it was designed to solidify a new political base among the most reactionary sections of the state apparatus and the financial elite, for the purpose of confronting American working people and imposing unprecedented attacks on their living standards and basic rights.

The missile strike against Al-Awlaki in Yemen constitutes a grave warning. The policy of military violence and assassination is not just a matter of foreign policy, but will be utilized against social and political forces deemed to be threats to the interests of America's financial oligarchy within the US itself.

Such a reactionary strategy—aided and abetted by Obama's "left" supporters—cannot halt the growth of mass social anger and unrest, which are fueled by the objective impact of the economic crisis, the consequences and costs of Obama's wars abroad, and the ever-widening chasm between the financial elite and the broad masses of the population.

Rather, it can only accelerate the growth of social discontent and social struggles that can find a way forward only through the independent intervention of the American working class in opposition to the entire existing political and social system.

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