

Enduring Terror Double Standards

Exclusive: President Barack Obama ordered the targeted killing of al-Qaeda figure and American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki despite the lack of any legal due process. But the same week, the U.S. government continued to turn a blind eye to a Cuban-American terrorist harbored in Miami, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Former Vice President Dick Cheney may have expressed the pervasive American double standard on human rights best during a NBC "Today" show interview when host Matt Lauer asked if Cheney's support for waterboarding would carry over to its use by a foreign adversary against an American suspected of spying or caught conducting a covert operation.

"We probably would object to it," responded Cheney, "on the grounds that we have obligations towards our citizens and that we do everything we can to protect our citizens."

As for how that attitude matched up with his enthusiastic support for waterboarding detainees in the "war on terror," Cheney explained that "we weren't dealing with American citizens in the enhanced interrogation program." He then added, "the fact is, it worked."

In other words, one set of rules on torture applies to the United States and another set applies to the rest of the world, with gradations depending on how close a country or an individual is to the United States. The only consistency is the hypocrisy, and the only measure is whether something "worked."

Similar double standards were also on display this past week with disparate attitudes applied toward "terrorism" depending on who is doing the terrorizing.

On Friday, President Barack Obama announced the targeted killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen of Yemeni extraction who had turned on the United States and joined with al-Qaeda operatives to plot attacks against Americans.

Because Awlaki allegedly collaborated in terrorist attempts to kill Americans, including the botched "underwear" bombing over Detroit on Christmas 2009, he was hunted down and killed by a CIA drone attack with no due process beyond Obama putting Awlaki's name on a "capture-or-kill" list.

However, also last week, with virtually no attention in the U.S. news media, Venezuela expanded on its appeal to the United States to extradite CIA-trained Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to face charges of not only masterminding

the mid-air bombing of a Cubana airliner in 1976 but engaging in acts of torture and other crimes while serving in a Venezuelan intelligence agency four decades ago.

The United States has been harboring Posada since 2005, with the Bush administration and now the Obama administration refusing to take action to ensure that Posada faces justice for these grave crimes. Instead of extraditing Posada to Venezuela, the U.S. government has bungled minor cases against him for illegal entry and perjury.

As a result, Posada, now 83, has gotten to live out his golden years in relative comfort in Miami supported by the influential Cuban-American community, much as his terrorist co-conspirator Orlando Bosch did.

In being spared punishment for the 1976 Cubana Airline bombing, which killed 73 people including the Cuban youth fencing team, the pair also enjoyed the invaluable assistance of the Bush Family, including George H.W. Bush, Jeb Bush and George W. Bush.

New Charges

Venezuela's new extradition request results from investigations into political repression from the 1960s to the 1980s, including thousands of kidnappings, "disappearances" and acts of torture.

Posada has been implicated in some of these human rights crimes because after receiving CIA training for covert operations aimed at Fidel Castro's Cuba Posada in 1967 went to work for the feared Venezuelan intelligence agency, known as DISIP, where he became chief of operations.

One recently revealed case implicating Posada involved two women Brenda Hernandez Esquivel and Marlene del Valle Esquivel whose home in Maracay was raided in 1973 by state security agents searching for "subversive elements."

In the raid, three men were killed, one after opening the door and two others after surrendering, the complaint alleges. Later, the women were taken to DISIP's local headquarters where they say they were abused by Posada, who was known as "Commissioner Basilio,"

Regarding Brenda Hernandez Esquivel, Posada noted that she was pregnant and told his officers that "the seed must be finished off," which was accomplished by kicking the woman in the abdomen killing the unborn child, according to the complaint. Afterwards, the woman said she barely escaped attempts by the officers to drown her.

Posada is also alleged to have used a lit cigarette and feigned executions to torture Marlene del Valle and her six-month-old child as a means to extract information.

Later, the two women say they were moved to DISIP headquarters in Caracas where they were subjected to further torture until ultimately being released.

Three years later, Posada and Bosch allegedly had a bomb placed onboard a Cubana Airlines plane that was carrying 73 people, including the Cuban youth fencing team from Caracas to Havana. Though Bosch and Posada have formally denied masterminding the Cubana Airlines bombing, evidence in U.S. government files makes the case of their guilt overwhelming.

Declassified U.S. documents show that soon after the Cubana plane was blown out of the sky on Oct. 6, 1976, the CIA, then under the direction of George H.W. Bush, identified Posada and Bosch as the masterminds of the bombing.

But in fall 1976, Bush's boss, President Gerald Ford, was in a tight election battle with Democrat Jimmy Carter and the Ford administration wanted to keep intelligence scandals out of the newspapers. So Bush and other officials kept the lid on the investigations. [See Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Secret Cables

Still, inside the U.S. government, the facts were well known. According to a secret CIA cable dated Oct. 14, 1976, intelligence sources in Venezuela relayed information about the Cubana Airlines bombing that tied in Bosch, who had been visiting Venezuela, and Posada, who was his host and was still a senior DISIP officer.

The Oct. 14 cable said Bosch arrived in Venezuela in late September 1976 under the protection of Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, a close Washington ally who assigned his intelligence adviser Orlando Garcia "to protect and assist Bosch during his stay in Venezuela."

On his arrival, Bosch was met by Garcia and Posada, according to the report. Later, a fundraising dinner was held in Bosch's honor. "A few days following the fund-raising dinner, Posada was overheard to say that, 'we are going to hit a Cuban airplane,' and that 'Orlando has the details,'" the CIA report said.

"Following the 6 October [1976] Cubana Airline crash off the coast of Barbados, Bosch, Garcia and Posada agreed that it would be best for Bosch to leave Venezuela. Therefore, on 9 October, Posada and Garcia escorted Bosch to the Colombian border, where he crossed into Colombian territory."

In South America, police began rounding up suspects. Two Cuban exiles, Hernan Ricardo and Freddy Lugo, who got off the Cubana plane in Barbados, confessed that they had planted the bomb. They named Bosch and Posada as the architects of the attack.

A search of Posada's apartment in Venezuela turned up Cubana Airlines timetables and other incriminating documents.

Posada and Bosch were charged in Venezuela for the Cubana Airlines bombing, but the case soon became a political tug-of-war, since the suspects were in possession of sensitive Venezuelan government secrets that could embarrass President Andres Perez.

A New Day for Terrorists

After President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George H.W. Bush took power in Washington in 1981, the momentum for unraveling the mysteries of the Cuban Airlines bombing and other anti-communist terror plots dissipated. Reagan's ramped-up Cold War trumped any concern about right-wing terrorism.

Indeed, Reagan and Bush found right-wing extremists like Posada useful again and surely weren't eager to offend Miami's politically powerful Cuban community.

In 1985, Posada escaped from a Venezuelan prison where he was awaiting trial. In his autobiography, Posada thanked Miami-based Cuban activist Jorge Mas Canosa for the \$25,000 that was used to bribe guards who allowed Posada to walk out of prison.

Another Cuban exile who aided Posada was former CIA officer Felix Rodriguez, who was close to then-Vice President George H.W. Bush. At the time, Rodriguez was handling secret supply shipments to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, a pet project of President Reagan.

After fleeing Venezuela, Posada joined Rodriguez in Central America and began using the code name "Ramon Medina." Posada was assigned the job of paymaster for pilots in the White House-run Contra-supply operation.

By the late 1980s, Orlando Bosch also was out of Venezuela's jails and back in Miami. But Bosch, who had been implicated in about 30 violent attacks, was facing possible deportation by U.S. officials who warned that Washington couldn't credibly lecture other countries about terrorism while protecting a terrorist like Bosch.

But Bosch got lucky. Jeb Bush, then an aspiring Florida politician, led a lobbying drive to prevent the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service from

expelling Bosch. In 1990, the lobbying paid dividends when Jeb's dad, President George H.W. Bush, blocked proceedings against Bosch, letting the unapologetic terrorist stay in the United States.

In 1992, also during the Bush-41 presidency, the FBI interviewed Posada about the Iran-Contra scandal for 6 ½ hours at the U.S. Embassy in Honduras. Posada filled in some blanks about the role of Bush's vice presidential office in the secret Contra operation.

According to a 31-page summary of the FBI interview, Posada said Bush's national security adviser, former CIA officer Donald Gregg, was in frequent contact with Felix Rodriguez.

"Posada recalls that Rodriguez was always calling Gregg," the FBI summary said. "Posada knows this because he's the one who paid Rodriguez' phone bill." After the interview, the FBI agents let Posada walk out of the embassy unmolested. [For details, see Parry's *Lost History*.]

Harboring Terrorists

In 2005, when Posada eventually made his way into Miami, then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush made little effort to capture him. Posada was detained only after he held a news conference.

Then, instead of extraditing Posada to Venezuela to stand trial for a terrorist mass murder, George W. Bush's administration engaged in a lackadaisical effort to have him deported somewhere else for lying on an immigration form.

During a 2007 court hearing in Texas, Bush administration lawyers allowed to go unchallenged testimony from a Posada friend that Posada would face torture if he were returned to Venezuela. The judge, therefore, barred Posada from being deported there.

After that ruling, Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez accused the administration of "a cynical double standard" in the "war on terror." As for the claim that Venezuela practices torture, Alvarez said, "There isn't a shred of evidence that Posada would be tortured in Venezuela."

Posada came to personify the hypocrisy of George W. Bush's famous declaration that harboring a terrorist was no better than being a terrorist.

On May 2, 2008, Posada was feted at a gala fundraising dinner in Miami. Some 500 supporters chipped in to his legal defense fund and Posada arrived to thundering applause. In a bristling speech against the Castro regime, Posada told his supporters, "We ask God to sharpen our machetes."

Venezuelan Ambassador Alvarez protested the Bush administration's tolerance of the dinner. "This is outrageous, particularly because he kept talking about [more] violence," Alvarez said.

Similarly, his alleged co-conspirator in the Cubana Airlines bombing, Orlando Bosch, showed no remorse for his violent past.

In a TV interview, reporter Manuel Cao on Miami's Channel 41 asked Bosch to comment on the civilians who died when the Cubana plane crashed off the coast of Barbados.

Bosch responded, "In a war such as us Cubans who love liberty wage against the tyrant [Fidel Castro], you have to down planes, you have to sink ships, you have to be prepared to attack anything that is within your reach."

"But don't you feel a little bit for those who were killed there, for their families?" Cao asked, noting the presence of Cuba's amateur fencing team that had just won gold, silver and bronze medals at a youth fencing competition in Caracas. "The young people onboard?"

Bosch replied, "I was in Caracas. I saw the young girls on television. There were six of them. After the end of the competition, the leader of the six dedicated their triumph to the tyrant. She gave a speech filled with praise for the tyrant.

"We had already agreed in Santo Domingo, that everyone who comes from Cuba to glorify the tyrant had to run the same risks as those men and women that fight alongside the tyranny."

[The comment about Santo Domingo was an apparent reference to a meeting by a right-wing terrorist organization, CORU, which took place in the Dominican Republic in 1976 and which involved a CIA undercover asset.]

No Outrage

Though Bosch was allowed to die in peace earlier this year, the Obama administration's Justice Department did prosecute Posada on perjury charges (a case that was lost when the jury apparently sympathized with the anti-communist militant).

Still, Obama has shown no interest in seeking justice for the Cubana Airlines victims. To do so would surely have political repercussions in the swing state of Florida in 2012.

The U.S. news media remains similarly blasé about Posada walking free, in contrast to their fury over Libya's supposed role in the mid-air bombing of Pan

Am 103, which killed 270 people in 1988. The widely presumed guilt of Muammar Gaddafi's government was often cited as justification for seeking violent "regime change" in Libya this year.

At leading news outlets, such as the New York Times, Libyan guilt for the Pan Am 103 bombing was stated as flat fact, even though the evidence was much weaker indeed threadbare compared to what exists against Posada and Bosch on the Cubana Airlines case. [For more on the Pan Am 103 case against Libya, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Through the US Media Lens Darkly.](#)"]

There is also a strong U.S. media consensus that President Obama did the right thing in ordering the targeted killing of Awlaki even though there was no criminal indictment, no evidence presented to a grand jury, no formal legal proceeding of any sort.

By contrast, the U.S. government's calculated neglect of Venezuela's repeated requests that Posada be turned over for criminal prosecution for acts of terrorism and torture draws virtually no media attention at all.

Perhaps the true meaning of "American exceptionalism" is that the rules apply to every nation except America. Ultimately, Dick Cheney seems to be right, that the U.S. government feels no obligation to enforce international laws against terrorism and torture if American officials or their friends are the ones implicated.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](#). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

'Occupy Wall Street' Movement Grows

The economic distress caused by out-of-control Wall Street greed finally has prompted a dramatic public response in the form of protesters occupying a park in the Financial District of New York City. Slowly, the movement has attracted broader support, reports Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

There was a rumor on Friday that the band Radiohead would be dropping by the #Occupy Wall Street encampment. They had just been on "The Colbert Report" and their fan base is huge among the very demographic of younger people drawn to the protests now beginning their third week.

And so more people came than organizers expected. Loads of people! Except, alas, for Radio Head. The band had reportedly called to express support that led some to conclude that they were on the way.

This demonstrates again the power of celebrity to draw a crowd. What did impress the activists in Zuccotti Park in the Financial District is that the Radiohead fans actually stuck around and took part in the activities and a march that went north to Police Headquarters protesting the pepper-spraying of activists.

That police action against #Occupy Wall Street protesters had the other unintended consequence of persuading the news media, which had convinced itself that this growing assembly was not worth covering, to cover it.

Soon, thanks to research by the mysterious "Anonymous," activists were able to identify the police commander responsible for using a chemical weapon against female protesters.

His name is Anthony Bologna, and soon his email was hacked and his record of alleged earlier abuse incidents was publicized, apparently along with his online porn collection.

Then, Jon Stewart stepped in Thursday with a report on the cop he called "TONY BALONEY," ridiculing him and the police force.

Perhaps, that is why the NYPD was more restrained Friday night and backed down with threatened arrests of a group of activist bicyclists called Critical Mass, that had shown up to show solidarity.

When it was announced at a nightly meeting (called the "General Assembly") that the bikers were at risk, hundreds of activists rushed out to show some solidarity to them and, then, there were no arrests.

Perhaps this incident was evidence of a sign I saw reading "The power of the people is greater than the people in power."

#Occupy Wall Street has yet to attract the 20,000 militants they had hoped for but it's growing and, more importantly, retaining its sense of community, non-violence, and sense of a tolerant community. It is a decentralized.

Most important is that similar actions are already taking place in other cities like a march on Friday in Boston against the Bank of America. An even bigger one is being planned for Washington in October.

Other organizations are supporting this emerging movement. Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union say they "applaud the courage of the young people on Wall Street" and are planning to turn out their members next week.

I saw tee-shirts of UAW members and met some activists from the Salvadorian community. Already #Occupy Wall Street sent over a hundred people to back a protest by postal workers trying to save their jobs and the Post Office.

The longer this lasts, and is allowed to last, the more it is likely to grow.

Already intellectuals and writers like Chris Hedges are praising the protesters as "the best among us" and are imploring the rest of us to get involved:

"There are no excuses left. Either you join the revolt taking place on Wall Street and in the financial districts of other cities across the country or you stand on the wrong side of history.

"Either you obstruct, in the only form left to us, which is civil disobedience, the plundering by the criminal class on Wall Street and accelerated destruction of the ecosystem that sustains the human species, or become the passive enabler."

Veteran activist Carl Davidson writes:

"Young rebels often manifest a moral clarity that awakens and prods the rest of us. Through their direct actions, they become a critical force, holding up a mirror for an entire society to take a look at itself, what it has come to, and what choices lay before it.

"The historic example is the four young African American students that sat at a lunch counter and ordered a cup of coffee in Greensboro, North Carolina back in 1960. The Wall Street protests are thus a clarion call to the trade unions and everyone concerned with economic and social justice."

This weekend, Occupy Wall Street is promising to make an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and to begin a debate about next steps.

The last two weeks have been a tremendous learning experience for the activists who even doubted their staying power. Now their non-organization has organized with a food committee, media center, sanitation department and task force to encourage more debate.

David Degraw of AmedStatus.com that pushed for the protests sees the movement defining itself. He told me on my weekly News Dissector Radio Show on Progressive Radio Network that he expects more clarity to emerge from a debate that's already underway.

He writes, "As the occupation of Wall Street moves into its third week, there are many questions about the organizers behind the ongoing protests and the origins of the 99% Movement."

He has encountered resistance from parties unknown to his efforts to encourage a debate.

"As AmedStatus was pushing for a decentralized global rebellion against Wall Street and actively supporting the Egyptian uprising against the IMF and Federal Reserve, the attacks on the site escalated. In what appeared to be a fatal blow, the entire ISP network that the AmedStatus.com site was hosted on was knocked offline, hundreds of sites were also affected and the AmedStatus.com web hosting provider said that they would no longer be able to host the site unless it was moved to a service that was significantly more than we were paying or could afford.

"With a very limited budget, and in complete desperation, AmedStatus put out a call for help."

The computer whiz Anonymous stepped in and helped the site recover. It is now on the leading edge of the movement. Other sites like Livestream carry the events around the clock the way Al Jazeera reported on the uprising in Egypt.

#OccupyWallStreet disseminates tweets around the clock

Many in the media wrote off the young people in Egypt, and proved to be as out of touch as much of the American media is today. As Bob Dylan sang decades ago to a reporter from Time Magazine, "There's something happening and you don't know what it is, do you"

News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs about the protests on News Dissector.com. His latest film, Plunder The Crime of Our Time" called for protests against financial crime. (Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.

Finding Peace in Religious Scholarship

Some neoconservatives, Christian fundamentalists and right-wing Jews insist that

a “clash of civilizations” is underway with Islam and that peaceful coexistence is not an option. But Rev. Howard Bess, a Baptist, sees hope from fair-minded scholarship about the Bible and the Qu’ran.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

Every Sunday I lead an adult Sunday School discussion class. Just now we are reading and discussing Stephen Prothero’s book, *God Is Not One*.

The title might be a bit unsettling to some, but it makes a point. When a religious person says “My God is one and one only, and there is no other God,” dialogue dies in a world that is desperately in need for gracious communication. Prothero is determined to initiate and encourage respectful argument.

I am a Christian and my commitment to Christ is fixed. Prothero does not ask that I change my mind about my faith. However, he does ask that I become familiar with other faiths and be fair in my understanding of them.

The first challenge in the book is Islam. In order to meet the demand for fairness, I pulled my copy of the Qu’ran from the shelf with a commitment to read the Qu’ran entirely. I have begun a process.

I have read, studied and interpreted my own special volume, the Bible, for a lifetime. I become annoyed when people misquote, misrepresent and tear from context the words of the Bible.

I am especially sensitive about reading the Bible in the context in which it was written. I always want to know who wrote it, when did the person write it, to whom were the words directed, what was the context. I have found that if I ask these basic questions, the Bible makes more sense and its messages are clearer.

If this is a reasonable way to approach my special book, should I not give the same effort to reading the Qu’ran?

According to Muslim tradition, the Qu’ran has no author other than Allah, the common Arabic word for God, with Allah’s words passed down to the prophet Muhammad.

Muhammad was a bright, thoughtful man who was an illiterate. He could neither read nor write. The tradition is that Allah spoke the sacred messages to Muhammad, word for word, line by line, verse by verse. Muhammad repeated the words to other people, the words were shared, and eventually they were written down in Arabic.

The message of Allah became fixed for all time. In the faith of Islam, Muhammad

was the final prophet. Revelation was completed and contained wholly in the Qu'ran. It would be tempting to move on from Muhammad, but my curiosity has been tweaked. Who was Muhammad?

Out of our growing discussions, Darlene went to the shelves of our library to see what we had. We were surprised. We actually had some good material, not read thoroughly and certainly not digested for our present dialogues. I dived into Karen Armstrong's *Muhammad, a Prophet for Our Times*. My reading table is becoming cluttered, but my understanding is growing.

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in the city of Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia. As a child he was orphaned. Besides that, we know almost nothing of his childhood or early manhood.

During the years of his growing up, Arab tribalism was still the basic social and political structure of Arabia. The basis of ethics and morality was the good of the tribe. Religion was not well defined, and no God was greater than the good of the tribe.

The traditional life of the nomadic tribe was very difficult with constant conflict between tribes for water and grazing land. Wars and killing were endless and people lived by a conscience trained only by the survival ethic of the tribe.

Some tribes drifted into populated areas but kept their tribal identities. The city of Mecca had become a population center and came to be dominated by successful businessmen and traders. Many Arabs made the transition from herders to businessmen.

The presence of a highly successful clan of Jews added to the tensions of the City. Mecca had become a center of both great wealth and great poverty. Outside of the tribe there was no concern for the sick, the elderly or the impoverished.

What made Muhammad different is a matter for speculation. He became one of the successful businessmen, accumulating wealth but never enslaved to his wealth.

For contemplation, he often retreated to a mountain cave north of Mecca, where he considered the problems of Mecca: the greed, the injustice and the arrogance. According to Islamic tradition, Allah began giving Muhammad sacred words when he was 40. The core of the message was that God was one, a unity who demanded complete allegiance.

When Muhammad began sharing his message to the people of Mecca, he was not taken seriously. At the time, he was a minor voice with a message that challenged the social and economic forces that ruled the city.

However, soon, his message and leadership proved successful. The city and an entire region changed their ways. Indeed, there has been no social revolution in history that made such an impact on so many people in such a short time.

Muhammad was committed to a just and decent society in which every person is treated with respect. To represent Muhammad otherwise is a travesty to his life and a misrepresentation of the Islam he initiated.

It is true that the major religions of the world are different and cannot be harmonized without doing damage to the basic concepts of each faith. But there is value in Prothero's message of understanding and respect for one another's beliefs.

I need to get back to my reading. I want to be prepared for the class discussion next Sunday.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net .
