

The US Secretive Government's "Kill List": How About NOBODY Should Be "Authorized To Assassinate US Citizens"

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*There's a [viral cospypasta](#) going around social media claiming that the National Security Council position President Trump is attempting to push **Steve Bannon** into entails authority over a secretive government "kill list" which authorizes assassinations of enemies of the US government, including assassinations of American citizens.*

Unlike 99 percent of all social media copy/paste trends, this one is actually grounded in fact. The United States government can and does assassinate people with impunity, including US citizens, and the National Security Council [is indeed](#) a fundamental part of its process in doing so. In 2011, US-born citizen Anwar al-Awlaki was [executed without trial](#) via US drone strike in Yemen, and two weeks later another drone strike [killed his 16 year-old son](#), also a US citizen. The panel responsible for these decisions conducts itself with total opacity, giving the US public no insight at all into how, when and why the decision to assassinate someone is made, all perfectly legally. *Reuters* [reports](#) that according to an unnamed official, these extrajudicial killings are "permitted by Congress when it authorized the use of military forces against militants in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001; and they are permitted under international law if a country is defending itself."

So this cospypasta is going around, and all the armchair liberals on my newsfeed are freaking out about it saying "Oh noes! We can't let the *Breitbart* guy have this kind of authority! He'll be on a panel that gives him the authority to legally assassinate US citizens!" Meanwhile nobody seems to be voicing any concern at all about the fact that THEIR GOVERNMENT CAN LEGALLY ASSASSINATE US CITIZENS.



For God's sake, liberals. Wake up already. We have here a golden opportunity to shine a big, bright light on a truly reprehensible practice by the US government that everyone wanted to hurry up and forget about under President Obama, and we're letting it slip through our fingers by making it about some alt-right jerk who [probably can't get on the panel anyway](#).

It's fine to ring alarms about Bannon, but can we please stop pretending he's the most concerning thing about the issue in question? Even if you're fine with the extrajudicial killings of foreigners, pure egoic self-interest should propel you to fight tooth and claw against a policy which enables your government to kill you with impunity and opacity under the "Trust us, we're the good guys" post-9/11 authoritarian schtick Bush lulled us into accepting.

What makes this such a perfect opportunity is the way all the establishment fearmongering about Trump can be used in our favor to illustrate just how horrific executive powers have gotten under Bush and Obama. When it was Obama assassinating people liberals were able to compartmentalize away from the jarring reality of what was happening, thinking “Well he seems like a nice guy and he looks good in a suit, and isn’t his family beautiful? What breed is their new dog? I should really google that,” but now that those same exact powers have been transferred to Trump people can suddenly see them since they no longer belong to a trusted member of their pack.

If we can keep it from being dragged into useless partisan inertia, it will move from “Oh well, I trust him” to “Oh my God, this is a fascist government!” And of course it always has been, but beggars can’t be choosers and at least now we can get everyone looking. The fact that horrible people can wind up in positions of power is exactly why it used to be illegal for the government to assassinate its own citizens. We need to turn this from being a conversation about what a creep Bannon is to why we should never allow such practices at all.



The debate about government surveillance and the death of habeas corpus is an interesting one. The federal government is demanding more and more power because of the very real threat of a group of terrorists getting their hands on a nuclear weapon, among other things, and that’s arguably fine as long as we’re not asked to just blindly trust that nobody who wields that power will be nefarious.

Trump’s election is as clear an argument against that trust as we could possibly hope for, so there’s got to be a trade-off at the very least. If the federal government wants absolute power, we should at the very least be receiving absolute transparency so we can see what they’re up to. If America’s constant foreign interventionism and military entanglements are an obstacle to that transparency, then it should have to stop that behavior to enable transparency, and reducing its military interventionism would, of course, greatly reduce the risk of suffering a terrorist attack in the first place. The alternative is trusting that these godlike powers will never fall into the hands of a tyrant, which has already proven to be a naive pipe dream.

So can we get this debate turned in a healthy direction, please? The NSC and the kill lists will still be there long after Bannon’s obesity and hatred keels him over if we don’t. That is way too much power with way too much opacity for any government to be trusted with.

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