

Ex-US president indicts Obama as assassin

Bill Van Auken
27 June 2012

A column published Monday in the *New York Times* by Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the United States, constitutes an extraordinary indictment of the Obama administration for engaging in assassinations and other criminal violations of international law and the US Constitution.

Titling his column “A Cruel and Unusual Record,” Carter writes: “Revelations that top officials are targeting people to be assassinated abroad, including American citizens, are only the most recent, disturbing proof of how far our nation’s violation of human rights has extended.”

Referring to the infamous provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), signed into law by Obama on December 31 of last year, Carter writes: “Recent legislation has made legal the president’s right to detain a person indefinitely on suspicion of affiliation with terrorist organizations or ‘associated forces,’ a broad, vague power that can be abused without meaningful oversight from the courts or Congress.” He goes on to refer to “unprecedented violations of our rights” through warrantless wiretapping and electronic data mining.

Elaborating on the US drone strikes, the former president adds, “Despite an arbitrary rule that any man killed by drones is declared an enemy terrorist, the death of nearby innocent women and children is accepted as inevitable... We don’t know how many hundreds of innocent civilians have been killed in these attacks, each one approved by the highest authorities in Washington. This would have been unthinkable in previous times.”

Carter’s column appeared on the same day that Pakistan’s ambassador to the United Nations testified before the UN Human Rights Commission, denouncing US drone attacks on his country in which “thousands of innocent people, including women and children, have been murdered.” He said that in 2010 alone, 957

Pakistanis were killed.

Carter goes on to indict the administration for the continued operation of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where, he notes, out of 169 prisoners “half have been cleared for release, yet have little prospect of ever obtaining their freedom,” and others “have no prospect of ever being charged or tried either.”

In the few cases where prisoners have been brought before military tribunals, he notes, the defendants “have been tortured by waterboarding more than 100 times or intimidated with semiautomatic weapons, power drills or threats to sexually assault their mothers.” He continues: “Astoundingly, these facts cannot be used as a defense by the accused, because the government claims they occurred under the cover of ‘national security.’”

Aside from moral qualms, and there is no reason to doubt that these play a significant role in Carter’s case, the former president expresses profound concerns that the brazen criminality of the actions carried out by the US government is undermining American foreign policy. Not only are these methods fueling popular hostility around the globe, they are depriving Washington of the ability to cloak its policies in the mantle of human rights and the defense of democracy, a method employed to significant effect by US imperialism since its advent at the end of the 19th century.

Carter himself played the “human rights” card prominently during his presidency, even as his administration sought to prop up the torture regime of the Shah in Iran, initiated the CIA-backed Islamist insurgency in Afghanistan, and affirmed—in the Carter Doctrine—America’s right to use military force to assure its domination of Persian Gulf oil supplies.

A former senior naval officer and submarine expert, Carter was brought into the White House in 1977 to restore the credibility and stature of the American

presidency in the wake of US imperialism's debacle in Vietnam and the criminality surrounding Watergate.

Yet, nearly four decades later, the extra-constitutional methods and criminality in the White House go far beyond anything done under Richard Nixon.

There is no question that Carter chose each word of his column carefully, avoiding hyperbole. Indeed, the name Obama does not appear. In the first word of the piece, however, he inserted a link to the lengthy *New York Times* article of June 1 documenting how Obama personally directs the preparation of "kill lists," choosing victims and signing off on drone strikes when it is known that innocent civilians will be killed.

In this context, Carter's use of the word "assassination" to describe the drone attacks has an unmistakable meaning. The president of the United States, this former president is saying, is guilty of war crimes and murder.

At the age of 88, Carter is a disinterested observer, concerned more with his legacy than any political gain. His testimony is all the more extraordinary in that he occupied the same office as Obama, is a member of the same party, and supported Obama's election.

What could impel him, with little more than four months until the presidential election, to level such charges at his party's candidate and the sitting president? He must believe that the political setup in America has descended so far into criminality and the threat of a police state is so great that it is imperative for him to speak out.

Carter makes the telling point that these criminal actions have been carried out with "bipartisan executive and legislative" support and virtually "without dissent." Indeed, as if to prove his point, his own statements in the column—which have explosive political significance—have been largely passed over in silence by the mass media.

Twelve years after the stolen presidential election of 2000, the central lesson of that crucial episode in American political life has been driven home ever more forcefully: there exists within the US corporate and political establishment no significant constituency for the defense of democratic rights and constitutional methods.

The unprecedented gulf between a ruling financial oligarchy and the masses of working people—which has grown uninterrupted throughout this period—is wholly

incompatible with such rights and such methods.

Carter's words are a warning. The threat of an American police state and the use of the murderous methods employed by US imperialism abroad against the working class at home is real and growing. The working class must prepare accordingly, mobilizing its independent political power against the capitalist profit system from which these threats arise.

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