

As Jordan and ISIS Exchange Executions, Folly of US “War on Terror” Looms

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by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

The Jordanian government has confirmed the execution of two jailed Iraqis, both accused of being jihadist militants who planned or participated in attacks within Jordan, in retaliation for the execution by the Islamic State of a captured Jordanian pilot whose death was shown in a video released Tuesday.

“What killed Kassasbeh was not Islam. What killed him are the new dynamics of globalisation and transnational violence that have consumed the Middle East and the Islamic world, unleashed by the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Syrian civil war.” –Asst. Prof. Ibrahim al-Marashi

[According](#) to *McClatchy*:

Jordanian state television said one of the executed prisoners was Sajida al Rishawi, the 44-year-old Iraqi woman whose release the Islamic State had demanded in return for the life of a Japanese hostage killed last week. The other was Ziad al-Karbouli, a jihadist who once worked with Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the Jordanian who founded al Qaida in Iraq, the organization that was the precursor to the Islamic State.

Government spokesman Mohammed al Momani announced in Amman that the two prisoners had been executed at dawn. Both Karbouli and Rishawi had been in prison for nearly a decade.

Jordan had announced that it would move quickly to avenge the murder of Lt. Moaz al Kasasbeh whose horrific execution was made public Tuesday by an Islamic State video that showed him

being led to a cage in the desert, doused with gasoline and set alight.

The Guardian [adds](#):

The fate of Kasasbeh – a member of a large tribe that forms the backbone of support for the country’s Hashemite monarchy – has gripped Jordan for weeks and some Jordanians have criticised King Abdullah for embroiling them in the US-led alliance that they say will provoke a militant backlash.

Some analysts believe Amman could now escalate its involvement in the campaign against Islamic State, which has seized large areas of Iraq and [Syria](#), Jordan’s neighbours to the north and east. US officials told Reuters on Tuesday the killing of Kasasbeh would likely harden Jordan’s position as a member of the coalition against Islamic State.

Though many Jordanians have expressed criticism against the nation’s monarchy government for participating in the U.S.-led war on the Islamic State (aka ISIS or ISIL), analysts vary on their assessment about how the execution of the pilot, who was burned alive, will shift public sentiment and impact the overall war which has ensnared the Middle East.

Several observers have taken the opportunity of these latest developments to reflect on how the mindset and tactics employed in what has become known as the “global war on terror” or (GWOT)–spearhead by the U.S. military–are inextricably linked to what is commonly referred to as the “barbarism” and “savagery” of non-state militant actors like ISIS.

In a post [published](#) on *The Intercept* on Wednesday, journalist and columnist Glenn Greenwald explores how the ritualistic condemnation of ISIS—who he acknowledges is a group “indescribably nihilistic and morally grotesque”—also serves

the purpose of obfuscating the inherent violence and depravity of the military campaign that the U.S. has waged in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere over the last twelve or more years. After documenting numerous incidents in which the U.S. military's use of drones, hellfire missiles, white phosphorous, and other weaponry that have resulted in the maiming and death of countless civilians, including many who were "burned alive," Greenwald writes:

Unlike ISIS, the U.S. usually (though not always) tries to suppress (rather than gleefully publish) evidence showing the victims of its violence. Indeed, concealing stories about the victims of American militarism is a critical part of the U.S. government's strategy for maintaining support for its sustained aggression. That is why, in general, the U.S. media has a policy of systematically excluding and ignoring such victims (although disappearing them this way does not actually render them nonexistent).

One could plausibly maintain that there is a different moral calculus involved in (a) burning a helpless captive to death as opposed to (b) recklessly or even deliberately burning civilians to death in areas that one is bombing with weapons purposely designed to incinerate human beings, often with the maximum possible pain. That's the moral principle that makes torture specially heinous: sadistically inflicting pain and suffering on a helpless detainee is a unique form of barbarity.

But there is nonetheless something quite obfuscating about this beloved ritual of denouncing the unique barbarism of ISIS. It is true that ISIS seems to have embraced a goal – a strategy – of being incomparably savage, inhumane and morally repugnant. That the group is indescribably nihilistic and morally grotesque is beyond debate.

That's exactly what makes the intensity of these repeated

denunciation rituals somewhat confounding. Everyone decent, by definition, fully understands that ISIS is repellent and savage. While it's understandable that being forced to watch the savagery on video prompts strong emotions (although, again, hiding savagery does not in fact make it less savage), it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the ritualistic expressed revulsion has a definitive utility.

[And writing](#) for *Al-Jazeera English*, Ibrahim al-Marashi, an assistant history professor at California State University, puts the latest tit-for-tat violence between Jordan and ISIS within a historical context—rooted in the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003—that speaks to the growing and worrying way in which the cycle of violence and acts of terrorism and aggression (including by states, aspiring states, and non-state actors) have created and fostered the current situation:

To recap, a Jordanian, [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi moved from Jordan to Afghanistan to Iraq in 2001, set up a terrorist group that killed thousands of Iraqis, and dispatched Iraqis to Jordan in 2005 to kill Jordanians and a prominent Syrian director. A Jordanian pilot, sent to combat a transnational terrorist group in Syria and Iraq is killed in 2015 by that very group established by a fellow Jordanian.

What killed Kassasbeh was not Islam. What killed him are the new dynamics of globalisation and transnational violence that have consumed the Middle East and the Islamic world, unleashed by the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Syrian civil war.

While sympathies to ISIL might have existed among elements in Jordan's society, this execution will most likely strengthen Jordanian resolve in combating this group. In the impoverished Jordanian town of [Maan, support for ISIL](#) has been vocal and explicit, with inhabitants of the town flying ISIL's flag.

Kassasbeh's death will most likely harden Jordanian resolve

and eliminate any public sympathy for ISIL. However, Jordan is now at a critical juncture. A heavy handed response by the Jordanian state against Maan in light of Kassasbeh's execution might have the inverse effect of dissipating any sympathy for the pilot's death, and spur some of its citizens to join ISIL.

How the Jordanian security forces and the state will react after the death of its pilot will have ramifications for its long-term security. Jordan has announced [it has executed Rishawi](#) in response to Kassasbeh's death. As I wrote in response to [Obama's State of the Union](#) speech, state-sanctioned violence in response to non-state actor violence will continue to produce an endless cycle of violence if not coupled with addressing the conditions – unemployment, humiliation, lack in governance – that produce terrorism in the first place.

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Calls for 'Torture Team' Prosecutions Persist as Cheney Brags "I'd Do It Again"

Published on Monday, December 15, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

Former vice president of the United States Dick Cheney [told](#) NBC's Chuck Todd on Sunday that he'd "do it again in a minute."

And what about President Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush? Said Cheney: "He authorized it. He Approved it."

"It would be comforting to dismiss Cheney as a historical oddity, to picture him sitting in the dimly lit room of a motel, changing the pitch of his voice to pretend he wasn't alone. But he's got company, and it's dangerous." –journalist Amy Davidson

And what is the "it"? The torture of other human beings.

However, nearly a week after the partial release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on CIA torture—despite a [full-court media press from Cheney and others](#) defending how the U.S. government employed gross human rights violations in the name of national security—the new calls for prosecutions into these admitted crimes continue.

For it's part, the ACLU has put forth a five-point plan for accountability which includes appointment of a special prosecutor.

In a [new op-ed](#) over the weekend, Jameel Jaffer, the ACLU's deputy legal director said the case for prosecuting those behind the torture program, though long overdue, has never been better.

"The argument for the appointment of a special prosecutor is straightforward," Jaffer argued. "The CIA adopted interrogation methods that have long been understood to constitute torture. Those methods were used against more than a hundred prisoners, including many – at least 29 – whom the CIA itself now recognizes should never have been detained at all."

"If we don't hold our officials accountable for having authorized such conduct, we become complicit in it." –Jameel Jaffer, ACLU

As part of its renewed effort to push for prosecutions, the Center for Constitutional Rights has put forth [a petition](#) calling on Attorney General Eric Holder to prosecute the high-level government officials responsible for the torture. [Appearing](#) alongside social activist Frances Fox Piven on Melissa Harris-Perry's weekend show on MSNBC, CCR's executive director Vince Warren said we should not be having a conversation about whether torture "worked" or not, because torture—just like slavery and genocide—is among the "highest forms of crimes that people can commit against each other."

"This is why we need to be thinking about prosecution," Warren continued. "The only way to prevent torture and things like this from happening, is to prosecute the people who have done this. This isn't a question of values. This is a question of criminality."

From her perspective, Pivens said that torture is "morally reprehensible" but that there are also deeper issues at work when accountability is non-existent. "There is an almost criminal gang in our government's security agencies which is not subject to democratic accountability of any kind," she said. "And what they do has huge effects on the future of the United States and the future of the world. You can't look at these horrific acts and not wonder, at least, whether the experience of this kind of behavior at the hands of American agents doesn't have something to do with the rise of terrorist groups like ISIL."

Following Cheney's appearance on *Meet The Press* on Sunday, *The New Yorker's* Amy Davidson pilloried the former vice president, and other likes former CIA chief Michael Hayden, for continuing to parade about as though what they did to people in the name of the American people should be heralded. She [wrote](#):

Basically, in Cheney's world, nothing Americans do can be called torture, because we are not Al Qaeda and we are not

the Japanese in the Second World War (whom we prosecuted for waterboarding) and we are not ISIS. "The way we did it," as he said of waterboarding, was not torture. In other words, it was not really the Justice Department that "blessed," or rather transubstantiated, torture; it was our American-ness. Is there an argument that could degrade that American identity more?

It would be comforting to dismiss Cheney as a historical oddity, to picture him sitting in the dimly lit room of a motel, changing the pitch of his voice to pretend he wasn't alone. But he's got company, and it's dangerous. The way that many, including the present and former directors of the C.I.A., have responded to the Senate report has been shameless and sordid. (There have been exceptions, as [Jane Mayer notes](#).) They have spent a lot of time complaining that the Agency hasn't been sufficiently praised. The word "torture" upsets them.

Despite new admissions by Cheney and a televised press conference delivered by CIA director John Brennan last week, it remains unclear if the new demands for accountability, including criminal probes or charges, will actually result.

As the Associated Press [reports](#) Monday:

Department officials said they will not revisit their 2012 decision to close the investigation, citing among other challenges the passage of time and the difficulty of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that crimes were committed, especially in light of government memos that gave interrogators extraordinary latitude.

"Our inquiry was limited to a determination of whether prosecutable offenses were committed. Importantly, our investigation was not intended to answer the broader questions regarding the propriety of the examined conduct," the department said in a statement after the report was

released.

That conclusion followed an investigation led by special prosecutor John Durham that began in 2009 as an outgrowth of a probe into the destruction of videotapes of CIA interrogation tactics. The inquiry into interrogation tactics came amid the release of an internal CIA inspector general's report that said CIA interrogators once threatened to kill the children of a Sept. 11 suspect and suggested that another suspected terrorist would be forced to watch his mother being sexually assaulted.

Durham specifically investigated potential crimes in the deaths of two detainees, including one who was shackled to a cold concrete wall in a secret CIA prison, while in custody in Iraq and Afghanistan. In closing the investigation, the department said it had "reviewed a tremendous volume of information" about detainees alleged to have been in U.S. custody but did not find enough evidence to convict anyone.

As the ACLU's Jaffer argues, however, nothing about that investigation precludes a new and more aggressive attempt to achieve accountability for those who ordered, authorized, and carried out the program.

"If we don't hold our officials accountable for having authorized such conduct, we become complicit in it," he said. "The prisoners were tortured in our names. Now that the torture has been exposed in such detail, our failure to act would signify a kind of tacit approval. Our government routinely imprisons people for far lesser offenses. What justification could possibly be offered for exempting the high officials who authorized the severest crimes?"

He concluded, "For the last decade, officials who authorized torture have been shielded from accountability for their acts. The Senate report makes it clear – indeed, it could not make it any clearer – that impunity for torture must now come to an

end.”

And as Davidson wrote, “if this past week has proved anything, it’s that the legacy of torture is not quiet repentance but impunity. [President Obama] has told his agents not to torture, and Brennan says he can work with that, while the C.I.A. waits for instructions from the next one.”

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British Spy Agency: We Don’t Need Warrant for Americans’ Data. We Have ‘Arrangements’

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by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

British intelligence agencies can access Americans’ communications data without a warrant and keep it for two years, newly released documents show.

The British spy agency, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), revealed the practices, called “arrangements” by the government, to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT), a watchdog for national surveillance practices.

Some of the details of of these “arrangements” were provided to human rights organizations including [Privacy International](#), [Liberty](#) and [Amnesty International](#), which had brought a [challenge](#) regarding GCHQ’s surveillance activities to the IPT following revelations made possible by Edward Snowden.

The policies allow the British agencies to receive bulk data

from the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) as well as other foreign agencies.

As detailed in a [document](#) (pdf) posted by Privacy International, the arrangements appear to serve as legal justification for the practice, stating that it not a circumvention of law when “it is not technically feasible” to get a warrant “and it is necessary and proportionate for the Intelligence Services to obtain those communications.”

“It is outrageous that the Government thinks mass surveillance, justified by secret ‘arrangements’ that allow for vast and unrestrained receipt and analysis of foreign intelligence material is lawful.”
–Eric King, Privacy International

The rights groups also note that the GCHQ explanation is at odds with the what the British Intelligence Services Committee stated in July 2013 regarding the NSA’s PRISM program, that “in each case where GCHQ sought information from the US, a warrant for interception... was already in place.”

The groups say that the arrangements reveal inadequate legal safeguards and oversight of surveillance practices.

“We now know that data from any call, internet search, or website you visited over the past two years could be stored in GCHQ’s database and analyzed at will, all without a warrant to collect it in the first place,” Eric King, Deputy Director of Privacy international, said in a press statement.

“It is outrageous that the Government thinks mass surveillance, justified by secret ‘arrangements’ that allow for vast and unrestrained receipt and analysis of foreign intelligence material is lawful. This is completely unacceptable, and makes clear how little transparency and accountability exists within the British intelligence

community,” he stated.

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[US Official: Bombing Oil Pipelines in Syria a 'Viable Option'](#)

Published on Thursday, October 23, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

A top State Department official on Thursday said that bombing oil pipelines controlled by Islamic State (or ISIS) in Syria is now a “viable option” under consideration by the U.S. military.

Julietta Valls Noyes, the US deputy assistant secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, was in London and her comments were first reported by the British press. Citing figures that estimate ISIS is generating nearly \$2 million every day by selling crude oil reserves it now controls, Noyes said that the U.S. may expand targeting of oil-related infrastructure inside Syria to include “kinetic strikes against some of the pipelines” and other “physical action to stop the flow.”

“Bombing oil pipelines to get at ISIS’s financing would be foolhardy... and provide anti-American groups anywhere in the world with a rationale for bombing pipelines on which we and our allies depend. The result could be global economic havoc.”

—Michael T. Klare

[According](#) to the *Independent*, Noyes said that sale of fuel is

one of the U.S. government's "principal concerns" regarding ISIS' ability to fund its ongoing military operations and that in addition to other methods to stem the group's the sale of oil "air strikes are a viable option."

Reacting to Noyes' comments, Michael T. Klare, a professor at Hampshire College who has written extensively on energy resources and U.S. foreign policy, told *Common Dreams* that any attempt to bomb oil pipelines in Syria would be a serious mistake with potentially far-reaching implications.

"Bombing oil pipelines to get at ISIS's financing would be a very foolhardy move," Klare stated in an email. "First of all, it would be almost impossible to determine that the pipelines were carrying oil produced by oilfields under ISIS's control, and second, there could be a considerable risk of civilian casualties from the resulting explosions. Bombing pipelines could also lead to massive oil spills and resulting environmental damage."

In addition, he said, attacking pipelines in any manner "would provide anti-American groups anywhere in the world with a rationale for bombing pipelines on which we and our allies depend. The result could be global economic havoc."

Since U.S.-led airstrikes inside Syria began last month, warplanes have already targeted refineries and other oil-related infrastructure held by ISIS. So far, however, targeting flowing pipelines has not been officially discussed.

The Telegraph [reports](#):

Western officials say that Syria's own regime has been an important buyer of ISIL's oil. While President Bashar al-Assad poses as a sworn enemy of ISIL, officials from Western and Middle Eastern countries believe that he has deliberately created some of the conditions for the terrorist movement's rise in order to present himself as a bulwark against extremism.

If America were to destroy a pipeline taking oil from ISIL to the regime, this could be a way of weakening both Mr Assad and the terrorists. However, ISIL is also believed to smuggle oil to buyers in Turkey and Iraq. Most of those supplies are thought to go by tanker, not via pipelines.

ISIL's possession of oilfields has helped it to become one of the richest terrorist organisations in history. Control of these assets makes the movement financially self-sufficient, reducing its dependence on donors from elsewhere in the Middle East. In all, ISIL is believed to have amassed a war-chest running into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

According to Klare, however, if nations want to curtail ISIS' oil revenues, he suggests that other strategies are available that don't carry the same high-level risk associated with airstrikes. "The US should put diplomatic pressure on Turkey to crack down on black-market oil smugglers that operate in Turkish territory, and block any bank accounts used by ISIS to collect funds from such sales," Klare suggested. "These efforts would do much more to impede ISIS's funding while avoiding the risk of civilian casualties."

'The Oil Weapon'

In a [recent TomDispatch essay](#) discussing the targeting of oil infrastructure in Syria, Klare argued that the U.S. government—once on the receiving end of oil embargoes—has now initiated a new strategy of using "the oil weapon" by threatening sanctions, or in Syria's case – targeted airstrikes, to impede the ability of enemies to operate. According to Klare:

When first employed, the oil weapon was intended to exploit the industrial world's heavy dependence on petroleum imports from the Middle East. Over time, however, those producing countries became ever more dependent on oil revenues to finance their governments and enrich their citizens.

Washington now seeks to exploit this by selectively denying access to world oil markets, whether through sanctions or the use of force, and so depriving hostile producing powers of operating revenues.

The most dramatic instance of this came on September 23rd, when American aircraft [bombed](#) refineries and other oil installations in areas of Syria controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL or IS). An extremist insurgent movement that has declared a new "caliphate," ISIS is not, of course, a major oil producer, but it has taken control of oil fields and refineries that once were operated by the regime of Bashar al-Assad in eastern Syria. The revenue generated by these fields, reportedly [\\$1 to \\$2 million](#) daily, is being used by ISIS to generate a significant share of its operating expenses. This has given that movement the wherewithal to [finance](#) the further recruitment and support of thousands of foreign fighters, even as it sustains a high tempo of combat operations.

Black-market dealers in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey have evidently been [assisting](#) ISIS in this effort, purchasing the crude at a discount and selling at global market rates, now hovering at about \$90 per barrel. Ironically, this clandestine export network was initially established in the 1990s by Saddam Hussein's regime to evade U.S. sanctions on Iraq.

The Islamic State has proven [adept](#) indeed at exploiting the fields under its control, even selling the oil to agents of opposing forces, [including](#) the Assad regime. To stop this flow, Washington launched what is planned to be a [long-term air campaign](#) against those fields and their associated infrastructure. By bombing them, President Obama evidently hopes to curtail the movement's export earnings and thereby diminish its combat capabilities. These strikes, he [declared](#) in announcing the bombing campaign, are intended to "take out

terrorist targets” and “cut off ISIL’s financing.”

It is too early to assess the impact of the air strikes on ISIS’s capacity to pump and sell oil. However, since the movement has been producing only [about 80,000 barrels](#) per day (roughly 1/1,000th of worldwide oil consumption), the attacks, if successful, are not expected to have any significant impact on a global market already increasingly glutted, in part because of an [explosion](#) of drilling in that “new Saudi Arabia,” the United States.

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Obama Charged with ‘Imperial Hubris’ Unmatched Even by Bush

Published on Friday, September 12, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

A day after President Obama told the American public he was preparing to bomb targets inside the sovereign state of Syria and that he did not need congressional approval to do so, critics are lashing out against what Bruce Ackerman, a professor of law and political science at Yale University, described as “imperial hubris” on Friday.

In his scathing op-ed in the *New York Times*, Ackerman [writes](#):

President Obama’s [declaration of war](#) against the terrorist group known as the [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria](#) marks a decisive break in the American constitutional tradition. Nothing attempted by his predecessor, [George W. Bush](#),

remotely compares in imperial hubris.

Mr. Bush gained explicit congressional consent for his invasions of Afghanistan and [Iraq](#). In contrast, the Obama administration has not even published a legal opinion attempting to justify the president's assertion of unilateral war-making authority. This is because no serious opinion can be written.

This became clear when White House officials briefed reporters before Mr. Obama's speech to the nation on Wednesday evening. They said a war against ISIS was justified by Congress's authorization of force against Al Qaeda after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and that [no new approval was needed](#).

But the 2001 [authorization for the use of military force](#) does not apply here. That resolution – scaled back from what Mr. Bush initially wanted – extended only to nations and organizations that “planned, authorized, committed or aided” the 9/11 attacks.

And Ackerman's not alone.

Robert Chesney, a professor at the University of Texas School of Law, told the [Daily Beast](#) this week that Obama's claim of authority to bomb ISIS targets in Syria was “on its face” an “implausible argument.”

“The 2001 AUMF requires a nexus to al Qaeda or associated forces of al Qaeda fighting the United States,” explained Chesney, but “since ISIS broke up with al Qaeda it's hard to make” the case that authority granted by the AUMF still applies.

And as *The Nation* magazine's Zoë Carpenter [reports](#):

The White House's dismissal of the need for congressional approval is also in conflict with positions Obama himself

expressed as a presidential candidate. "The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation," Obama [declared](#) to The Boston Globe in 2008.

The situation in Iraq and Syria does not appear to meet that standard. Obama acknowledged on Wednesday that "[w]e have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland." Meanwhile, intelligence sources say that the threat from ISIS has been grossly exaggerated. "It's hard to imagine a better indication of the ability of elected officials and TV talking heads to spin the public into a panic, with claims that the nation is [honeycombed with sleeper cells](#), that operatives are streaming across the border into Texas or that the group will soon be spraying Ebola virus on mass transit systems—all on the basis of no corroborated information," former State Department counterterrorism adviser Daniel Benjamin [told The New York Times](#).

According to Ackerman, the president has put himself in a perilous position.

"The president seems grimly determined to practice what Mr. Bush's lawyers only preached," the Yale professor concludes in his op-ed. "He is acting on the proposition that the president, in his capacity as commander in chief, has unilateral authority to declare war. In taking this step, Mr. Obama is not only betraying the electoral majorities who twice voted him into office on his promise to end Bush-era abuses of executive authority. He is also betraying the Constitution he swore to uphold."

And Carpenter says that in addition to defying Congress and his constitutional obligations, Obama should also be worried about the implications for his new strategy under international law. She writes:

It's worth noting that the legality of an extended cross-border campaign isn't only a question of the separation of powers. As Eli Lake [noted](#) at The Daily Beast, the White House has not explained the basis for the strikes under international law.


While the administration's current attempt to circumnavigate Congress is hypocritical as well as potentially illegal, it's also consistent with the way Obama has exercised US military power before. As Spencer Ackerman [notes](#), he's extended drone strikes across the Middle East and North Africa; initiated a seven-month air campaign in Libya without congressional approval; prolonged the war in Afghanistan; and, in recent months, ordered more than 1,000 troops back into Iraq. Promises of no boots on the ground notwithstanding, Obama's war footprint is large, and expanding.

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Obama: 'I Believe in American Exceptionalism with Every Fiber of My Being'

Published on Wednesday, May 28, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

– Jon Queally, staff writer

 President Barack Obama arrives to deliver the commencement address to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point's Class of 2014, Wednesday, May 28, 2014, in West Point, N.Y. (Photo: AP) In a speech rife with incongruities and contradictions,

President Obama set out his vision and defense of U.S. foreign policy on Wednesday at the West Point Military Academy in New York.

In the speech, Obama announced that he believes "in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being" and spoke repeatedly about "American leadership" and "American strength."

Progressives and foreign policy experts on the left, however, were quick to criticize the president's speech from various angles via their Twitter accounts with many noting that for all his grand rhetoric on the nation's special place in the world, the United States under his leadership has done little to inspire and much to undermine such a role. From assaults on human rights and the flouting of international law to serves its own interests, many critics charge, the United States continues to export militarism while undermining efforts to create a more just and peaceful world.

A sampling:

Obama at [#westpoint](#) Talks re hardest lesson of Iraq and Afghanistan? How about this one: Don't invade other countries.

– CODEPINK (@codepink) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama: "I'm haunted by those deaths" – of [#wespoint](#) cadets, but not civilian victims of US aggression.

– Sam Hussein (@samhousseini) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama says military will now explain its actions more clearly to the public. [#AFRICOM](#) will you answer my many pending questions now? embed?

– Nick Turse (@NickTurse) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama touts US exceptionalism at [#westpoint](#). Exceptionally arrogant, no?

– Medea Benjamin (@medeabenjamin) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama says we have to lead by example. Torture? Indefinite detention? Drone attacks? [#westpoint](#)

– Medea Benjamin (@medeabenjamin) [May 28, 2014](#)

"We must not create more enemies than we take off the battlefield"—then time to take the drones out of Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia. [#WestPoint](#)

– Chase Madar (@ChMadar) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama authorized 425 drone strikes, killing over 3,200 people. The size of AQ-affiliated groups has not diminished.

– Micah Zenko (@MicahZenko) [May 28, 2014](#)

Obama offers three straw-men of IR (realism, interventionism, isolationism), then a false dichotomy about military force (all or nothing).

– Micah Zenko (@MicahZenko) [May 28, 2014](#)

The president's remarks, as prepared for delivery by the White House, follow:

Good morning. Thank you, General Caslen, for that

introduction. To General Trainor, General Clarke, and the faculty and staff at West Point – you have been outstanding stewards of this proud institution, and excellent mentors for the newest officers in the United States Army. I'd like to acknowledge the Army's leadership – Secretary McHugh and General Odierno, as well as Senator Jack Reed – a proud graduate of West Point himself.

To the class of 2014, I congratulate you on taking your place on the Long Gray Line. Among you is the first all-female command team: Erin Mauldin and Austen Boroff. In Calla Glavin, you have a Rhodes Scholar, and Josh Herbeck proves that West Point accuracy extends beyond the three point line. To the entire class, let me reassure you in these final hours at West Point: as Commander-in-Chief, I hereby absolve all cadets who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. Let me just say that nobody ever did that for me when I was in school.

I know you join me in extending a word of thanks to your families. Joe DeMoss, whose son James is graduating, spoke for many parents when he wrote me a letter about the sacrifices you have made. "Deep inside," he wrote, "we want to explode with pride at what they are committing to do in the service of our country." Like several graduates, James is a combat veteran. And I would like to ask all of us here today to stand and pay tribute – not only to the veterans among us, but to the more than 2.5 million Americans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their families.

It is a particularly useful time for America to reflect on those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom – for you are the first class to graduate since 9/11 who may not be sent into combat in Iraq or Afghanistan. When I first spoke at West Point in 2009, we still had more than 100,000 troops in Iraq. We were preparing to surge in Afghanistan. Our counter-terrorism efforts were focused on al Qaeda's core leadership. And our nation was just beginning a long climb out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Four and a half years later, the landscape has changed. We have removed our troops from Iraq. We are winding down our war in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda's leadership in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been decimated, and Osama bin Laden is no more. Through it all, we have refocused our investments in a key source of American strength: a growing economy that can provide opportunity here at home.

In fact, by most measures, America has rarely been stronger relative to the rest of the world. Those who argue otherwise – who suggest that America is in decline, or has seen its global leadership slip away – are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics. Think about it. Our military has no peer. The odds of a direct threat against us by any nation are low, and do not come close to the dangers we faced during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, our economy remains the most dynamic on Earth; our businesses the most innovative. Each year, we grow more energy independent. From Europe to Asia, we are the hub of alliances unrivalled in the history of nations. America continues to attract striving immigrants. The values of our founding inspire leaders in parliaments and new movements in public squares around the globe. And when a typhoon hits the Philippines, or girls are kidnapped in Nigeria, or masked men occupy a building in Ukraine – it is America that the world looks to for help. The United States is the one indispensable nation. That has been true for the century passed, and will likely be true for the century to come.

But the world is changing with accelerating speed. This presents opportunity, but also new dangers. We know all too well, after 9/11, just how technology and globalization has put power once reserved for states in the hands of the individual, raising the capacity of terrorists to do harm. Russia's aggression toward former Soviet states unnerves capitals in Europe, while China's economic rise and military reach worries its neighbors. From Brazil to India, rising

middle classes compete with our own, and governments seek a greater say in global forums. And even as developing nations embrace democracy and market economies, 24 hours news and pervasive social media makes it impossible to ignore sectarian conflicts, failing states and popular uprisings that might have received only passing notice a generation ago.

It will be your generation's task to respond to this new world. The question we face – the question you will face – is not whether America will lead, but how we will lead, not just to secure our peace and prosperity, but also to extend peace and prosperity around the globe.

This question isn't new. At least since George Washington served as Commander-in-Chief, there have been those who warned against foreign entanglements that do not touch directly on our security or economic well-being. Today, according to self-described realists, conflicts in Syria or Ukraine or the Central African Republic are not ours to solve. Not surprisingly, after costly wars and continuing challenges at home, that view is shared by many Americans.

A different view, from interventionists on the left and right, says we ignore these conflicts at our own peril; that America's willingness to apply force around the world is the ultimate safeguard against chaos, and America's failure to act in the face of Syrian brutality or Russian provocations not only violates our conscience, but invites escalating aggression in the future.

Each side can point to history to support its claims. But I believe neither view fully speaks to the demands of this moment. It is absolutely true that in the 21st century, American isolationism is not an option. If nuclear materials are not secure, that could pose a danger in American cities. As the Syrian civil war spills across borders, the capacity of battle-hardened groups to come after us increases. Regional aggression that goes unchecked – in southern Ukraine, the

South China Sea, or anywhere else in the world – will ultimately impact our allies, and could draw in our military.

Beyond these narrow rationales, I believe we have a real stake – an abiding self-interest – in making sure our children grow up in a world where school-girls are not kidnapped; where individuals aren't slaughtered because of tribe or faith or political beliefs. I believe that a world of greater freedom and tolerance is not only a moral imperative – it also helps keep us safe.

But to say that we have an interest in pursuing peace and freedom beyond our borders is not to say that every problem has a military solution. Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures – without thinking through the consequences; without building international support and legitimacy for our action, or leveling with the American people about the sacrifice required. Tough talk draws headlines, but war rarely conforms to slogans. As General Eisenhower, someone with hard-earned knowledge on this subject, said at this ceremony in 1947: "War is mankind's most tragic and stupid folly; to seek or advise its deliberate provocation is a black crime against all men."

Like Eisenhower, this generation of men and women in uniform know all too well the wages of war. That includes those of you at West Point. Four of the service-members who stood in the audience when I announced the surge of our forces in Afghanistan gave their lives in that effort. More were wounded. I believe America's security demanded those deployments. But I am haunted by those deaths. I am haunted by those wounds. And I would betray my duty to you, and to the country we love, if I sent you into harm's way simply because I saw a problem somewhere in the world that needed fixing, or because I was worried about critics who think military intervention is the only way for America to avoid looking weak.

Here's my bottom line: America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. The military that you have joined is, and always will be, the backbone of that leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only – or even primary – component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail. And because the costs associated with military action are so high, you should expect every civilian leader – and especially your Commander-in-Chief – to be clear about how that awesome power should be used.

Let me spend the rest of my time, then, describing my vision for how the United States of America, and our military, should lead in the years to come.

First, let me repeat a principle I put forward at the outset of my presidency: the United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it – when our people are threatened; when our livelihood is at stake; or when the security of our allies is in danger. In these circumstances, we still need to ask tough questions about whether our action is proportional, effective and just. International opinion matters. But America should never ask permission to protect our people, our homeland, or our way of life.

On the other hand, when issues of global concern that do not pose a direct threat to the United States are at stake – when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction – then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilize allies and partners to take collective action. We must broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development; sanctions and isolation; appeals to international law and – if just, necessary, and effective – multilateral military action. We must do so because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained, and less likely to lead to costly

mistakes.

This leads to my second point: for the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America at home and abroad remains terrorism. But a strategy that involves invading every country that harbors terrorist networks is naïve and unsustainable. I believe we must shift our counter-terrorism strategy – drawing on the successes and shortcomings of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan – to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold.

This reflects the fact that today's principal threat no longer comes from a centralized al Qaeda leadership. Instead, it comes from decentralized al Qaeda affiliates and extremists, many with agendas focused in the countries where they operate. This lessens the possibility of large-scale 9/11-style attacks against the homeland, but heightens the danger to U.S. personnel overseas, as we saw in Benghazi; or less defensible targets, as we saw in a shopping mall in Nairobi. We need a strategy that matches this diffuse threat; one that expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military thin, or stir up local resentments.

Empowering partners is a large part of what we've done in Afghanistan. Together with our allies, America struck huge blows against al Qaeda core, and pushed back against an insurgency that threatened to overrun the country. But sustaining this progress depends on the ability of Afghans to do the job. That's why we trained hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police. Earlier this spring, those forces secured an election in which Afghans voted for the first democratic transfer of power in their history. At the end of this year, a new Afghan President will be in office, and America's combat mission will be over.

Now, as we move to a train and advise mission in Afghanistan, our reduced presence there will allow us to more effectively address emerging threats in the Middle East and North Africa.

Earlier this year, I asked my national security team to develop a plan for a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel. Today, as part of this effort, I am calling on Congress to support a new Counter-Terrorism Partnerships Fund of up to \$5 billion, which will allow us to train, build capacity, and facilitate partner countries on the front lines. These resources will give us flexibility to fulfill different missions, including training security forces in Yemen who have gone on the offensive against al Qaeda; supporting a multinational force to keep the peace in Somalia; working with European allies to train a functioning security force and border patrol in Libya; and facilitating French operations in Mali.

A critical focus of this effort will be the ongoing crisis in Syria. As frustrating as it is, there are no easy answers – no military solution that can eliminate the terrible suffering anytime soon. As President, I made a decision that we should not put American troops into the middle of this increasingly sectarian civil war, and I believe that is the right decision. But that does not mean we shouldn't help the Syrian people stand up against a dictator who bombs and starves his people. And in helping those who fight for the right of all Syrians to choose their own future, we also push back against the growing number of extremists who find safe-haven in the chaos.

With the additional resources I'm announcing today, we will step up our efforts to support Syria's neighbors – Jordan and Lebanon; Turkey and Iraq – as they host refugees, and confront terrorists working across Syrian borders. I will work with Congress to ramp up support for those in the Syrian opposition who offer the best alternative to terrorists and a brutal dictator. And we will continue to coordinate with our friends and allies in Europe and the Arab World – to push for a political resolution of this crisis, and make sure that those countries, and not just the United States, are contributing their fair share of support to the Syrian people.

Let me make one final point about our efforts against terrorism. The partnership I've described does not eliminate the need to take direct action when necessary to protect ourselves. When we have actionable intelligence, that's what we do – through capture operations, like the one that brought a terrorist involved in the plot to bomb our Embassies in 1998 to face justice; or drone strikes, like those we have carried out in Yemen and Somalia. But as I said last year, in taking direct action, we must uphold standards that reflect our values. That means taking strikes only when we face a continuing, imminent threat, and only where there is near certainty of no civilian casualties. For our actions should meet a simple test: we must not create more enemies than we take off the battlefield.

I also believe we be more transparent about both the basis for our actions, and the manner in which they are carried out – whether it is drone strikes, or training partners. I will increasingly turn to our military to take the lead and provide information to the public about our efforts. Our intelligence community has done outstanding work and we must continue to protect sources and methods. But, when we cannot explain our efforts clearly and publicly, we face terrorist propaganda and international suspicion; we erode legitimacy with our partners and our people; and we reduce accountability in our own government.

This issue of transparency is directly relevant to a third aspect of American leadership: our efforts to strengthen and enforce international order.

After World War II, America had the wisdom to shape institutions to keep the peace and support human progress – from NATO and the United Nations, to the World Bank and IMF. Though imperfect, these institutions have been a force multiplier – reducing the need for unilateral American action, and increased restraint among other nations. But just as the world has changed, this architecture must change as well. At

the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy spoke about the need for a peace based upon, "a gradual evolution in human institutions." Evolving these institutions to meet the demands of today must be a critical part of American leadership.

Of course, skeptics often downplay the effectiveness of multilateral action. For them, working through international institutions, or respecting international law, is a sign of weakness. I think they're wrong. Let me offer just two examples why.

In Ukraine, Russia's recent actions recall the days when Soviet tanks rolled into Eastern Europe. But this isn't the Cold War. Our ability to shape world opinion helped isolate Russia right away. Because of American leadership, the world immediately condemned Russian actions. Europe and the G-7 joined with us to impose sanctions. NATO reinforced our commitment to Eastern European allies. The IMF is helping to stabilize Ukraine's economy. OSCE monitors brought the eyes of the world to unstable parts of Ukraine. This mobilization of world opinion and institutions served as a counterweight to Russian propaganda, Russian troops on the border, and armed militias. This weekend, Ukrainians voted by the millions; yesterday, I spoke to their next President. We don't know how the situation will play out, and there will be grave challenges. But standing with our allies on behalf of international order has given a chance for the Ukrainian people to choose their future.

Similarly, despite frequent warnings from the United States, Israel, and others, the Iranian nuclear program steadily advanced for years. But at the beginning of my presidency, we built a coalition that imposed sanctions on the Iranian economy, while extending the hand of diplomacy to the Iranian government. Now, we have an opportunity to resolve our differences peacefully. The odds of success are still long, and we reserve all options to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But for the first time in a decade, we have a

very real chance of achieving a breakthrough agreement – one that is more effective and durable than what would be achieved through the use of force. And throughout these negotiations, it has been our willingness to work through multilateral channels that kept the world on our side.

This is American leadership. This is American strength. In each case, we built coalitions to respond to a specific challenge. Now we need to do more to strengthen the institutions that can anticipate and prevent them from spreading. For example, NATO is the strongest alliance the world has ever known. But we are now working with NATO allies to meet new missions – within Europe, where our Eastern allies must be reassured; and also beyond Europe's borders, where our NATO allies must pull their weight to counter-terrorism, respond to failed states, and train a network of partners.

Likewise, the UN provides a platform to keep the peace in states torn apart by conflict. Now we need to make sure that those nations who provide peace-keepers have the training and equipment to keep the peace, so that we can prevent the type of killing we have seen in Congo and Sudan. We are deepening our investment in countries that support these missions. Because having other nations maintain order in their own neighborhoods lessens the need for us to put our own troops in harm's way. It is a smart investment. It's the right way to lead.

Keep in mind, not all international norms relate directly to armed conflict. In the face of cyber-attacks, we are working to shape and enforce rules of the road to secure our networks and citizens. In the Asia Pacific, we are supporting Southeast Asian nations as they negotiate a code of conduct with China on the South China Sea, and are working to resolve territorial and maritime disputes through international law. That spirit of cooperation must energize the global effort to combat climate change – a creeping national security crisis that will help shape your time in uniform, as we're called on to respond

to refugee flows, natural disasters, and conflicts over water and food. That's why, next year, I intend to make sure America is out front in a global framework to preserve our planet.

You see, American influence is always stronger when we lead by example. We cannot exempt ourselves from the rules that apply to everyone else. We can't call on others to make commitments to combat climate change if so many of our political leaders deny that it is taking place. It's a lot harder to call on China to resolve its maritime disputes under the Law of the Sea Convention when the United States Senate has refused to ratify it – despite the repeated insistence of our top military leaders that the treaty advances our national security. That's not leadership; that's retreat. That's not strength; that's weakness. And it would be utterly foreign to leaders like Roosevelt and Truman; Eisenhower and Kennedy.

I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being. But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law; it's our willingness to affirm them through our actions. That's why I will continue to push to close GTMO – because American values and legal traditions don't permit the indefinite detention of people beyond our borders. That's why we are putting in place new restrictions on how America collects and uses intelligence – because we will have fewer partners and be less effective if a perception takes hold that we are conducting surveillance against ordinary citizens. America does not simply stand for stability, or the absence of conflict, no matter what the price; we stand for the more lasting peace that can only come through opportunity and freedom for people everywhere.

Which brings me to the fourth and final element of American leadership: our willingness to act on behalf of human dignity. America's support for democracy and human rights goes beyond idealism – it's a matter of national security. Democracies are our closest friends, and are far less likely to go to war. Free and open economies perform better, and become markets for

our goods. Respect for human rights is an antidote to instability, and the grievances that fuel violence and terror.

A new century has brought no end to tyranny. In capitals around the globe – including some of America's partners – there has been a crackdown on civil society. The cancer of corruption has enriched too many governments and their cronies, and enraged citizens from remote villages to iconic squares. Watching these trends, or the violent upheaval in parts of the Arab World, it is easy to be cynical.

But remember that because of America's efforts – through diplomacy and foreign assistance, as well as the sacrifices of our military – more people live under elected governments today than any time in human history. Technology is empowering civil society in ways that no iron fist can control. New breakthroughs are lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty. And even the upheaval of the Arab World reflects the rejection of an authoritarian order that was anything but stable, and offers the long-term prospect of more responsive and effective governance.

In Egypt, we acknowledge that our relationship is anchored in security interests – from the peace treaty with Israel, to shared efforts against violent extremism. So we have not cut off cooperation with the new government. But we can and will persistently press for the reforms that the Egyptian people have demanded.

Meanwhile, look at a country like Burma, which only a few years ago was an intractable dictatorship, hostile to the United States. Thanks to the enormous courage of the people in that country – and because we took the diplomatic initiative – we have seen political reforms opening a once closed society; a movement away from partnership with North Korea in favor of engagement with America and our allies. We are now supporting reform – and badly needed national reconciliation – through assistance and investment; coaxing and, at times, public

criticism. Progress could be reversed. But if Burma succeeds, we will have gained a new partner without having fired a shot.

In all these cases, we should not expect change to happen overnight. That's why we form alliances – not only with governments, but with ordinary people. For unlike other nations, America is not afraid of individual empowerment, we are strengthened by it – by civil society and transparency; by striving entrepreneurs and small businesses; by educational exchange and opportunity for women and girls. That's who we are. That's what we represent.

I saw that throughout my trip to Africa last year. American assistance has made possible the prospect of an AIDS-free generation, while helping Africans care for their sick. We are helping farmers get their products to market, and feeding populations once endangered by famine. We aim to double access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa, so people are connected to the promise of the global economy.

All this creates new partners and shrinks the space for terrorism. Tragically, no American security operation can eradicate the threat posed by an extremist group like Boko Haram. That is why we must focus both on rescuing those girls, but also on supporting Nigerian efforts to educate its youth. Indeed, this should be one of the hard-earned lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, where our military became the strongest advocate for diplomacy and development. Foreign assistance isn't an afterthought – something nice to do apart from our national defense. It's part of what makes us strong.

Ultimately, global leadership requires us to see the world as it is, with all its danger and uncertainty. But American leadership also requires us to see the world as it should be – a place where the aspirations of individual human beings matter; where hopes and not just fears govern; where the truths written into our founding documents can steer the currents of history in the direction of justice. And we cannot

do that without you.

Graduates, you have taken this time to prepare on the quiet banks of the Hudson. You leave this place to carry forward a legacy that no other military in human history can claim. And you do so as part of a team that extends beyond your units or even our Armed Forces. In the course of your service, you will work as a team with diplomats and development experts. You will get to know allies and train partners. You will embody what it means for America to lead.

Next week, I will go to Normandy to honor the men who stormed the beaches. And while it is hard for many Americans to comprehend the courage and sense of duty that guided those who boarded small ships, it is familiar to you. At West Point, you define what it means to be a patriot.

Three years ago, Gavin White graduated from this Academy. He then served in Afghanistan. Like the soldiers who came before him, he was in a foreign land, helping people he'd never met, putting himself in harm's way for the sake of his people back home. Gavin lost one of his legs in an attack. I met him last year at Walter Reed. He was wounded, but just as determined as the day that he arrived here. He developed a simple goal. Today, his sister Morgan will graduate. And true to his promise, Gavin will be there to stand and exchange salutes with her.

We have been through a long season of war. We have faced trials that were not foreseen, and divisions about how to move forward. But there is something in Gavin's character, and America's character, that will always triumph. Leaving here, you carry with you the respect of your fellow citizens. You will represent a nation with history and hope on our side. Your charge, now, is not only to protect our country, but to do what is right and just. As your Commander-in-Chief, I know you will. May God bless you. May God bless our men and women in uniform. And may God bless the United States of America.

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[Calls for Justice After Video Reveals IDF Shooting of Innocent Palestinian Teens](#)

Published on Tuesday, May 20, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

Rights group says killings amount to "war crimes," demands international probe

– Lauren McCauley, staff writer

International outcry and condemnation came swiftly on Tuesday following the release of video footage showing two innocent Palestinian teenagers being shot dead by Israeli forces.

[According](#) to rights group Defense for Children International – Palestine, which obtained and circulated the security camera footage, Nadeem Siam Nawara, 17, and Mohammad Mahmoud Odeh, 16, sustained fatal gunshot wounds on May 15 by Israeli Defense Forces after participating in a demonstration near the Ofer military prison in the West Bank. The teens were there to mark Nakba (or Catastrophe) Day, which commemorates the 1948 mass displacement of Palestinians, and express solidarity with the hunger striking prisoners currently held in the detention center.

After the video was made public, assistant UN secretary general for political affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco demanded

an "independent and transparent" probe into the circumstances surrounding the boys' deaths.

"It is of serious concern that initial information appears to indicate that the two Palestinians killed were both unarmed and appeared to pose no direct threat," [said](#) Fernandez-Taranco.

"The UN calls for an independent and transparent investigation by the Israeli authorities into the two deaths, and urges Israel to ensure that its security forces strictly adhere to the basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials," he said at a briefing of the UN Security Council.

Though the closed circuit television footage showed some rocks being thrown by protesters early on, as one witness reported, "at the moment of the killings, nothing was going on and no stone throwing was taking place."

"The images captured on video show unlawful killings where neither child presented a direct and immediate threat to life at the time of their shooting," said Rifat Kassis, executive director of DCIP. "These acts by Israeli soldiers may amount to war crimes, and the Israeli authorities must conduct serious, impartial, and thorough investigations to hold the perpetrators accountable."

The video below contains graphic and disturbing footage:

After viewing the video, people demanding accountability for the killings flooded Twitter under the hashtag "#Justice4NadeemandMohammad."

[Tweets about "#Justice4NadeemandMohammad"](#)

Brad Parker, an attorney and International Advocacy Officer with DCIP, [told](#) *Vice News* that their organization is currently in discussion with the victims' families about

pursuing complaints with both the Israeli Army and international bodies. However, he is not optimistic that they will be successful.

"We think the likelihood of having an impartial, open and thorough investigation opened is very slim," he said. "But we think that the key to child protection in occupied Palestinian territories is accountability, because Israeli soldiers can do whatever they want at the moment with essentially no repercussions."

The teens' deaths raise the number of Palestinian children killed by Israeli forces in 2014 to four, according to data collected by DCIP. Since 2000, over 1,400 Palestinian children have been killed as a result of Israeli military and settler presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Reacting to the news, many expressed grief for the other Palestinian children whose deaths were not caught on camera.

I shudder to think how many other unspoken casualties there are or how many Nadeem & Mohammads have been killed.

[#Justice4NadeemandMohammad](#)

– Anam (@AnamR_Syed) [May 20, 2014](#)

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US Agents Whisked Out of

Yemen after Killing Two in Gunfight: Report

Published on Saturday, May 10, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

US Special Forces soldier and CIA agent reportedly killed two Yemeni men in botched kidnapping

– Jon Queally, staff writer

New [reporting](#) from the *New York Times* tells the story of how two U.S. agents—one from the CIA and the other a Special Forces soldier—were involved in a deadly incident more than a month ago that began in a barber shop in the Yemen capital of Sanaa and ended after two alleged assailants were killed in a gunfight.

Subsequently the U.S. officers—before news of the incident spread—were quickly extracted from the country with the blessing and quiet support of the Yemeni government.

[From](#) the *Times*:

News of the shootings comes at a perilous moment for the government of President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, whose collaboration with American drone strikes against suspected members of Al Qaeda is already a subject of seething resentment in Yemen. Yemenis believe, with some evidence, that the drone strikes often kill nearby civilians as well as their targets, so any indication that Mr. Hadi's government helped conceal the killing of Yemenis by American commandos could be problematic.

Violence in the country is increasing, and on Friday, militants attacked a checkpoint outside the presidential palace, apparently in retaliation for the government's

roughly 10-day offensive against Qaeda strongholds.

Exactly what the two Americans were doing at the time of the shooting on April 24 is unclear. Some American officials said they were merely getting a haircut in a barbershop on Hadda Street in Sana, in an upscale district frequently visited by foreigners, playing down any suggestions that they were engaged in a clandestine operation.

Late Friday, both the Pentagon and C.I.A. declined to comment on the shooting, and referred all questions to the State Department.

“We can confirm that, last month, two U.S. Embassy officers in Yemen fired their weapons after being confronted by armed individuals in an attempted kidnapping at a small commercial business in Sana,” a State Department spokeswoman, Marie Harf, said in an email response to questions from The New York Times. “Two of the armed individuals were killed. The Embassy officers are no longer in Yemen.”

With so little known about the details, those skeptical of the U.S. government's narrative of incident—at least at the moment—can do little more than speculate about alternative stories. But as suggested by investigative journalist Chris Woods, who has done extensive reporting on the CIA's clandestine drone operations in Yemen for the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, any government claims about overseas episodes like this should be treated with deep suspicion. In response to the *Times* coverage, Woods tweeted:

Nothing to see, move along now. CIA and JSOC operatives 'foil Yemen kidnapping', gun down 2 assailants in barbershop
<http://t.co/DpnsmMoToh>

– Chris Woods (@chrisjwoods) [May 10, 2014](#)

[Rachel Maddow: U.S. 'has no leg to stand on' lecturing Putin about Ukraine](#)

✘ [Rachel Maddow: U.S. 'has no leg to stand on' lecturing Putin about Ukraine](#) (via [Raw Story](#))

MSNBC host Rachel Maddow noted on Monday the “central awkwardness” in U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry chastising Russian President Vladimir Putin for invading Ukraine under, as Kerry put it, a “completely trumped-up pretext.”

“Absolutely...”

[Scahill and Rowley's "Dirty Wars" Nominated for Best Documentary Film](#)

✘

Published on Thursday, January 16, 2014 by [Common Dreams](#)

**“Holy Shit,” says Scahill as hopes rise
that prominent award can elevate
discussion of US drone war and Obama’s
“kill list” policies**

– Jon Queally, staff writer

The documentary film [“Dirty Wars,”](#) featuring independent journalist Jeremy Scahill whose [book of the same name](#) explores the rise of the U.S military’s secret war against global terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, has been nominated for this year’s Academy Award in the Best Feature Documentary category.

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Announced Thursday, the nomination will likely elevate the profile of the film, its director Rick Rowley, and the investigative work of Scahill that has tracked the use of

drones, assassination squads, and other controversial military strategies employed by both the Bush and Obama administrations.

As Scahill himself [expressed](#) when the film was placed on the Oscar short list:

*The hope with [the film] is that people pay attention to these stories, that Americans will know what happened to the Bedouin villagers in al-Majalah, Yemen, where three dozen women and children were killed in a U.S. cruise missile strike that the White House tried to cover up and allowed the Yemeni government to take credit for, or the people that are killed in night raids in Afghanistan or drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan. I mean, that's our hope with this. It's been our hope from the beginning. And so, you know, we're—in the 15 films that are on the short list for an Oscar, there are some incredible films on that. Jehane Noujaim's film, *The Square*, about the Egyptian revolution is—you know, it's a fantastic movie. *The Act of Killing*, of course, you had Joshua Oppenheimer on the show. And, I mean, there's just—we're honored to be in that field with people, and we just hope that this results in more attention being paid to this issue of the U.S. assassination program.*

Here's the [official list](#) of nominees as posted to the Oscar's website:

Documentary Feature

- ***“The Act of Killing”*** Joshua Oppenheimer and Signe Byrge Sørensen
- ***“Cutie and the Boxer”*** Zachary Heinzerling and Lydia Dean Pilcher
 - ***“Dirty Wars”*** Richard Rowley and Jeremy Scahill
 - ***“The Square”*** Jehane Noujaim and Karim Amer
- ***“20 Feet from Stardom”*** Nominees to be determined

Assuming he was responding to the news, Scahill's reaction was succinct:

HOLY SHIT!!!!

– *jeremy scahill (@jeremyscahill)* [January 16, 2014](#)

Watch the film's trailer:

And here is Scahill and Rowley appearing on Democracy Now! to discuss the film:

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