

shifts: “regime commanders,” “regime airspace” — as if our commanders and skies were not us. The aim, he thinks, is to make a population numb to its own defense while legitimizing war crimes. But Iranians didn’t fall for it. Barseghian emphasizes that Iran has never accepted Israel as legitimate, “even during the Shah’s time when Israel worked with SAVAK,” the Shah’s notorious secret police.

The wholeness Israel seeks to break
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are from this region and have lived together since their beginnings. People can’t be forced to accept an exclusively Jewish “state,” as is clear to Barseghian. He himself is an Iranian Christian, born in Tehran to Armenian parents from Isfahan. This longstanding coexistence undercuts Israel’s claim of a European “right” to Palestine — the whole-

ness itself is what Israel seeks to break. “Look at Iraq, then Syria,” he says. “Now, they come after us.” Does he believe our nation can hold? I ask him. So long as Iran has defenders, he responds, this country will continue to baffle its adversaries — and Israel will keep exposing itself. The June Onslaught, to him, was proof. The commanders were loved by the nation for safeguarding our territorial integrity. But

when they were taken, the continuity plan held; Iran did not fold, but forced Israel to retreat and seek a cease-fire. The martyrs were honored because they held the nation intact. In July, Armita Rezaiejad — whose father was gunned down by Mossad in front of her eyes when she was five — asked an audience of journalists, “How can you call it a 12-day war when my father was killed over 5,000 days ago?”

We stand after one campaign in a longer war to subdue this region and “take out the head of the octopus” — Israel’s description of Iran — cast as the nerve center of resistance. Our elders foresaw the expansion of Israel and warned and prepared us. For daring to oppose it, our backs have been broken, our children turned to mangled flesh before our eyes. Still, our survival feels miraculous. “Sardar Rashid loved Aya 47 of Surah al-Hajj,” his wife recalls in

a sermon weeks after June 13, referring to a verse of the Holy Qur’an. In it, God promises justice, but “a day with your Lord is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.” He had conviction that it would come, she explains, but not according to a timeline we determine, and the only way to endure as a people was to bear witness.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.

Extrajudicial killings from Barack Obama to Donald Trump

By Medea Benjamin
Co-founder of peace group CODEPINK
OPINION

In May 2013, as president Barack Obama delivered a major foreign-policy speech in Washington, I managed to slip inside. As he was winding up, I stood and interrupted, condemning his use of lethal drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. “How can you, a constitutional lawyer, authorize the extrajudicial killing of people — including a 16-year-old American boy in Yemen, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki — without charge, without trial, without even an explanation?” As security dragged me out, Obama responded, “The voice of that woman is worth paying attention to.” Perhaps my questions touched a chord in his conscience, but the drone attacks did not stop. Just before that incident, I had returned from Yemen, where a small delegation of us met with Abdulrahman’s grandfather, Nasser al-Awlaki — a dignified man with a PhD from an American university, someone who genuinely believed in the values this country claims to represent. He looked at us, grief etched into his face, and asked, “How can a nation that speaks of law and justice kill an American child without apology, without even a justification?” Under Obama, drone strikes killed thousands of people. Entire communities lived under the constant terror of buzzing drones — never knowing whether a flash in the sky meant death for them, their children, or the neighbors who ran to help. We heard these horrors firsthand in 2012, when CODEPINK traveled to Pakistan to meet with victims’ families. A tribal leader from Waziristan described attending a peaceful jirga — a gathering of elders — when a US missile obliterated the meeting. Dozens were instantly killed. As survivors rushed to help the wounded, a second missile struck. Forty-two people died, including elders and local officials. No one in Washington was held accountable. Not one person. Faced with mounting outrage, Obama eventually scaled back the drone program — not because the killings were illegal, immoral, or strategically disastrous, but because the political cost was rising. The truth is that Obama’s drone war normalized the idea that the United States can kill whoever



The illustration shows US President Donald Trump (L) and his predecessor, Barack Obama, over the picture of a drone.
● LEX VILLENA/THE REASON

er it wants, wherever it wants, without due process or oversight. That normalization is the bridge to where we are today. The Trump administration is now carrying out extrajudicial assassinations at sea, including “double taps”. With the latest December 15 strikes, 95 people have been blown to bits in the bombing of 25 boats. Meanwhile, the administration is refusing to release the memo that supposedly explains the legal basis for these killings or to release the

video showing the September bombing that killed two shipwrecked sailors who survived an initial strike. But let’s be clear: the actions of the Trump administration are not an aberration — they are the logical sequel to Obama’s drone killings. If Obama could kill a 16-year-old American boy without accountability, why wouldn’t Trump believe he has the same power to snuff out the lives of civilians with no due process? One of the victims of Trump’s maritime strikes was Alejandro Carranza Medina, a Colombian

fisherman killed on September 15 when a US missile tore apart his vessel. His family has filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The family says he was working — fishing, not fighting — when the US government ended his life. And even in cases where drugs are on board, let’s say the obvious: Smuggling narcotics does not turn the open sea into a battlefield, and it does not strip civilians of their right to due process simply because the Trump administration says so. The US

cannot declare people “enemy fighters” to disguise what are, in reality, unlawful killings. Civil liberties groups are suing the government to secure the release of the Office of Legal Counsel opinion and other documents related to these strikes on civilian boats in international waters. The public deserves to see this information. The American people also deserve to see the full video of the September “double tap” that killed two survivors desperately clinging to their overturned boat, as a bipartisan group of lawmakers is demanding. We deserve transparency, accountability, and answers — the same things we demanded under Obama and never received. For more than 20 years, human rights advocates have warned that unchecked drone warfare would shred the boundaries between war and peace, between combatants and civilians, between military force and basic law enforcement. Trump’s maritime killings are the predictable collapse of a system the Obama administration cemented into place: killing people far from any battlefield, without legal authority, without congressional approval, and without the slightest regard for human rights. Once an administration insists that due process in the use of lethal force is optional, every future president inherits a blank check for murder.

The article first appeared on Antiwar.com.



A Yemeni boy walks past a mural depicting a US drone in Sana’a, Yemen, on December 13, 2013. The writing on the wall reads, “Why did you kill my family?”
● MOHAMMED HUWAIS/GETTY IMAGES.

Under Obama, drone strikes killed thousands of people. Entire communities lived under the constant terror of buzzing drones — never knowing whether a flash in the sky meant death for them, their children, or the neighbors who ran to help. Faced with mounting outrage, Obama eventually scaled back the drone program — not because the killings were illegal, immoral, or strategically disastrous, but because the political cost was rising. The truth is that Obama’s drone war normalized the idea that the United States can kill whoever it wants, wherever it wants, without due process or oversight.