

Obama gives a lift to Al Qaeda

By [NAT HENTOFF](#) The Times and Democrat | Posted: Monday, June 25, 2012 2:45 am

Amid the sharp accusations that the Obama administration “leaks” classified intelligence information to make the president look like a tough, drone-admiring protector of national security, two separate, fact-based reports from Yemen appeared in the June 14 New York Times. These reports, which should have been linked into a front-page story, show how grateful Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is to Barack Obama as he focuses on who is to be assassinated on the “kill lists.”

In “How Drones Help Al Qaeda,” Ibrahim Mothana, a Yemini writer and co-founder of the Watan Party, cites Robert Grenier, formerly in charge of the CIA’s counterterrorism center, warning “that the American drone program in Yemen risks turning the country into a safe haven for Al Qaeda, like the tribal areas of Pakistan.”

Adds Mothana: “The drone program is leading to the Talibanization of vast tribal areas and the radicalization of people who could otherwise be America’s allies in the fight against terrorism in Yemen.”

Obama and his CIA have already succeeded in doing much of that in Pakistan.

Explains Mothana: “The situation is quite likely to get worse now that Washington has broadened its rule of engagement to allow so-called signature strikes.”

What’s that?

“When surveillance data suggest a terrorist leader may be nearby but the identities of all others targeted is not known.

“Such loose rules risk redefining ‘militants’ as any military-age males seen in a strike zone.”

They are turned into “suspects” to also be wiped out.

Gee, who can now legitimately call Obama “soft” on terrorism? Shouldn’t he be returning his Nobel Peace Prize? The president is just expanding and deepening the legacy of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, who often spoke of “preserving American values.”

Like, “kill lists”?

Consider the other June 14 New York Times story from Yemen: “For Yemen’s New President, a Battle for Control and a Tug of War With the Past.” Note how differently the term “militant” is used to describe actual Al Qaeda killers:

“Financially struggling, Yemen is facing an increasingly brazen Qaeda franchise that controls large parts of its territory in the southern provinces of Abyan and Shabwa. With the government and army remaining fractured, the militants take advantage of the power vacuum.”

And “even with the military’s recent gains against Ansar al-Sharia, a Qaeda-linked group, militants control vast territory in the south. This is the case even as American drone strikes have sharply increased and about 20 American military advisers have arrived in Yemen to provide intelligence support.”

As the advisers do their work, of course, there will be more murderous drone strikes, creating more mass hatred of the United States.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, President Obama’s deep affection for killer drones is helping Al Qaeda gain recruits and adding to anti-American feeling there. Glenn Greenwald, a penetrating reporter and luminous news analyst whose byline I never miss, writes of yet another old-fashioned American value that is being scorned by Obama’s CIA’s robotic drones:

“In February, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism documented that after the U.S. kills people with drones in Pakistan, it then targets for death those who show up at the scene to rescue the survivors and retrieve the bodies, as well as those who gather to mourn the dead at funerals” (“U.S. again bombs mourners,” salon.com, June 4).

Citing the bureau’s report, he writes: “The CIA’s drone campaign in Pakistan has killed dozens of civilians who had gone to help rescue victims or were attending funerals.”

Does this make you proud to be an American?

“This repellant practice continues,” Greenwald adds. “Over the last three days, the U.S. has launched three separate drone strikes in Pakistan: one on each day ... It was the second strike ... that targeted mourners gathered to grieve those killed in the first strike.”

Included was one of those whose brother had been killed in that morning’s attack.

“Note,” says Greenwald — and I would add that Obama in particular should note — “that there is no suggestion, even from the ‘officials’ on which these media reports (as usual) rely, that the dead man was a terrorist or even a ‘militant.’ He was simply receiving condolences for his dead brother.

“But pursuant to the standards embraced by President Obama, the brother ... is inherently deemed a ‘combatant’ and therefore a legitimate target for death solely by virtue of being a ‘military-age male in a strike zone.’”

And keep this in mind about our super-tough commander-in-chief: “Of course, killing family members of bombing targets is nothing new for this president: Let’s recall the still unresolved question of why (U.S. citizen) Anwar Awlaki’s 16-year-old American son, Abdulrahman, was killed by a U.S. drone attack in Yemen two weeks after his father was killed.”

And no one was punished or even charged.

Four more years of Obama! Will Mitt Romney be any more devoted to the most basic human rights? Will the United States ever go back to practicing the presumption of innocence? How many citizens, including the new generation, have even heard of the presumption of innocence in our rule of law?

How can the Americans we are becoming ever give a damn about bringing back the Constitution? The day after 9/11, President Bush said: “We will not allow this enemy to win the war by changing our way of life or restricting our freedoms.”

Bush is still here. What does he think now?

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