



Background: U.S. Airforce F-15Es drop 2,000lb. bombs in eastern Afghanistan, November 26, 2009.

Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

A little over a year ago this week, millions of people in the U.S. greeted the inauguration of Obama with hope. For years people had watched in revulsion as Bush overrode massive public opposition to launch totally unjustified war against Iraq. They watched as he occupied Afghanistan and declared that the U.S. had the right to go to war against anyone it perceived to be even possibly “threatening” it. They saw the pictures from Abu Ghraib and some heard the tales out of Guantánamo... they watched the basic rights that are supposed to be guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution shredded... and they saw a country rapidly heading in a direction that revolted them.

The chart on this page shows what Obama has done about those outrages. In almost every case, he has maintained the course first charted by Bush. In the egregious cases of Afghanistan and Pakistan, including his Wild West use of drone missiles to assassinate any people he wishes (and in the process also kill scores of other people), he has “doubled down” on the vicious course undertaken by Bush.

In some cases, Obama has “only” maintained the measures taken by Bush—but far from being “neutral,” this makes things far worse. For now, what were unprecedented outrages perpetrated by Bush—for instance, widespread unwarranted wiretapping, or the suspension of habeas corpus (the right to trial) on the say-so of the president, or the assertion that the president can forbid trials on the basis that they might touch on “state secrets”—are transformed into the norm and the status quo; from being unprecedented, these outrages *become* the precedents for the future.

Why has this happened? Many Obama supporters will say that “he has to do it.” To the extent they are pointing to the fact that there are larger forces dictating what any president does, they are right. But to the extent they use this statement to absolve Obama—and themselves—of any responsibility, they are wrong.

During the Bush years many people who became Obama supporters would look at what Bush was doing and say, “We are better than that.” “We” may well be—and how we confront these challenges will be part of what decides whether that is true; but they—those larger forces who Obama does in fact represent when he formulates his policies, makes his speeches and enforces his decisions—most assuredly are NOT. This kind of shit—the crimes you hated under Bush—are what they, and their way of doing things are all about. These crimes are in the service of something very specific—“keeping America number one,” that is, in a position of dominance over the rest of the world. This is the goal animating both Bush and Obama, as much as they may differ in how to do this. The fact that Obama explicitly framed last week’s State of the Union address with this goal illustrates that point.

If the outrages that drove you to support Obama were wrong under Bush, they are still wrong today. If those abuses led you to pour your efforts into the Obama campaign, then there is a responsibility to confront and work toward finding ways to change these now. Yes, this will require hard work... and hard thinking. AND yes, this may make you uncomfortable—uncomfortable in doing new things, and uncomfortable in thinking about this country in ways that can pose challenges to what you take for granted intellectually, how you live and what you dream about.

That requires a significant degree of bravery. But there is no other morally viable course.

There is a place where epistemology and morality meet.

There is a place where you have to stand and say: **It is not acceptable to refuse to look at something—or to refuse to believe something—because it makes you uncomfortable.**

And: **It is not acceptable to believe something just because it makes you feel comfortable.**

Bob Avakian,
Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA
Bringing Forward Another Way



WAR

Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

Bush seized on September 11 to launch the “war on terror”—an unbounded war for greater imperialist empire, which involved committing war crimes and crimes against humanity on a massive scale, including the unjust, immoral and illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and a global campaign of assassinations, illegal and indefinite detention without due process, and torture.

Obama no longer uses the words “war on terror,” but he’s continuing—and in many ways escalating—the global war Bush began. He is tripling the number of troops in Afghanistan to over 100,000 and escalating the war in Pakistan. In 2004-2008, Bush authorized 46 drone attacks. In the year Obama’s been in office, he’s authorized at least 63.

He has escalated and expanded CIA operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and other countries.

He has continued Bush’s policy of targeted killings of U.S. citizens without due process, with a “hit list” of U.S. citizens he’s personally authorized to be killed.

Soldiers of the U.S. 2nd Battalion arrive in Ramadi, Iraq, November 15, 2009.



TORTURE

Photo: AP

Bush created a legal framework for torture and carried it out on an unprecedented scale, while claiming “the U.S. does not torture.”

In his State of the Union address, Obama claimed, “We’ve prohibited torture.” Obama banned some interrogation methods, while allowing his CIA director to reserve the right to use them. Obama has fought for immunity for Bush torturers and has continued rendition of prisoners to countries where torture is carried out.

Soldier guards an Afghan prisoner in Wardak Province, August 18, 2009.



RENDITION/GUANTANAMO

Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

Bush expanded the policy of “rendition”—seizing people without charges and taking them to secret prisons for torture and interrogation. The U.S. prison at Guantánamo became the hated global symbol of these brutal and illegal practices.

Obama formally ended CIA renditions and promised to close Guantánamo. Yet he retained authority to use renditions, authorized the CIA to continue rendering suspects to third countries for detention, torture and interrogation, and continues to operate secret prisons in Afghanistan where prisoners are detained indefinitely without charges. Guantánamo remains open.

A prisoner being moved to a cell at Guantánamo Base, January 11, 2002. More than a year into the Obama presidency, Guantánamo still holds close to 200 prisoners.



SPYING/WIRETAPPING

Photo: AP

Bush authorized massive, widespread illegal wiretapping and spying, including on millions of U.S. citizens.

Obama has left the Bush surveillance program intact and embraced the Patriot Act. He argues presidential “sovereign immunity” means U.S. officials can’t be sued for violating federal surveillance laws.

Security system manufacturer displays its wares, Annapolis, Maryland, March 19, 2009.