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Two Obamas, Two Classes of Children

Fate of All Empires

by RALPH NADER

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An Associated Press photograph brought the horror of little children lying dead outside of their home to an American Audience. At least 10 Afghan children and some of their mothers were struck down by an airstrike on their extended family household by order of President Barack Obama. He probably decided on what his aides describe as the routine weekly “Terror Tuesday” at the White House. On that day, Mr. Obama typically receives the advice about which “militants” should live or die thousands of miles away from drones or aircraft. Even if households far from war zones are often destroyed in clear violation of the laws of war, the president is not deterred.

These Obama airstrikes are launched knowing that very often there is “collateral damage,” that is a form of “so sorry terrorism.” How can the president explain the vaporization of a dozen pre-teen Afghan boys collecting firewood for their families on a hillside? The local spotter-informants must have been disoriented by all those \$100 bills in rewards. Imagine a direct strike killing and injuring scores of people in a funeral procession following a previous fatal strike that was the occasion of this processional mourning. Remember the December 2009 Obama strike on an alleged al-Qaida training camp in Yemen, using tomahawk missiles and – get this – cluster bombs, that killed 14 women and 21 children. Again and again “so sorry terrorism” ravages family households far from the battlefields.

If this is a war, why hasn’t Congress declared war under Article 1, Sec. 8 of the U.S. Constitution? The 2001 Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force is not an open-ended authorization for the president. It was restricted to targeting only nations, organizations or

persons that are determined to have been implicated in the 9/11 massacres, or harbored complicit organizations or persons.

For several years, White House officials, including ret. General James Jones, have declared that there is no real operational al-Qaeda left in Afghanistan to harbor anyone. The Pakistani Taliban is in conflict with the Pakistani government. The Afghan Taliban is in brutal conflict with the Afghanistan government and wants to expel U.S. forces as their members view occupying-invaders, just as their predecessors did when they expelled the Soviet invaders. The Taliban represent no imminent threat to the U.S.

President Obama's ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron P. Munter, used to complain to his colleagues about the CIA's drone attacks saying "he didn't realize his main job was to kill people." He knew how such attacks by whining drones, hovering 24/7 over millions of frightened people and their terrified children produce serious backlashes that fester for years.

Even a loyalist such as William M. Daley, Mr. Obama's chief of staff in 2011, observed that the Obama kill list presents less and less significant pursuits. "One guy gets knocked off, and the guy's driver, who's No. 21, becomes 20?" Daley said, describing the internal discussion. "At what point are you just filling the bucket with numbers?"

Yet this unlawful killing by a seemingly obsessed Obama, continues and includes anyone in the vicinity of a "suspect" whose name isn't even known (that are called "signature strikes"), or mistakes, like the recent aerial killings of numerous Pakistani soldiers and four Afghan policemen – considered our allies. The drone kill list goes on and on – over 3000 is the official fatality count, not counting injuries.

In a few weeks, The Nation magazine will issue a major report on U.S.-caused civilian casualties in Afghanistan that should add new information.

Now switch the scene. The president, filled with memories of what his secret drone directives as prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner have done to so many children, in so many places, traveled on Monday to Newtown, Connecticut for the second time. He commiserated with the parents and relatives of the 20 children and six adults slain by a lone gunman. Here he became the compassionate president, with words and hugs.

What must be going through his mind as he sees the rows of 10 Afghan little children and their parents blown apart in that day's New York Times? How can the president justify this continued military occupation for what is a civil war? No wonder a majority of the American people want out of Afghanistan, even without a close knowledge of the grisly and ugly things going on there in our name that are feeding the seething hatred of Obama's war.

Sometime after 2016 when Barack Obama starts writing his lucrative autobiographical recollections, there may be a few pages where he explains how he endured this double life ordering so-called precision attacks that kill many innocent children and their mothers and fathers while mourning domestic mass killings in the U.S. and advocating gun controls. As a constitutional law teacher, he may wonder why there have been no "gun controls" on his lawless,

out-of-control presidency and his reckless attacks that only expanded the number of al-Qaeda affiliates wreaking havoc in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, North Africa and elsewhere.

Al-Qaeda of Iraq is now merging with an affiliate called “al-Nusra” in Syria that will give Obama more futile exercises on Terror Tuesdays. The CIA calls the reaction to such operations “blowback” because the unintended consequences undermine our long-term national security.

Obama is not like the official criminal recidivist, ex-Vice President Dick Cheney, who misses no chance to say he has no regrets. Obama worries even as he greatly escalates the aerial attacks started by George W. Bush. In his State of the Union speech he called for a “legal and policy framework” to guide “our counterterrorism operations,” so that “no one should just take my word that we’re doing things the right way.” Granted, this is a good cover for his derelictions, but it probably reflects that he also needs some restraint. Last year he told CNN it was “something you have to struggle with.”

Not that our abdicatory Congress would ever take him up on his offer for such legal guidance should he ever submit a proposed framework. Nor would Congress move to put an end to secret laws, secret criteria for targeting, indefinite imprisonment, no due process, even for American citizens, secret cover-ups of illegal outsourcing to contracting corporations and enact other preventive reforms.

Mr. Obama recognized in his CNN interview that “it’s very easy to slip into a situation in which you end up bending rules thinking that the ends always justify the means. That’s not who we are as a country.”

Unfortunately, however, that’s what he has done as a president.

Unless the American people come to realize that a president must be subject to the rule of law and our Constitution, our statutes and treaties, every succeeding president will push the deficit-financed lawlessness further until the inevitable blowback day of reckoning.

That is the fate of all empires.