

Media covered up US assassination base in Saudi Arabia

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For more than a year, several major US media outlets—including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*—deliberately concealed the existence of a US drone base in Saudi Arabia. The base was used to carry out many of the CIA’s extra-judicial assassinations, including the killing of at least two US citizens.

The decision not to report on the location of the base was made at the direct request of the Obama administration, underscoring once again the role of the media as an auxiliary arm of the state.

The drone base’s location was finally reported in an article published this week in the *Times*, shortly before a Senate hearing for John Brennan, who has been nominated by Obama to head the CIA. Brennan reportedly played a key role in establishing the base in Saudi Arabia and has been central in the drawing up of the administration’s “kill list” of individuals to be assassinated.

The revelation came a day after NBC News released a leaked Justice Department white paper giving the administration’s legal rationale for assassinating US citizens, including Anwar Al-Awlaki in September 2011, one of those killed using drones from the Saudi base. Al-Awlaki’s 16-year old son, also a US citizen, was assassinated in a separate attack. (See: “The police state implications of Obama’s assassination program”)

Attempting to justify the decision not to report on the location of the drone base, *Times* managing editor Dean Baquet told the newspaper’s public editor, Margaret Sullivan, that until the nomination of Brennan the location of the drone base was a mere “footnote” to stories about the assassination program.

This false rationalization—that the location of the base was not particularly important or newsworthy—is contradicted by further statements from Baquet. Sullivan writes, “The government’s rationale for asking that the location be withheld was this: Revealing it might

jeopardize the existence of the base and harm counterterrorism efforts. ‘The Saudis might shut it down because the citizenry would be very upset,’ [Baquet] said.”

Baquet added, “We have to balance that concern with reporting the news.”

Baquet and the *Times* are so deeply integrated into the state apparatus that they do not realize how devastating this statement is. The interests of the state—in engaging and covering up criminal actions abroad—have to be “balanced” with the ostensible task of the *Times*, to report the news. The newspaper accepts, moreover, the entire rationale of the “war on terror.”

Sullivan adds, “Mr. Baquet said he had a conversation with a C.I.A. official about a month ago and, at that time, agreed to continue withholding the location, as it had done for many months.”

According to Sullivan, as this week’s *Times* article was being prepared, the CIA and government were informed that the newspaper was planning on revealing the location and that “officials should contact Mr. Baquet if they wanted to discuss it further.” This time, there was no objection from the Obama administration.

In other words, the *Times* and its reporters are in regular discussion with the CIA over what is and is not “fit to print.”

By Baquet’s own admission, the *Times* decided not to expose the location of the base because it could cause problems for US ally Saudi Arabia, a despotic monarchy that is a lynchpin in the broader strategy of American imperialism in the Middle East. The monarchy plays a key role not only in the drone assassination program, but also the war in Syria and efforts to suppress popular uprisings throughout the region against pro-US governments.

There is widespread opposition within Saudi Arabia to the presence of the US military. After the 2003 US

invasion of Iraq, bases were formally removed, though there remained a large military-intelligence presence in the country.

The *Times* was also covering for Brennan, currently the deputy national security advisor for homeland security and counterterrorism under Obama. Brennan is a former CIA station chief in Saudi Arabia and evidently had close connections to the Saudi monarchy, helping to negotiate the establishment of the base. A base in Saudi Arabia is particularly important due to its proximity to Yemen, where al-Awlaki was killed; Iran, where US spy drones are known to operate; and North Africa.

The American media in general, and the *New York Times* in particular, has a long and sordid record of collusion with the government in promoting war and covering up for crimes at home and abroad. Particularly since the attacks of September 11, the media has integrated itself more thoroughly into the state apparatus, going far beyond the “embedded” reporters that travel with the US military.

One particularly egregious example was the decision by the *New York Times* to withhold reports on the National Security Agency’s illegal domestic spying program at the request of the Bush administration for over a year. The period in which the newspaper sat on the information without informing the American people included the 2004 US elections. (See, “A damning admission: New York Times concealed NSA spying until after 2004 elections”)

When the newspaper published a report on the destruction of the CIA videotapes of torture in 2007, it acknowledged that this came only after discussions with the government and evidently after another lengthy delay. (See, “New York Times bows to White House pressure over CIA tapes story”)

There can be no doubt that there are many more crimes carried out by the government that are known to the editors of the *Times* and other major American media, but remain concealed from the American people.



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