

Dead Men Tell No Tales: The CIA, 9/11 and the Anwar Al-Awlaki Assassination

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

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This article was first published on October 9, 2011. One of the terrorists who took part in the attack which killed 12 journalists of the French satirical paper Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015 told BMFTV, a French news outlet, that he was funded by Awlaki.

On September 30, the CIA and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) assets under the Agency's control, assassinated the alleged "external operations" chief of the Afghan-Arab database of disposable Western intelligence assets, also known as Al-Qaeda, Anwar al-Awlaki, and a second American citizen, Samir Khan, the 25-year-old editor of *Inspire* magazine, in a drone strike in Yemen.

As [The Washington Post](#) reported last month, the "commingling" of CIA officers, JSOC paramilitary troops and contractors "occupy an expanding netherworld between intelligence and military operations" where "congressional intelligence and armed services committees rarely get a comprehensive view."

Or any "view" at all, which is precisely what the CIA and Pentagon have long desired; an oversight-free zone where American policymakers operate, as Dick Cheney infamously put it, on the "dark side," a position fully-embraced by the "hope and change" administration of Barack Obama.

Awlaki's state-sponsored killing, like the May 2 murder of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, resurface many unanswered questions concerning the 9/11 attacks, the so-called trigger for America's global "War on Terror."

But before turning to those issues, it is necessary to take a detour and examine administration actions; specifically the deliberations undertaken by Obama's national security team which culminated in Awlaki's death.

White House "Death Panel"

Unlike the fantasies of the corporate-controlled Tea Party who charged during the run-up to the White House sell-out of health care reform that the administration would create "death panels" to deny care to the elderly, it has since emerged that Team Obama has stood-up the authentic article.

According to [The Washington Post](#), President Obama's Justice Department "wrote a secret memorandum authorizing the lethal targeting" of Awlaki. The *Post* reports that the memorandum "was produced following a review of the legal issues raised by striking a U.S. citizen and involved senior lawyers from across the administration. There was no dissent

about the legality of killing Aulaqi.”

That memorandum, according to [The New York Times](#), was drafted in June 2010, some six months *after* Awlaki had been placed on the White House hit list, by Office of Legal Counsel attorneys “David Barron and Martin Lederman.”

Both former OLC lawyers are prominent “liberals” from prestigious universities; Barron at Harvard and Lederman at Georgetown University.

Ironically enough, in several scholarly articles they had railed against the previous administration’s adaptation of the “Unitary Executive Theory” promulgated by “torture memo” authors Jay Bybee and John Yoo.

Under Bush, OLC opinions were used to justify everything from warrantless wiretapping, the domestic deployment of the military to arrest Americans, to the torture and indefinite detention of “terrorist” suspects at the Guantánamo Bay prison gulag and CIA “black sites.”

This of course begs the question: if Awlaki’s murder was “legal,” why then was the authorization to do so reached *in camera* by officials following a deliberative process which can’t be shared with the public because of “national security”?

The answer should be chilling and shocking to all Americans: because the nucleus of a death squad state recalling those stood-up in Chile and Argentina during the “dirty war” period of the 1970s may now exist.

[Reuters](#) disclosed that Americans “are placed on a kill or capture list by a secretive panel of senior government officials, which then informs the president of its decisions, according to officials.”

“There is no public record of the operations or decisions of the panel,” reporter Mark Hosenball wrote, “which is a subset of the White House’s National Security Council. ... Neither is there any law establishing its existence or setting out the rules by which it is supposed to operate.”

According to [Reuters](#), “targeting recommendations are drawn up by a committee of mid-level National Security Council and agency officials. Their recommendations are then sent to the panel of NSC ‘principals,’ meaning Cabinet secretaries and intelligence unit chiefs, for approval.”

A “former official” told Hosenball that “one of the reasons for making senior officials principally responsible for nominating Americans for the target list was to ‘protect’ the president,” i.e., provide Obama *legal* cover under the thin veneer afforded by “plausible deniability.”

[McClatchy News](#) reported that “broadly speaking” White House orders to kill Awlaki were based on claims that “the nation’s inherent right of self-defense [is] recognized under international law.” However, “international law also imposes limits: Targeted killing is banned except to protect against ‘concrete, specific and imminent’ danger.”

And although the administration now claims that Awlaki was targeted for death because “his

role in AQAP had gone ‘from inspirational to operational’,” *Reuters* disclosed that “officials acknowledge that some of the intelligence purporting to show Awlaki’s hands-on role in plotting attacks was patchy.”

In fact, the White House has failed to provide *any* proof whatsoever that Awlaki posed an “imminent danger” to the United States, although there is considerable evidence that he was on the radar of U.S. and allied secret state intelligence agencies for more than a decade, had close ties to several of the 9/11 hijackers and *could have* been picked up and indicted at any time.

Instead, federal law enforcement officials gave Awlaki a green light to leave the United States, unlike thousands of innocent Muslim-Americans swept-up and detained by the FBI in the post-9/11 hysteria that followed the attacks.

A “former military intelligence officer who worked with special operations troops to hunt down high-value terrorism targets,” told the right-wing [Washington Times](#): “I think it’s pretty easy to understand why they didn’t take him alive. Would you want to deal with the hassle of trying to put him on trial, an American citizen that has gotten so much press for being the target of a CIA kill order? That would be a nightmare. The ACLU would be crawling all over the Justice Department for due process in an American court.”

That about sums up the dominant mindset of an Empire in sharp decline: the rule of law and due process for criminal suspects reduced to a “hassle.”

Slouching Towards Dictatorship

Obama’s national security team justified whacking Awlaki, as with their earlier hit on Osama Bin Laden, by referencing the Bush-era Authorization for Use of Military Force ([AUMF](#)), hastily passed by Congress in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

“A decade later,” *McClatchy* reported, “the Obama administration contends that this wartime authority remains even if it’s evolved for reasons the administration won’t fully elucidate.”

The relevant section of AUMF reads: “IN GENERAL — That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons *he determines* planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.” (emphasis added)

Readers will undoubtedly note that in passing the resolution, Congress not only ceded its authority to declare war to the Executive Branch but also planted the seeds of the administration’s preemptive war doctrines along with an unprecedented expansion of its domestic surveillance powers.

More pertinently, is the reason *why* the administration “won’t fully elucidate” how the Bush-era AUMF “evolved” chiefly due to the fact that secret annexes now exist which authorize the killing of Americans, not only in Yemen or other “War on Terror” fronts, but right here in the United States itself?

After all, it's not beyond the Obama administration to play fast and loose with the truth or hide repressive policies under layers of top secret presidential "findings" or a multitude of CIA and Pentagon black programs, as did the previous Bush government.

Recall that during the run-up to the reauthorization of three expiring provisions of the USA Patriot Act, civil libertarians decried the use of [secret legal memos](#) justifying everything from unchecked access to internet and telephone records to the deployment of government-sanctioned malware on private computers during "national security" investigations.

Recall too, that the Obama administration, as [The New York Times](#) disclosed in June, handed the FBI "significant new powers to its roughly 14,000 agents, allowing them more leeway to search databases, go through household trash or use surveillance teams to scrutinize the lives of people who have attracted their attention."

These "news rules," the *Times* averred, will give agents "more latitude" to investigate citizens even when there is no evidence they have exhibited "signs of criminal or terrorist activity."

It gets worse.

Last month, [The New York Times](#) revealed that the FBI "is permitted to include people on the government's terrorist watch list even if they have been acquitted of terrorism-related offenses or the charges are dropped."

Under these new standards, the Bureau may deem someone a "known or suspected terrorist," not based on evidence gathered through a criminal investigation, but solely if officials have "particularized derogatory information," including that derived from First Amendment protected activities, to support an individuals' watch listing or placement on a "no-fly" list.

One administration wag, speaking on condition of anonymity because to do otherwise would reveal "closely held deliberations within the administration," but did so anyway because this was clearly a *sanctioned leak* to stenographer Peter Finn, told *The Washington Post* that "what constitutes due process in [the Awlaki case] is a due process in war."

"The administration officials refused to disclose the exact legal analysis used to authorize targeting Aulqi," Finn wrote, "or how they considered any Fifth Amendment right to due process."

We now know, thanks to *Reuters*, that authorization came from a White House *death panel*, an extra-constitutional committee of anonymous officials operating outside the rule of law.

As we have seen since Barack Obama took office, as under the previous Bush government, the Constitution is a meaningless scrap of paper with some words on it, duly trotted out on national holidays only to be cast aside in practice; that is, when it isn't used as a rhetorical hammer against assorted "new Hitlers" or geopolitical rivals whose resources corporate America seek to "liberate."

Dead Men Tell No Tales

As toxic to democratic norms and the rule of law as the Awlaki affair clearly is, there are

underlying *parapolitical* themes surrounding his murder which strengthen suspicions that what took place in Yemen on September 30 is *more* than just another story about an overt power grab by the Executive Branch.

While the government and media continue to cover-up the role played by the CIA and other secret state agencies in alleged intelligence “failures” leading up to the 9/11 attacks, evidence suggests that the Awlaki killing, as with last May’s murder of former *bête noire* and on-again, off-again ally, Osama Bin Laden, may have been a “clean-up” operation designed to remove inconvenient witnesses with knowledge of Agency involvement in the plot.

As *Antifascist Calling* reported nearly two years ago in the wake of the aborted 2009 bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day over Detroit, a plot for which Awlaki was accused of orchestrating, though evidence can’t be supplied because it’s “secret,” [The Washington Post](#) disclosed that Awlaki had extensive contacts with 9/11 hijackers Nawaf Alhazmi, Khalid Almihdhar and Hani Hanjour who “had spent time at his mosques in California and Falls Church.”

In a series of 2010 articles ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), I reported on the stark parallels between September 11 and the Flight 253 affair.

Similar to the 2001 attacks we were told “changed everything,” far from being a failure to “connect the dots,” intelligence and law enforcement officials possessed sufficient information that *should have* prevented accused bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, from boarding that plane and placing the lives of nearly 300 air passengers at risk.

And while Awlaki wasn’t given a free pass by the administration in that botched attack, earlier government failures to apprehend him certainly set the stage.

According to [History Commons](#), “shortly before the [FBI] investigation [into Awlaki’s alleged ties to the now-shuttered Holy Land Foundation] is closed,” in 2000, Awlaki “is beginning to associate with hijackers Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almihdhar shortly before the investigation ends.”

“For instance,” *History Commons* avers, “on February 4, one month before the FBI investigation is closed, al-Awlaki talks on the telephone four times with hijacker associate [and suspected Saudi intelligence agent] Omar al-Bayoumi.”

“The 9/11 Commission will later speculate that these calls are related to Alhazmi and Almihdhar, since al-Bayoumi is helping them that day, and that Alhazmi or Almihdhar may even have been using al-Bayoumi’s phone at the time. Al-Bayoumi had also been the subject of an FBI counterterrorism investigation in 1999.”

Keep in mind that at least two of the hijackers, Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almihdhar, figure prominently in recent revelations by researcher Kevin Fenton, the author of [Disconnecting the Dots](#).

In a recent [conversation](#) with [Boiling Frogs Post’s](#) Sibel Edmonds and Peter B. Collins, Fenton said that during the course of his investigation, drawn from the Congressional 9/11 Joint Inquiry, the 9/11 Commission, the Justice Department’s Inspector General’s report, and the CIA’s still-redacted Inspector General’s report, he discovered that the CIA had deliberately

withheld information from the FBI that the future hijackers had entered the United States with multiple entry visas issued in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Even though the Agency had identified the pair as international terrorists who attended a 2000 Al-Qaeda summit in Malaysia where they and others, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Khallad Bin Attash, one of the principle architects of the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, planned the assault on the USS *Cole* and the 9/11 attacks, they kept this from the FBI, information that *could* have led straight to the heart of Al-Qaeda's "planes operation."

Fenton provides substantial evidence that the CIA's Alec Station Director Richard Blee and deputy, Tom Wilshire, concealed intelligence from investigators, concluding this "information was intentionally omitted in order to allow an al-Qaeda attack to go forward against the United States."

As part of this continuing cover-up, Awlaki's ties to the 9/11 hijackers were far more extensive than secret state officials have led us to believe.

In fact, although the Obama administration has justified killing Awlaki with false claims that he was AQAP's "external operations" chief, his role *before* 9/11 was substantially more significant from an investigatory perspective: that of a "fixer," first in San Diego where he assisted Saudi spook Omar al-Bayoumi in "settling" Alhazmi and Almihdhar, and later in Falls Church, Virginia, where he did the same for Hani Hanjour.

In 2002, [Newsweek](#) revealed that "some federal investigators suspect that al-Bayoumi could have been an advance man for the 9-11 hijackers, sent by Al Qaeda to assist the plot that ultimately claimed 3,000 lives."

"Two months after al-Bayoumi began aiding Alhazmi and Almihdhar," *Newsweek* disclosed, "al-Bayoumi's wife began receiving regular stipends, often monthly and usually around \$2,000, totaling tens of thousands of dollars.

Payments arrived "in the form of cashier's checks, purchased from Washington's Riggs Bank by Princess Haifa bint Faisal, the daughter of the late King Faisal and wife of Prince Bandar, the Saudi envoy who is a prominent Washington figure and personal friend of the Bush family."

With startling similarities to the Awlaki case, ten days after the attacks, al-Bayoumi is picked up by British authorities in London, where he had relocated in July 2001, at the request of the FBI. Although his phone calls, bank accounts and associations are scrutinized, the Bureau claim they found no connections to terrorism.

[The Washington Post](#) will report that by 2002 the FBI had concluded, the same year Awlaki leaves the U.S., "that no evidence could be found of any organized domestic effort to aid the hijackers."

Recall that new information linking some members of the Saudi royal family and its intelligence apparatus to the attacks has recently surfaced. Last month, [The Miami Herald](#) revealed that two weeks before the kamikaze assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a Saudi family "abruptly vacated their luxury home near Sarasota, leaving a brand new car in the driveway, a refrigerator full of food, fruit on the counter—and an open safe in a master bedroom."

Investigative reporters Anthony Summers and Dan Christensen learned that “law enforcement agents not only discovered the home was visited by vehicles used by the hijackers, but phone calls were linked between the home and those who carried out the death flights—including leader Mohamed Atta—in discoveries never before revealed to the public.”

“Ten years after the deadliest attack of terrorism on U.S. soil,” Summers and Christensen wrote, “new information has emerged that shows the FBI found troubling ties between the hijackers and residents in the upscale community in southwest Florida, but the investigation wasn’t reported to Congress or mentioned in the 9/11 Commission Report.”

In a follow-up piece that significantly advanced the story, researcher Russ Baker reported on the [WhoWhatWhy](#) web site “that those alleged confederates were closely tied to influential members of the Saudi ruling elite.”

Building on information first disclosed by the *Herald*, Baker, the author of [Family of Secrets](#), reports that this “now-revealed link” between those who consorted with the hijackers in Florida “and the highest ranks of the Saudi establishment, reopens questions about the White House’s controversial approval for multiple charter flights allowing Saudi nationals to depart the U.S., beginning about 48 hours after the attacks, without the passengers being interviewed by law enforcement—despite the identification of the majority of the hijackers as Saudis.”

Is there a pattern between the hands-off treatment afforded well-connected Saudis and Anwar al-Awlaki’s casual, and inexplicable, flight from the United States?

“After 9/11” [History Commons](#) points out, “the FBI will question al-Awlaki, and he will admit to meeting with Alhazmi several times, but say he does not remember what they discussed. He will not claim to remember Almihdhar at all.” Other accounts suggest that the relationship was much closer.

“The 9/11 Congressional Inquiry,” *History Commons* avers, “claim that Alhazmi and Almihdhar ‘were closely affiliated with [al-Awlaki] who reportedly served as their spiritual adviser during their time in San Diego. ... Several persons informed the FBI after September 11 that this imam had closed-door meetings in San Diego with Almihdhar, Alhazmi, and another individual, whom al-Bayoumi had asked to help the hijackers’.”

“Around August 2000,” *History Commons* reports, “al-Awlaki resigns as imam and travels to unknown ‘various countries.’ In early 2001, he will be appointed the imam to a much larger mosque in Falls Church, Virginia. During this time frame, Alhazmi, Almihdhar, and fellow hijacker Hani Hanjour will move to Virginia and attend al-Awlaki’s mosque there.”

Anecdotally, in 2003 [Newsweek](#) reports: “Lincoln Higgle, an antiques dealer who lived across the street from the mosque where Aulahi used to lead prayer, told *Newsweek* that he distinctly recalls the imam knocking on his door in the first week of August 2001 to tell him he was leaving for Kuwait. ‘He came over before he left and told me that something very big was going to happen, and that he had to be out of the country when it happened,’ recalls Higgle.”

The antiques dealer later told [The New York Times](#), that when he learned that Awlaki would be permanently leaving San Diego, “he told the imam to stop by if he was ever in the area—and got a strange response.” Higginbotham said, “I don’t think you’ll be seeing me. I won’t be coming back to San Diego again. Later on you’ll find out why.”

Although the FBI suspected Awlaki “had some connection with the 9/11 plot,” authorities claim there wasn’t enough evidence to charge him, nor can he be deported because he’s an American citizen. And when the Bureau hatched an ill-conceived plan to arrest him on an obscure charge of “transporting prostitutes across state lines,” that plan collapsed when Awlaki left the U.S. in March 2002.

“But on October 10, 2002,” [History Commons](#) reports, “he makes a surprise return to the U.S.” Although his name is on a terrorist watch list and he is detained by Customs’ officials when he lands in New York, they are informed by the FBI that “his name was taken off the watch list just the day before. He is released after only three hours.”

“Throughout 2002,” History Commons informs us, Awlaki is the “subject of an active Customs investigation into money laundering called Operation Greenquest, but he is not arrested for this either, or for the earlier contemplated prostitution charges. At the time, the FBI is fighting Greenquest, and Customs officials will later accuse the FBI of sabotaging Greenquest investigations.”

Awlaki again leaves the U.S., this time for good. Although the FBI admits they were “very interested” in Awlaki, they fail to stop him leaving the country. One FBI source told [U.S. News and World Report](#), “We don’t know how he got out.”

Inexplicably however, it was not until 2008 that secret state officials concluded that Awlaki was an Al-Qaeda operative! This beggars belief, and raises the question as to *why* he was allowed to leave in the first place. It certainly can’t be for lack of evidence or that when Awlaki set-up shop, first in London and finally in Yemen, he is continually under surveillance by British, Yemeni and American intelligence agencies.

Although interviewed four times by the FBI after September 11, the Bureau concluded, according to [The New York Times](#), that Awlaki’s “contacts with the hijackers and other radicals were random.”

Other investigators however, disagreed. “One detective,” the *Times* reported, whose name has been scrubbed from 9/11 Commission files, told staff that he believed Awlaki “was at the center of the 9/11 story.” At the time of the Flight 253 affair, I wrote that “despite, or possibly *because* of these dubious connections he was allowed to leave the country.”

In fact, the curious disinterest exhibited by authorities in bringing Awlaki to ground following September 11, were neither “errors in judgement” nor “mistakes” by overtaxed investigators but are rather, a *modus operandi* which suggests that Awlaki and others were part of a CIA *domestic* operation which allowed the 9/11 plot to go forward.

Nothing in what I have written above should be construed as justification for the extrajudicial assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki. In fact, the opposite conclusion can be drawn. The available evidence indicates that Awlaki could have been arrested multiple times. At the *least* serious end of the criminal justice spectrum he could have been charged with

providing “material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization,” to whit, Al-Qaeda, and *legally* taken out of circulation.

That he wasn’t and continued to operate freely as a propagandist, despite substantial corroboration from multiple law enforcement sources that he was a key figure in the pre-9/11 *domestic* support network, suggests that Awlaki may have been a double agent, albeit one who had decidedly gone “off the reservation.”

Awlaki’s handling by authorities raise serious questions about just how extensive U.S. support for Al-Qaeda was prior to, and possibly even *after* the September 11 attacks, particularly in resource-rich global hot-spots.

As numerous journalists and researchers have painstakingly documented, Al-Qaeda, allied terrorist outfits and international narco-trafficking networks have a long, sordid history of supporting U.S. covert operations that targeted America’s geopolitical rivals even as Bin Laden’s far-flung organization plotted to attack the United States itself.

In this light, Awlaki’s “targeted killing” as with the earlier hit on Osama Bin Laden, may be part of a larger CIA/Pentagon operation to remove inconvenient participants and witnesses from the scene who might have a thing or two to say about the crimes and intrigues hatched by the imperialist Empire.

After all, dead men tell no tales...

*Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in Covert Action Quarterly and [Global Research](#), he is a Contributing Editor with [Cyrano’s Journal Today](#). His articles can be read on [Dissident Voice](#), [The Intelligence Daily](#), [Pacific Free Press](#), [Uncommon Thought Journal](#), and the whistleblowing website [WikiLeaks](#). He is the editor of *Police State America: U.S. Military “Civil Disturbance” Planning*, distributed by [AK Press](#) and has contributed to the new book from [Global Research](#), *The Global Economic Crisis: The Great Depression of the XXI Century*.*

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