

The Assassination of Anwar Al-Awlaki serves to justify Obama's Arbitrary Use of Death Squads

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The killing of Anwar al-Awlaki a U.S citizen in Yemen by a CIA drone missile on September 30 has been publicized by the mass media, President Obama and the usual experts on al-Qaeda as “a major blow to the jihadist network founded by Osama bin Laden” US officials called Awlaki “the most dangerous figure in Al-Qaeda” (Financial Times Oct. 1 and 2, 2011).

There is ample evidence to suggest that the publicity surrounding the killing of al-Awlaki has greatly exaggerated his political importance and is an attempt to cover up the declining influence of the US in the Islamic world. The State Department's declaration of a major victory serves to exaggerate US military capacity to defeat its adversaries. The assassination serves to justify Obama's arbitrary use of death squads to execute overseas US critics and adversaries by executive fiat denying the accused elementary judicial protections.

Myths About al-Awlaki

Al-Awlaki was a theological blogger in a small, poor Islamic country (Yemen). He was confined to propagandizing against Western countries, attempting to influence Islamic believers to resist Western military and cultural intervention. Within Yemen , his organizational affiliations were with a minority sector of the mass popular opposition to US backed dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. His fundamentalist group was largely influential in a few small towns in southern Yemen . He was not a military or political leader in his organization, dubbed by the West as “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula ” (AQAP). Like most of what the CIA calls “Al-Qaeda”, AQAP was a local autonomous organization, meaning that it was organized and controlled by local leaders even as it expressed agreement with many other loosely associated fundamentalist groups. Awlaki had a very limited role in the Yemeni groups' military and political operations and virtually no influence in the mass movement engaged in ousting Saleh. There is no evidence, documented or observable, that he was “a very effective propagandist” as ex-CIA and now Brookings Institution member Bruce Riedal claims. In Yemen and among the mass popular movements in Tunisia , Egypt , Bahrain or elsewhere his followers were few and far between. One “expert” cites such intangibles as his “spiritual leadership”, which is as good a way as any to avoid the test of empirical evidence: apparently a crystal ball or a tarot read will do.

Given the paucity of evidence demonstrating Awlaki's political and ideological influence among the mass movements in North Africa, the Middle East or Asia, the US intelligence agencies claim his “real influence was among English-speaking jihadi, some of whom he groomed personally to carry out attacks on the US.”

In other words Washington 's casting Awlaki as an "important threat" revolves around his speeches and writings, since he had no operational role in organizing suicide bomb attacks - or at least no concrete evidence has been presented up to now.

The intelligence agencies "suspect" he was involved in the plot that dispatched bombs in cargo aircraft from Yemen to Chicago in October 2010. US intelligence claims he provided a "theological justification" via e-mail for US army Major Nidal Malik's killing of 13 people at Fort Hood . In other words, like many US philosophical writers and legal experts like Princeton 's Michael Walzer and Harvard's Alan Dershowitz, Awlaki discussed "just wars" and the "right" of violent action. If political writings and speeches of publicists are cited by an assassin as the bases for their action, should the White House execute, leading US Islamophobes like Marilyn Geller and Daniel Pipes, cited as inspiration by Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik? Or does their Zionist affiliation provide them immunity from Navy Seal assaults and drone missiles?

Even assuming that the unsubstantiated "suspicions" of the CIA, MI 16 and the Al Qaeda "experts" are correct and Awlaki had a direct or indirect hand in "terrorist action" against the US, these activities were absurdly amateurish and abject failures, certainly not a serious threat to our security. The "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab's effort to ignite bomb materials on a flight to Detroit , December 25, 2009, led to roasting his testicles! Likewise the bombs dispatched in cargo aircraft from Yemen to Chicago in October 2010 were another bungled job.

If anything the Yemenite AQAP's hopeless, hapless operational planning served to highlight its technical incompetence. In fact according to Mutallab's own admission, published on NBC news at the time, Awlaki played no role in the planning or execution of the bomb attack. He merely served to refer Mutallab to the Al Qaeda organization.

Clearly, Awlaki was a minor figure in Yemen 's political struggles. He was a propagandist of little influence in the mass movements during the "Arab Spring". He was an inept recruiter of English-speaking would be bombers. The claims that he planned and "hatched" two bomb plots (Financial Times, October 1 and 2, page 2) are refuted by the confession of one bomber and the absence of any corroboratory evidence regarding the failed cargo bombs.

The mass media inflate the importance of Awlaki to the stature of a major al-Qaeda leader and subsequently, his killing as a "major psychological blow" to world-wide jihadists. This imagery has no substance. But the puff pieces do have a very important propaganda purpose. Worse still, the killing of Awlaki provides a justification for extra-judicial state serial assassinations of ideological critics of Anglo-American leaders engaged in bloody colonial wars.

Propaganda to Bolster Flagging Military Morale

Recent events strongly suggest that the US and its NATO allies are losing the war in Afghanistan to the Taliban: top collaborator officials are knocked off at the drop of a Taliban turban. After years of occupation, Iraq is moving closer to Iran rather than the US . Libya in the post-Gaddafi period is under warring mercenary forces squaring off for a fight for the billion dollar booty. Al Qaeda prepares battle against neo-liberal expats and Gaddafi renegades.

Washington and NATO's attempt to regain the initiative via puppet rulers in Egypt , Tunisia ,

Bahrain and Yemen is being countered by a “second wave” of mass pro-democracy movements. The “Arab Spring” is being followed by a “hot autumn”. Positive news and favorable outcomes for Obama are few and far between. He has run out of any pseudo-populist initiative to enchant the Arab-Islamic masses. His rhetoric rings hollow in the face of his UN speech, denying recognition of an independent Palestinian state. His groveling before Israel is clearly seen as an effort to bolster his re-election campaign financing by wealthy Zionists.

Diplomatically isolated and domestically in trouble over failed economic policies, Obama pulls the trigger and shoots an itinerant Muslim preacher in Yemen to send a “message” to the Arab world. In a word he says, “If you, the Arabs, the Islamic world, wont’ join us we can and will execute those of you who can be labeled “spiritual mentors” or are suspected of harboring terrorists.”

Obama’s defense of systematic killing of ideological critics, denying US constitutional norms of judicial due process to a U.S citizen and in blatant rejection of international law defines a homicidal executive.

Let us be absolutely clear what the larger implications are of political murder by executive fiat. If the President can order the murder of a dual American-Yemeni citizen abroad on the bases of his ideological-theological beliefs, what is to stop him from ordering the same in the US ? If he uses arbitrary violence to compensate for diplomatic failure abroad what is to stop him from declaring a “heightened internal security threat” in order to suspend our remaining freedoms at home and to round up critics?

We seriously understate our “Obama problem” if we think of this ordered killing merely as an isolated murder of a “jihadist” in strife torn Yemen ... Obama’s murder of Awlaki has profound, long term significance because it puts political assassinations at the center of US foreign and domestic policy. As Secretary of Defense Panetta states, “eliminating home grown terrorists” is at the core of our “internal security”.

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