

Extrajudicial Killings. Assassinating Awlaki: Obama Can Kill Anyone He Wants To

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Now we know what embattled Yemeni President Saleh meant when he cryptically [told reporters](#) from the *Washington Post* and *Time* yesterday: “We are fighting the al-Qaeda organization in Abyan [in Yemen] in coordination with the Americans and Saudis.” The defiant Saleh, who’s long promoted himself as an asset in America’s seemingly nonstop Long War on Terrorism (LWT), apparently knows what he’s talking about. Hours later, Yemen’s military announced that a missile strike had killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the bombastic, American-born Islamist who’s been linked to Al Qaeda and to recent terrorist attempts against the United States.

He’s not exactly Osama bin Laden, whose takedown in Pakistan in April helped spark the current US-Pakistan confrontation. But Awlaki’s assassination, and that’s what it was, is a signal that the Obama administration intends to pursue the LWT to the ends of the earth, regardless of the consequences, even if it means an extrajudicial killing of an American citizen.

Not that killing noncitizens is kosher, but killing an American isn’t. Still, rules are rules, and American citizens are supposed to have legal and civil rights that protect them from political or prosecutorial assassinations, even if they’re bad guys. Apparently, no longer. Still, Awlaki’s killing comes as no surprise, since the Obama administration long ago deemed him kill-worthy. As the Wall Street Journal [points out](#), the CIA tried to kill Awlaki recently: “The U.S. narrowly missed Mr. Awlaki in a failed assassination attempt back in May. U.S. drones fired on a vehicle in the southern Yemen province of Shebwa that the cleric had been driving in earlier the same day.”

Since then, the [United States has vastly expanded its Predator and Reaper drone capability](#) far beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan, setting up bases on Indian Ocean islands and targeting Yemen, Somalia and other countries.

The killings were first announced by the Yemen defense ministry and its military, ironic in that the entire country of Yemen is perched at the brink of a civil war in which its establishment, including its military command, has divided loyalties. Not only Awlaki, but [another American citizen](#) was killed in the US-orchestrated attack, too:

“Yemen’s Defense Ministry said another American militant was killed in the same strike alongside al-Awlaki—Samir Khan, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani heritage who produced ‘Inspire,’ an English-language al-Qaida Web magazine that spread the word on ways to carry out attacks inside the United States.”

Awlaki was born in New Mexico, and he was linked to the Fort Hood shootings at a military base in Texas and to the attempted Times Square bombing, though his exact role in those and other cases is unclear, that is, whether he masterminded or organized them or simply served as a kind of spiritual mentor to people who were planning acts of violence anyway. The point is, no judicial case has been made against Awlaki, he hasn't been formally accused in those events or others, the charges against him have never been proved in court. He was deemed guilty by the CIA and the US national security apparatus, and the sentence of death was carried out.

Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, a senior US official [said](#): "His death takes a committed terrorist, intent on attacking the United States, off the battlefield. Awlaki and AQAP [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula] are also responsible for numerous terrorist attacks in Yemen and throughout the region, which have killed scores of Muslims." Of course, whether Awlaki and AQAP have killed scores of Muslims or not isn't the point: unless the Obama administration truly wants to arrogate to itself the role of world policeman, it shouldn't be in the business of executing, extrajudicially, anyone it wants to, whether they're guilty of killing Muslims, Hindus, Jews or Christians.

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