



Obama Keeps CIA in Control of "Secret" Drone War in Syria

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On September 1, the *Washington Post* published an article citing information provided by a U.S. official that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. Special Operations forces “launched a secret campaign to hunt terrorism suspects in Syria as part of a targeted killing program that is run separately from the broader U.S. military offensive against the Islamic State.”

Specifically, the *Post* reported that the spy agency and the military were conducting drone strikes in Syria targeting “senior Islamic State operatives.”

One of the first victims of the joint venture was a British citizen “thought to be an architect of the terrorist group’s effort to use social media to incite attacks in the United States,” the paper reported, citing the unnamed officials.

Detail of the execution were provided by Daniel McAdams writing for the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity:

British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that his government had used drone strikes to kill two British citizens suspected of membership in ISIS in Syria. This is a major escalation for a country whose parliament voted against British bombing of Syria in 2013. Cameron claimed he had no other choice but to bomb, as there was “no government to work with” in Syria — after the past four years of US/UK “regime change” policy toward Syria had nothing to do with this!

The prominent role of the CIA in the Syrian drone strategy was highlighted by the *Washington Post*:

The clandestine program represents a significant escalation of the CIA’s involvement in the war in Syria, enlisting the agency’s Counterterrorism Center (CTC) against a militant group that many officials believe has eclipsed al-Qaeda as a threat.

Any “escalation” of the CIA’s involvement in an undeniably military operation is in direct contradiction of President Obama’s promise to reduce the role the agency would play in perpetrating war.

In 2103, CIA Director John Brennan testified at his confirmation hearing that the Obama administration's use of the CIA as essentially a separate branch of the armed forces would be phased out in favor of a return to its traditional task of gathering intelligence.

Then, in a foreign policy speech at the National Defense University on May 23, 2013, President Obama set out his "comprehensive counterterrorism strategy," which included a reduced role for the CIA and a return of the Pentagon as the primary perpetrator of the death-by-drone program.

In its article on the recently launched Syrian drone campaign, the *Washington Post* provided pretexts used by the Obama administration to explain the apparent duplicity:

Peter Boogaard, a spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said that Obama remains committed to increasing the transparency of counterterrorism operations by "turning to the U.S. military to take the lead and to provide information to the public." But he said the effort will be "carried out in a manner that does not degrade our ability to leverage the full range of counterterrorism capabilities."

Some see the Syrian theater of the drone war as a bad move and one that will degrade the United States in other ways, however.

In an article published on September 8, the Cato Institute laid out "five problems" with the Syrian drone campaign.

The first problem seen by Cato is that the use of drones to kill Syrian targets "will inflame anti-American sentiment in the region."

There are compelling reasons for believing this claim.

The escalation of the drone war in Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and elsewhere has already created this sad situation. It is a deadly development known as blowback.

"You want us to stay quiet while our wives and brothers are being killed for no reason. This attack is the real terrorism," said Mansoor al-Maweri, whom CNN reported in 2012 as being "near the scene of the strike" that "accidentally" killed 15 innocent men, women, and children in Yemen in September of that year.

Then there was this from "an activist" who lived near the site of the massacre: "I would not be surprised if a hundred tribesmen joined the lines of al Qaeda as a result of the latest drone mistake," said Nasr Abdullah. "This part of Yemen takes revenge very seriously."

The former CIA Pakistan station chief warned about the repercussions of the rapid expansion of the drone war in Yemen, Robert Grenier told *The Guardian* (U.K.):

That brings you to a place where young men, who are typically armed, are in the same area and may hold these militants in a certain form of high regard. If you strike them indiscriminately you are running the risk of creating a terrific amount of popular anger. They have tribes and clans and large families. Now all of a sudden you have a big problem.... I am very concerned about the creation of a larger terrorist safe haven in Yemen.

We have gone a long way down the road of creating a situation where we are making more enemies than we are removing from the battlefield. We are already there with regard to Pakistan and Afghanistan and may be heading down that same deadly path in Syria.

In every instance, the federal government's response to the threats purportedly posed by al-Qaeda, ISIS, and others has failed to pass constitutional muster. Ultimately, this will be President Obama's legacy, regardless of the rhetoric he employs to justify the summary execution of "terrorists."

In the case of the drone war, much of the major media attention has focused on the shift of responsibility for carrying out the kill orders from the CIA to the Defense Department.

That type of coverage amounts to little more than picking the low-hanging fruit of this poisonous tree, when more good could be done by hacking relentlessly at its unconstitutional roots.

It matters less who pulls the trigger than why the trigger was ordered pulled in the first place. In the case of the United States of America, the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution mandates that "no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."

This amendment is a protection of a timeless principle of liberty and justice. In fact, due process as a check on monarchical power was included in the Magna Carta of 1215.

As this reporter wrote in 2014:

Over the years, the Magna Carta was occasionally revised and amended. In 1354, the phrase "due process of law" appeared for the first time. The Magna Carta as amended in 1354 says: "No man of what state or condition he be, shall be put out of his lands or tenements nor taken, nor disinherited, nor put to death, without he be brought to answer by due process of law."

President Obama's decision to turn to drone-delivered assassinations of "enemies" is an effrontery to over 650 years of our Anglo-American law's protection from autocratic decrees of death without due process of law.

When any president usurps the power to kill anyone — even alleged "militants" with anti-American attitudes — without due process, he places our Republic on a trajectory toward tyranny and government-sponsored terrorism.

The *Washington Post* story reports that Syria is officially a "denied" area for the CIA, meaning that the agency has no established presence within the borders of that country. That restriction, and those of the Constitution, mean nothing to the president, and the only denial recognized by him is the denial of due process to those he orders killed by the CIA and Pentagon.