

## **The New Commandment on Political Murders: Thou Shalt Not Kill—But We Will**

by Dr. Liaquat Ali Khan

The September 11 attacks have changed American law and foreign policy regarding political murders. Since the 1970s, when a Congressional Committee exposed the CIA plots to murder Fidel Castro and other foreign leaders, the President's law embodied in Executive Orders has prohibited government employees from directly or indirectly engaging in assassinations. That law seems to have been secretly revoked. The President may do so for national security reasons. Even if the Executive Order prohibiting assassinations is still law, its language is open to interpretation. Given the bad faith interpretations that government lawyers have made to undermine the laws of war and torture, do not be surprised if the Executive Order is reinterpreted to allow domestic—yes domestic—and foreign political murders. If the law has indeed been revoked, the President's hand is freer.

Not only the law but also US foreign policy has changed with respect to political murders, casting away years of international efforts to forbid extra-judicial killings. The new US commandment is: Thou shall not kill—but we will. The word “thou” in the commandment is a bit convoluted. It means Syria and other disfavored states. It does not include Israel and other allies. The US, as the sole superpower, is of course above and beyond all commandments. Under the new commandment, the US reserves the right to murder whomever it pleases, to condemn or condone political murders as it pleases. Here are three episodes that illuminate the new commandment.

### **Condemning Political Murder**

Take the political murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. A UN commission has concluded that since the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services were closely allied in Lebanon, “it would be difficult to envisage a scenario whereby such a complex assassination plot could have been carried out without their knowledge.” The commission also accuses Syrian security officials of giving false or inaccurate information. However, the commission is emphatic in saying that the investigation is incomplete and that “the full picture of the assassination can only be reached through an extensive and credible investigation.”

The UN report provides a basis, however thin, for the US ruling group to slash the Syrian throat. After Iraq, Syria has been the perfect next target for a while. The US ruling group needs new subterfuges to sustain the failing war on terror. Pouncing on the opportunity, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has already convicted the entire Syrian government. The UN report cannot be “left lying on the table,” she said. The military option is always there, President Bush announced on Al Arabiya television. Neocons agree wholeheartedly. Punishing Syria would also delight Prime Minister Sharon, whose own involvement in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon was not even referred to any UN investigation commission.

### **Condoning Political Murder**

That takes us to Sharon-sponsored political murders. In March 2004, Sharon ordered the murder of blind quadriplegic Sheikh Ahmad Yâsîn, the spiritual leader of Hamas, who had previously suffered years of torture in Israeli prisons. Yasin was blasted out of his wheelchair as he was returning from the Gaza mosque after the morning prayer. Sharon chose the time and place of the murder to reinforce a favorite Israeli theme that not even God helps the Palestinians. Israel accepted responsibility, arguing that the Sheikh, as the godfather of terrorism, deserved to die. Reacting to the news, the US State Department had no words of condemnation. Its spokesman urged “all parties to remain calm and exercise restraint.” This urging for calm was obviously aimed at Palestinians and not Israelis who, after the assassination, had every reason to be serene. President Bush further mitigated the murder by saying that Israel had the right to defend itself but should take into account the consequences of its actions. When the matter was brought before the UN Security Council, the same Council where the US is actively seeking a resolution against Syria, Israel faced no consequences for the political murder. The US vetoed the resolution drafted to condemn the killing. “How do the Israelis continue with what they are saying and what they are doing unless there is this unfortunate automatic protection by the superpower of the world?” remarked the Palestinian UN observer.

#### **Perpetrating Political Murder**

But the superpower of the world was even more blatant in committing political murders. In July 2003, the US murdered Saddam Hussein’s two sons, Uday and Qusai, and his 14-year old grandson, Mustapha. The murders were justified as the outcome of an armed encounter with the US army. But the circumstances under which the murders took place revealed intent and premeditation. The targets were trapped in a villa and had nowhere to go. Their limited cache of bullets had been completely exhausted. Several hours after the fire from the villa had stopped, US Special Forces under the cover of overwhelming force of missiles, helicopters, rockets, and grenades, entered the building not to take prisoners but, per order, to murder Saddam’s children.

Back home, particularly in Washington, the air was drenched with morbidity. Deaths of the enemy’s children were seen as rare trophies. Contrary to Pentagon wishes and contrary to the laws of war, the broken faces of Uday and Qusai were reconstructed with plastic pudding for a grand display. Gruesome pictures of the brothers were shown to the world as proof of the dead. Major newspapers, including the *New York Times*, celebrated the murders and congratulated the Bush administration for a heroic undertaking. So widespread was the joy in the murders that even some liberal Senators were bathing their hands in the blood.

These three episodes demonstrate that the US is evolving into a capricious monster. It no longer respects the rule of law. Away from the luminous halls on Capitol Hill where democracy is showcased for the American public and the world, lawless and arbitrary decisions are made in dim caves accessible only to select members of the ruling group. The world must demand that the Bush administration make an unequivocal statement in the UN Security Council that the US upholds the law against all political murders, with no exceptions.

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