

Institutionalized state assassinations and the November 6 election

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With barely a week and a half to go until the November 6 presidential elections, the entire spectrum of the American pseudo-left is exerting maximum efforts to turn out votes for Obama with the claim that the reelection of the incumbent Democrat would represent the “lesser of two evils.”

If there was any need for a further refutation of this shabby political argument it has been provided in the form of the exposé run by the *Washington Post* this week on the Obama administration’s institutionalization of assassinations orchestrated from the White House.

“Disposition Matrix,” sounding like the title of a science fiction film, is the term crafted by Obama’s intelligence and military advisers to describe a new system that is “codifying and streamlining” the extrajudicial killings that are being carried out on the orders of the US president on virtually a daily basis.

The media’s bloodless reports referring to unmanned aircraft carrying out strikes against “compounds” and killing unnamed “militants” serve to mask the reality of US drone warfare, which in Pakistan alone has torn to pieces and incinerated thousands of civilians, men, women, children, while leaving entire communities in a permanent state of terror. An untold number more have been killed in Yemen and Somalia and no doubt elsewhere.

The *Post* series reveals that the individual playing the presiding role in this program of state assassinations is John Brennan, a former top-ranking Central Intelligence Agency official tapped by Obama to be his counterterrorism adviser.

In the run-up to his inauguration, Obama had moved to name Brennan as the new CIA director. He was forced to back off the nomination, however, in the face of popular outrage over the fact that the candidate of

“hope” and “change” was installing a holdover from the Bush years who was deeply implicated in the policies of torture, indefinite detention, extraordinary rendition and cover-up that many thought they had voted against.

What emerges from the *Post* account is that Brennan has in his role of White House adviser amassed more control than the CIA director himself. Unelected and not subject to confirmation by Congress, Brennan wields “enormous power in shaping decisions on ‘kill’ lists and the allocation of armed drones, the war’s signature weapon,” the *Post* reports.

Carrying out these decisions are a combination of CIA paramilitary operatives and military commandos of the Pentagon’s Joint Special Operations Command. JSOC, which operates under conditions of extreme secrecy and outside of the Pentagon’s chain of command, has been described by one military official as an “industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine” and by others as the “President’s Army.”

Among the victims of this machine are American citizens, including the New Mexico-born cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed by a drone missile attack in Yemen in September 2011. His 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, was murdered in another drone strike two weeks later along with his 17-year-old cousin. No charges or even evidence was ever brought against Anwar al-Awlaki for any crimes, outside of his thoughts and speech. As for the 16-year-old son, there was not even that.

In a recent interview with CNN, Obama made the incredible claim that American citizens targeted in his assassination campaign are afforded “the protection of the Constitution and due process.” It did not occur to the reporter to ask what part of the Constitution grants the American president the power to order executions

without presenting charges, much less proving them in a court of law.

What Obama means by “due process” is that he rubber-stamps decisions made by Brennan and the CIA spooks and military brass who gather weekly at the White House to prepare “kill lists” in what they cynically refer to as “terror Tuesdays.”

This entire criminal procedure is a repudiation in practice of the US Constitution and of the most elementary democratic rights dating back nearly 900 years to the English Magna Carta, which held that no person could be put to death or imprisoned “except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land.”

Attorney General Eric Holder, however, has directly asserted the president’s right to order state killings with no need for charges or trials. And Obama at the end of last year signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act, allowing the president to throw anyone, including US citizens, into a military prison indefinitely without charge.

What has been put in place, on a scale that far surpasses what was done under George W. Bush, is the framework for an American police-military dictatorship.

Among the more chilling facts disclosed in the *Post* series is that the coordination of the “kill lists” has been entrusted to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), which it was recently revealed is simultaneously mining government data bases to accumulate vast amounts of information on average American citizens.

The erosion of democratic rights within the United States is far more advanced than most people realize. The methods of “kill lists” and military detention without charges or trial will be used against opponents of American imperialism all over the world and, increasingly, against those perceived as enemies of the state and impediments to profit interests within the US itself.

These policies are not driven fundamentally by the political ideology of either the Democratic or Republican parties, which give them bipartisan support. This was evidenced in Monday night’s debate, where Obama bragged about bringing alleged culprits “to justice” and Romney vowed “to kill them, to take them out of the picture.”

Rather they are the outcome, on the one hand, of unprecedented social inequality within America. The gap between a corporate and financial aristocracy that monopolizes economic wealth and political power and the vast mass of working people has become so wide as to be incompatible with democratic forms of rule. On the other hand, they are the byproduct of the unchecked growth of militarism, as US imperialism seeks to offset its economic crisis and decline by using armed force to assert control over the world’s strategically vital regions and resources.

The very fact that the detailed reports of a Murder, Inc. being run out of the West Wing of the White House have not prompted a public outcry and demands for Obama’s impeachment is testimony to the collapse of democratic consciousness within America’s ruling political establishment. Just as the economic practices of Wall Street and corporate America have assumed an increasingly criminal character, so the essential functioning of the state itself is ever more bound up with murder, brutality and extra-constitutional repression.

The startling revelations about the institutionalization of state assassinations under the Obama administration should impel workers and youth to consider very carefully what is happening in the US today and to draw the necessary political conclusions.

No matter which of the two capitalist parties emerges victorious on November 6, the immense dangers to basic democratic rights will only intensify in the wake of the election. Neither these rights, nor the jobs and conditions of working people, can be defended outside of a break with the Democratic Party and the preparation of a new revolutionary leadership and perspective in the working class for the great social struggles that are to come.

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