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"Disposition Matrix": President's 10-Year Plan for the Kill List

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here will be no end to the War on Terror and the targeting of “suspected militants” will continue and become more sophisticated, according to an article published in the *Washington Post* on October 23.

In the piece, Greg Miller describes a project the Obama administration has been developing for a couple of years called — in true Orwellian fashion — the “disposition matrix.”

Glen Greenwald at the *Guardian* (U.K.) describes the matrix’s chain of command:

The "disposition matrix" has been developed and will be overseen by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). One of its purposes is "to augment" the "separate but overlapping kill lists" maintained by the CIA and the Pentagon: to serve, in other words, as the centralized clearinghouse for determining who will be executed without due process based upon how one fits into the executive branch's "matrix".

According to reports, the plans for perpetuating and perfecting the death-by-drone program “contains the names of terrorism suspects arrayed against an accounting of the resources being marshaled to track them down, including sealed indictments and clandestine operations.”

The article quotes “U.S. officials” saying that the matrix will improve the existing pair of kill lists (one maintained by the President, the other kept by the CIA) by “mapping plans for the ‘disposition’ of suspects beyond the reach of American drones.”

Readers unfamiliar with the argot of the White House and the intelligence community should understand that the phrase “plans for the disposition” of someone means plans for summarily executing a person who has never been accused of a crime and who has never been proven to have any plan to attack the United States or its interests.

Charging someone with a crime and allowing him to counter evidence produced of his intent to commit a crime or of his collusion with those who do intend to commit a crime is called due process. It is a right guaranteed by the Constitution, but regularly and unrepentantly denied by the Obama administration to scores of people killed by drones everyday.

In an article in the *Atlantic*, Conor Friedersdorf records the comments made by Robert Gibbs, former White House press secretary and now a senior adviser to the Obama reelection campaign, regarding the use of drones to assassinate those without a demonstrable link to terror, particularly Abdulrahman al-Awlaki.

For those unfamiliar with the story, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki was killed in October 2011, and to date the Obama administration has never informed the country of any wrongdoing by this teenager, other than being related to a man (his father) who posted anti-American videos on the Internet that allegedly influenced others to commit crimes.

As he sat enjoying a roadside picnic in Yemen with a few second cousins and their friends — most of whom the young Colorado native had never met before that day — the teenager and all his companions were killed by two Hellfire missiles fired from a Predator drone.

The finger that pressed the button launching the lethal ordnance was American, and so was 16-year-old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, the target of the strike.

Upon being asked how the president justified killing an underage “American citizen ... without due process, without trial,” Gibbs responded:

I would suggest that you should have a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well being of their children. I don't think becoming an al Qaeda jihadist terrorist is the best way to go about doing your business.

That is the sort of callous disregard for the value of life and the rule of law that animates the current administration. The fact is that Abdulrahman was not a terrorist, was never accused of fomenting terrorism (as his father was), and was not in the company of his father when he was killed. That would have been impossible because by the time he and his cousins were killed, his father was already dead.

Perhaps the younger Awlaki was accidentally killed. If that were so, why wouldn't the administration admit it? Gibbs' answer indicates that the boy's only crime was having a bad father. If that's a crime for which you can be executed, then there are a lot of people all over the world who need to be watching their backs.

The unanswered questions are mounting: How many of those killed were innocent bystanders such as those who happened to be with Abdulrahman al-Awlaki? How many of the actual “targets,” like Abdulrahman, were themselves innocent or at least had no demonstrable ties to terrorist organizations?

This question will never be known with certainty because the president alone serves as judge, jury, and executioner — and does not believe he is obliged to provide evidence to the American people.

In fact, it would be very naïve to believe the targeted assassination of an innocent like Abdulrahman was an unfortunate miscalculation. When the judicial and executive powers of government are consolidated and restraints on the exercise of power are cast aside, it can be expected — based both on our knowledge of history and on the nature of man — that power will be abused and no one's rights or life will be safe from elimination by despots.

The revelation of the “disposition matrix” makes it certain that, as the report indicates, the despotism will go on for at least another decade. In fact, the *Post* article suggests that according

to the timeline provided by their sources, the United States is only at the halfway point of the “war on terror,” and the president and his agents will add and subtract names to their proscription lists, but “with the pace of drone strikes ... never go to zero.”

A comment from “a senior administration official” quoted in the *Post* article explains why the “disposition matrix” was necessary to keep America safe: “We can’t possibly kill everyone who wants to harm us,” he said.

Given the expansion of the drone program and the institutional and habitual delivery of remote control death without due process, it seems the federal government will certainly keep trying.