

Video of September 2 killing showed US massacred “shipwrecked” people, House committee leaders say

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Democratic Representatives Jim Himes and Adam Smith said Thursday that the full video of the September 2 missile strike that killed 11 people in the Caribbean showed that two “shipwrecked individuals” were “killed by the United States military.”

The two congressmen are the ranking members of the House Intelligence and House Armed Services Committee respectively, which viewed the video in a closed-door briefing. Last week, the *Washington Post* reported that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth gave a verbal order to “kill everybody” on board the boat, leading to a second strike that killed two survivors.

In a statement following the hearing, Himes and Smith said that “we saw or heard nothing today to convince us that the decision to strike the vessel a second time was justified.”

They added, “The video we saw today showed two shipwrecked individuals who had no means to move, much less pose an immediate threat, and yet they were killed by the United States military. Regardless of what one believes about the legal underpinnings of these operations, and we have been clear we believe they are highly questionable, this was wrong.”

“It looks like two classically shipwrecked people,” Smith said in an interview with the *New Republic*. During the session, members of Congress were told that the Pentagon “judged that these two people were capable of returning to the fight.”

In September, the Trump administration began murdering people in boats off the coast of Venezuela in over 20 separate missile strikes. It claimed, without evidence, that the victims were transporting drugs. But even if the victims had been captured and convicted in a court of law, their killing outside of any legal process

is a summary execution, a murder, and a war crime.

Trump, a known admirer of Adolf Hitler, is seeking to establish a personalist dictatorship in the United States in an ongoing coup d’etat. His murders off the Caribbean and Pacific coasts of Latin America are aimed at establishing a precedent for the murder of civilians by the military, precedents which he hopes to use against his domestic political opponents.

In the case of the September 2 strikes, the fact that a motorboat was transporting 13 people on a short trip between Venezuela and Trinidad suggests that it was transporting people, not drugs. As one official told the *Washington Post*, “More people on board means less room for drugs to sell.”

Given the likelihood that the boat was transporting passengers as its cargo, not drugs, the decision to murder the survivors could be seen as a deliberate action to cover up the murders committed in the first strike.

While the briefing was behind closed doors, committee members said that the officer responsible for the murders, Adm. Frank “Mitch” Bradley, claimed that his supervisor, Defense Secretary Hegseth, did not give an order to massacre the survivors. During the hearing, however, Bradley admitted that Hegseth was the “target engagement authority” for the murder.

The Pentagon’s law of war manual declares that soldiers have a duty to refuse to carry out “clearly illegal” orders, such as killing shipwrecked sailors. “Orders to fire upon the shipwrecked would be clearly illegal,” the manual declares.

At a cabinet meeting Tuesday, Hegseth claimed that he had stopped paying attention to the massacre after the first bombing and did not witness the second

bombing. “As you can imagine at the Department of War, we’ve got a lot of things to do, so I didn’t stick around for the hour, two hours, whatever,” he said, “I moved to my next meeting.”

He said Bradley “made the correct decision.”

Commenting on the veracity of this claim, Eugene Vindman, a former senior adviser to the National Security Council and a war hawk and critic of the Trump administration, told *The Hill*, “A Navy admiral, very well regarded, with all those years of experience—shooting at shipwrecked sailors on its face sounds absurd. So, he must have gotten an order.”

In an interview on CNN, Republican Sen. Thom Tillis asked what Hegseth was doing during that period. “I’ll take at face value, right now, what Secretary Hegseth said. He said he wasn’t there. He said he was busy doing other things,” Tillis said. “I would assume a part of the record was, what was the other thing that he was doing that was more important than a battle damage assessment over the first strike in the Caribbean?”

Maine independent Senator Angus King told CNN, “I want to see his calendar for that day. I want to know what meeting he went to. I want to know how long he was, where he was,”

In the face of the administration’s increasingly tattered denials of responsibility, the Republicans defending Trump have made clear that the murders in the Caribbean are a development and extension of the drone murders carried out under the Democratic Obama administration.

“Those who appear ‘troubled’ by videos of military strikes on designated terrorists have clearly never seen the Obama-ordered strikes, or, for that matter, those of any other administration over recent decades,” said Republican Representative Rick Crawford, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee.

This line was elaborated by Marc A. Thiessen, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, in a *Washington Post* column headlined, “Trump, Hegseth’s drug-boat strike playbook was written by Obama.” The column bears extensive quotation:

On taking office, Obama dramatically escalated the use of drone strikes against terrorism targets after ending the CIA’s terrorist

interrogation program—finding it was simpler to vaporize enemy combatants rather than capture them alive for questioning. So Obama forged what the New York Times called at the time a “take-no-prisoners policy,” ordering more than 540 drone strikes on terrorists in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen (including one that killed a U.S. citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki, leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula).

The strikes Obama ordered were similar to those Trump has carried out in the waters off of Venezuela. Obama used what were called “signature strikes” in which the U.S. targeted patterns of behavior denoting terrorist activity (“signatures”) even when the precise identity of the individuals being targeted was unknown. And he routinely carried out so-called “double-tap” strikes hitting a target once and then striking again to take out any survivors or other terrorists who rushed to the scene after the initial hit.

Obama personally approved the “kill lists” for these strikes. “Turns out I’m really good at killing people,” Obama reportedly declared to aides. According to one estimate, the strikes Obama authorized killed an estimated 3,797 people.

So, anyone who wants to charge Pete Hegseth with war crimes should charge Barack Obama first.

All of this is completely true. These admissions of fact are meant as a warning to any factions of the US political establishment: If they admit Trump and Hegseth committed war crimes, there will be demands for prosecution for war crimes of the top officials in every presidency of the 21st century, all of whom are guilty of war crimes on a vast scale.



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