



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 5, 2011

## CIA Has Become “One Hell of a Killing Machine,” Official Says

The Central Intelligence Agency continues to rapidly expand its global extrajudicial assassination program under the Obama administration, secretly murdering people with drones from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Somalia and Yemen. Even American citizens are fair game, according to the President.

The dramatic evolution of the agency’s priorities and operations has become so extreme that a former senior intelligence official told the *Washington Post* the CIA had been turned into “one hell of a killing machine.” The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the paramilitary transformation was “nothing short of a wonderment.”

But the dramatic metamorphosis, detailed in a recent exposé by the *Post*, entitled “[CIA shifts focus to killing targets](#),” is hardly without critics. Some experts have even [warned Congress](#) that the illegal killings may constitute war crimes.

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Thousands of suspected “militants” and civilians have been executed in drone strikes so far. At least 168 children were killed by such attacks just in Pakistan over a seven year period, according to a [study](#) released last month by the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism. The real figure is probably even higher.

But few of the targeted suspects, if any, were formally charged with committing a crime before being blown apart — often with their entire families. Even fewer had been convicted in a court of law.

And though American authorities publicly claim the assassination programs only target high-level terror suspects, the former intelligence official cited by the *Post* said that is not necessarily the case. “It wasn’t always high-value targets,” he said, speaking about the intended victims of the agency’s teams on the ground. “They were trying to pursue and kill sometimes lower-hanging fruit.”

Along with its death squads, the CIA has also reportedly recruited a vast network of spies in the nations where its Predator drones are dropping bombs. The agency’s “Special Activities Division” even trains and operates own proxy militias in countries such as Afghanistan, which are apparently responsible for much of the dirty work.

According to experts, the ongoing changes in the CIA’s focus and operations have led to boundaries between the agency, the military, and U.S. war contractors becoming increasingly blurred. Even Congress is often kept out of the loop under the guise of “national security.”





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But critics charge that the agency's expanding role as an independent war-making apparatus should be cause for concern. "We're seeing the CIA turn into more of a paramilitary organization without the oversight and accountability that we traditionally expect of the military," National Security Project director Hina Shamsi with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) told the *Post*.

The myriad assassination programs are particularly troubling to critics. In the U.S. Congress, for example, representatives on both sides of the aisle have blasted the "illegal" murders.

"Think of the use of drone air strikes as summary executions, extra-judicial killings justified by faceless bureaucrats using who-knows-what 'intelligence,' with no oversight whatsoever and you get the idea that we have slipped into spooky new world where joystick gods manipulating robots deal death from the skies," [noted](#) Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) in an editorial.

And it isn't just foreigners who can be executed at any time. Last year it was revealed that the CIA — with the support of the Obama administration — maintained an [assassination list that included dozens of Americans](#). The agency has knowingly [murdered at least one American citizen in Yemen](#) with a drone strike, and others are still in the cross hairs.

Congressman and Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul was among the critics who noted that murdering people without trials violates the law. "Now we are told that assassination of foreigners as well as American citizens is legitimate and necessary to provide security for our people. It is my firm opinion that nothing could be further from the truth," he said during a speech on the House floor. "Secret arrests, secret renditions, torture and assassinations are illegal under both domestic and international law."

Around the world, the uproar has been even more significant. In Pakistan, where hundreds of drone strikes in recent years have resulted in countless civilians deaths, outrage over the CIA's aerial killing spree has sparked waves of massive protests.

Human rights organizations have also sounded the alarm. And at the United Nations, senior investigators have repeatedly claimed the U.S. government was openly flaunting the law.

"In a situation in which there is no disclosure of who has been killed, for what reason, and whether innocent civilians have died, the legal principle of international accountability is, by definition, comprehensively violated," [noted](#) then-UN extrajudicial killings investigator Philip Alston, who authored a 2010 report charging that the Obama administration may be committing war crimes.

The CIA said its murder programs are used less frequently than other tactics such as arrests. But under the Obama administration, the use of drones and assassinations has [surged to unprecedented heights](#) — far beyond what occurred under Bush. The operations, however, rarely attract media scrutiny.

As *The New American* [reported](#) in June, increasing amounts of American bombs have been raining down on Yemen. And according to the *Post's* recent article, the CIA is actually building a runway and expanded facilities for its drones — presumably because the assassination programs in that country are set to balloon.

The U.S. government's secret war in Yemen, which used [blatant lies exposed in diplomatic cables](#) to attack targets and prop up the ruling dictatorship, has also been criticized for widespread civilian casualties. One of the American citizens targeted for assassination by the CIA is believed to be somewhere in Yemen.

And in Libya, recently leaked documents [reveal that the CIA was helping Gaddafi](#) fight the same



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terrorists currently being armed, trained, and financed by the Obama administration and NATO. In a sudden unexplained shift, however, the agency has since then been [helping the al-Qaeda-linked rebels overthrow the regime](#).

Closer to America the CIA's shadowy operations are under scrutiny, too. As *The New American* [reported](#) last month, the agency was almost certainly involved in the growing scandal surrounding the federal government's "[Operation Fast and Furious](#)" that armed Mexican drug cartels. Reports also [suggest](#) that the agency's decades-old involvement in drug trafficking continues.

Even more recently the CIA was [exposed](#) collaborating with the New York Police Department to spy on Americans. The revelations led to particularly fierce criticism because the CIA is not supposed to be engaged in domestic espionage or law enforcement operations.

While the increased scrutiny of the spy agency and its deadly operations has led to more criticism, very few policy makers have proposed solutions. Rep. Ron Paul, like former President John F. Kennedy, suggested abolishing the CIA entirely. But for now that possibility appears remote.

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