

Obama publicly embraces drone killings

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2 February 2012

President Obama on Monday issued a public defense of the murderous drone campaign that the US began against Pakistan in 2004 and sharply escalated after he entered the White House.

The US government has generally maintained a policy of not commenting on the drone attacks. They are directed by the CIA and are considered to be covert operations, despite the fact that the Pakistani people have no doubts about who is raining death upon them, and details of the campaign have been widely reported in the press.

Administration officials dismissed expressions of concern that Obama's public comments represented a security breach and insisted that it was no unintentional slip-up by the president.

Indeed, there is every reason to believe that Obama sought a forum to publicly embrace the drone killings. The Google-sponsored "online town hall" where he made his remarks reportedly received some 130,000 questions from the public out of which just six, including the one on the drone attacks, were selected.

"I want to make sure people understand actually drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties," Obama said in response to the question. "For the most part, they've been very precise, precision strikes against al-Qaeda and their affiliates."

He added, "This is a targeted, focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists, who are trying to go in and harm Americans, hit American facilities, American bases and so on." The killings were "judicious," Obama argued, and the ability to execute a "pinpoint strike" furthered "respect [for] the sovereignty of other countries."

The president's response was constructed entirely out of lies and distortions.

The reality is that in Pakistan, a country with which the US is not at war, the unmanned Predator drones have killed nearly 2,700 people. A recent study

prepared by the Brookings Institution concluded that, far from the precision assassinations portrayed by Obama, the strikes have claimed the lives of 10 civilians for every armed combatant. In other words, thousands of impoverished Pakistani villagers, men, women and children alike, have been slaughtered in this sinister form of remote-control warfare.

A more conservative estimate released by the London-based non-profit Bureau of Investigative Journalism last August counted—based on confirmed media reports—168 children slain in drone attacks. No "huge number" for Obama.

The claim that the CIA is targeting Al-Qaeda operatives bent on attacking US targets is just another example of Washington invoking a purported terrorist threat to terrorize the American people into accepting criminal aggression. The vast majority of the "militants" killed in the drone campaign are rank-and-file fighters bent not on attacking targets in the US, but rather driving the US occupation army out of neighboring Afghanistan.

Why did Obama go public with his defense of this killing campaign? It may have provided a means of exerting further pressure on the Pakistani government. Islamabad has been complicit in the attacks, only recently denying the CIA permission to launch drones from the country's air bases because of a series of US provocations and the visceral hostility of the Pakistani people.

On a more fundamental level, however, Obama's remarks are intended for domestic consumption. It is part of a broader move by the administration to publicly endorse and thereby justify and normalize the criminal actions carried out by the US military-intelligence apparatus.

Last December, Obama signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act, enshrining in US law the illegal, extra-constitutional practice of condemning to

indefinite military detention both citizens and non-citizens alike, without charges or trials and on the sole say-so of the White House.

Newsweek's Daniel Klaidman reported last week that the Obama administration is planning to have Attorney General Eric Holder deliver a speech advancing the pseudo-legal rationale for the drone missile assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki, the New Mexico-born US citizen killed last September in Yemen. This will entail the public assertion of the president's power to order the extrajudicial execution of American citizens, without providing any evidence, much less proving it in a court of law.

With all of these actions, the Obama administration is erecting the institutional framework of a police state.

He does so without fear of alienating his real "base"—Wall Street, the military-intelligence complex and sections of the affluent middle class, which once postured as liberals or even "lefts," but are now prepared to accept reactionary and repressive measures that go far beyond those carried out even by the Bush administration.

The political shift by this layer is bound up with the unprecedented social gulf separating them from the overwhelming majority of working people and the growing signs of a resurgence of class struggle.

The defense of democratic rights and the struggle against war are today inseparably bound up with the struggle for social equality. They can be carried forward only through the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.

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