

# The Federal Treason Indictment: Threatening Extreme Punishment for Public Speeches

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The U.S. government is charging someone with treason—resurrecting an extreme and very rarely used legal charge. This is an ominous development where the U.S. government intends to assert and exercise the power to hunt down, imprison, and potentially execute someone simply because of their public statements.

The man charged in this case is Azzam al-Amriki (formerly known as Adam Gadahn), a 28-year-old U.S. citizen raised in southern California who converted to Islam. Announcing this indictment on October 11, 2006, Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty said that al-Amriki is charged with treason because “he chose to join our enemy and to provide it with aid and comfort by acting as a propagandist for al Qaida.” Al-Amriki has now been added to the U.S. government’s “Most Wanted Terrorists List.”

U.S. Attorney Debra Wong Yang of the Central District of California said, as the indictment was announced: “The charges returned today by a federal grand jury demonstrate that the criminal justice system will not sit passively by while a United States citizen engages in such activities.”

The “activities” Yang referred to are *simply speech*. Al-Amriki is not accused of planning or participating in any attacks. He is accused, as McNulty made clear, of being “a propagandist”—who allegedly made a statement upholding armed attacks on U.S. targets, claiming support for al-Qaeda, and calling on U.S. soldiers to desert. In fact, the *only* evidence filed against him with the grand jury was five videotapes containing statements he made on behalf of al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda is a completely reactionary group that does not represent the interests of the masses of people anywhere in the world. But the U.S. government’s charge of treason, punishable by death, against an alleged supporter of al-Qaeda for making public statements is a dangerous precedent. In announcing the indictment, McNulty deliberately described the charge of treason as “exceptionally severe.”

This treason law has not been used since the early 1950s, at a time when the U.S. ruling class was seriously considering launching a new world war against the then-socialist countries, the Soviet Union and China. Hysteria and punishment over “treason” played a part in fanning the great repression and anti-communist political witchhunts of that time—where critical thinking was suppressed and tremendous conservative conformity was demanded of everyone.

The Bush administration is now applying this charge of treason to an alleged supporter of the al-Qaeda jihadist movement. But it is clear that influential and outspoken forces within the U.S. are *demanding* that this charge of treason be applied *far more broadly*—to threaten and repress many different political forces within the U.S.

The fascist mouthpiece Ann Coulter has appeared over and over on television and in the press to insist that the great bulk of the Democratic Party are simply traitors who should be treated as criminals. In her book *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism*, she writes, “The inevitable logic of the liberal position is to be for treason.” In a 2005 speech at the University of Florida she said, “They [liberals] are always accusing us of repressing their speech. I say let’s do it. Let’s repress them.”

The Christian fascist lunatic-and-presidential-adviser Pat Robertson argued on his 700 Club TV show (Dec. 7, 2005): “One of the fundamental principles we have in America is that the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and attempts to undermine the commander in chief during time of war amounts to treason. I know we have an opportunity to express our points of view, but there is a time when we’re engaged in a combat situation that carping criticism against the commander in chief just doesn’t cut it.”

The next day this accusation of treason was seconded on the Fox Channel when the raving right-wing commentator Bill O’Reilly said: “The ACLU is doing what they think is best for the country they envision, not the country we have now, but certainly is aiding and abetting the enemy...”

After the World Can’t Wait movement placed full page ads in major newspapers like the *USA Today* and *New York Times*, these ads and the signatories to World Can’t Wait’s call were denounced by Gary Bauer, a prominent Christian fascist and former Republican presidential candidate. Of the ad, Bauer is quoted as saying: “If that’s not treasonous, I don’t know what is.” (See “[Anti-Bush Ad, Call for Ouster ‘Treasonous,’ Says Bauer](#),” Agape press service, October 5, 2006.)

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