

JEREMY SCAHILL

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Jeremy Scahill is the award-winning National Security Correspondent for the *Nation* magazine and author of the best-sellers *Blackwater* and *Dirty Wars*. He has reported from war zones around the world. His work has sparked several congressional investigations. He is a founding editor of *The Intercept*. He is also the subject of the film *Dirty Wars*, which was nominated for an Academy Award.

I'm not a Democrat, I'm not a Republican. I'm a journalist. I'm not one person in public and another person in private. I think that as journalists it has to be who you are in your heart. Not a career that you think you have or a profession that you've chosen, but a way of being. That's why great journalism contributes to strengthening democratic institutions or strengthening movements for change. Because you're providing people with information that they can use to make informed decisions.

I covered the war in Yugoslavia during the 1999 NATO bombing. I repeatedly was in Iraq and Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria, where I covered the struggle of indigenous villagers against the multinational oil corporations, Chevron and Shell.

And when Hurricane Katrina happened, I had just gotten done doing extensive time in Iraq, and I went to New Orleans. I arrived there just a couple of days after the really bad flooding had begun. I didn't see any FEMA the whole time that I was there. The National Guard was deployed in Iraq by Bush at the time.

The second day I was there, I was in the French Quarter just walking around, and I saw these two New York City police officers. I live in Brooklyn, New York, and I saw these New York City police officers so I went up and started talking to them. I thought it was interesting. There's no FEMA, there's no National Guard, but why are there New York City police officers here? They had come down to volunteer, like a lot of people. Firefighters came from different parts of the country, police officers came from different parts of the country.

So I'm sort of shooting the shit with these officers when this compact car with no license plates on it pulls up in front of us. And out pop these massive, steroid-induced creatures, vaguely resembling men. They were like Incredible Hulk figures or something, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Huge men with wrap-around sunglasses and baseball hats with the logo of a bear paw in a sniper site on it. It was like a mercenary clown car. Ten of them somehow poured out of this little Yugo or whatever it was. They came up to us and they said to the officers, "Where are the rest of the Blackwater guys?" And without skipping a beat, the officers start to tell them. I had one of those moments where you kind of zone out. It was like do-do-do-do do-do-do-do. Blackwater? These guys get back into the mercenary clown car and they speed off. And I

said to the officers, "Blackwater? You mean like the guys in Iraq and Afghanistan?" They said, "Yes, they're all over the place down here." I said, "Wow. Where can I find them?" They said, "You can go either way on this street," implying that they were sort of everywhere.

So I walked down Bourbon Street and watched as these Blackwater guys were emptying out someone's apartment above a bar. They were throwing the mattress out, throwing the furniture out. And they draped an American flag and they draped a Blackwater flag over it. They had sort of taken up shop in the middle of the French Quarter as their headquarters. I ended up talking some of these guys. They had M4 assault rifles, they had Glock 9 pistols strapped to their legs. They were wearing full armor, those ridiculous wrap-around glasses. I was travelling at the time with a woman, and they were incredibly interested in her breasts. So we were able to talk with them because they primarily wanted to be around this woman. She and I were sort of playing good cop, bad cop, so these guys are all, like, "Hey, baby, what you doin' tonight?" And I'm, like, "So where were you in Iraq?" We had sort of plotted this out, and it happens like that sometimes.

Anyway, we talked to them. Many of them had been in Iraq. One guy had just been in Iraq two weeks earlier. And they told us that they were in New Orleans to protect FEMA. There's no FEMA there, but somehow the mercenaries were there. And one of them flashes a gold badge from underneath his armor and says, "We were deputized"—and he used that word, "deputized"—"by the governor of the state of Louisiana, and we can use lethal force. And they said that why they were there was to "confront criminals and stop looters." So I asked them, "Who hired you?" And they said, "Oh, that's above our pay grade."

So I started to inquire with the U.S. Government about this. At first they denied the story. And then they were forced to admit, because after I did a story, then the *Washington Post* followed up on it, that the Department of Homeland Security had hired Blackwater on a megamillion-dollar, no-bid contract to be the official protective force of FEMA. I don't know if FEMA has arrived yet in New Orleans, but the mercenaries on the no-bid contract were certainly there. It was like Baghdad on the Bayou down there: Halliburton, Bechtel, DynCorp,

Triple Canopy, Blackwater, all of these companies just descended. They went from the Persian Gulf to the U.S. Gulf, and they went from war profiteering to disaster profiteering.

I became obsessed with this company and with this development as a kind of microcosm of what was happening in the world, what was happening in the so-called war on terror, what was happening with the cronyism of the Bush-Cheney government, what was happening with the use of private forces, which, of course, is increasingly happening throughout our cities across the country in urban areas, where there's a move to privatize police forces. There is a paramilitarization of law enforcement in this country, where many, many entities that shouldn't have them have these huge SWAT-style teams.

I started digging into this company and learned that the founder and owner of Blackwater—it was not a publicly traded company—was a radical right-wing neocrusader whose family had been the major bankroller of the Republican revolution and gave the seed money to two organizations that would form the core of the radical religious right, one of which is based here in Colorado. James Dobson, of Focus on the Family, was able to start his organization because of the financial generosity of the family of Eric Prince, the owner of Blackwater. In fact, James Dobson gave the eulogy at Eric Prince's father's funeral. Gary Bauer, Family Research Council, started the Family Research Council with money given by Eric Prince's family. This is in the 1990s. At the time when Blackwater opened, the main source of income they thought that they were going to generate was by dealing with school shootings. Columbine, of course, had just happened. Blackwater responded to the Columbine shootings by creating a mock high school in the wilderness of North Carolina called RU Ready High. They invite the law enforcement from around the country to train in SWAT-style tactics to raid high schools to take down the violent youth of America. That was the whole point of the thing.

On 9/11, Blackwater's entire game changed. Eric Prince, the owner of Blackwater, was on Fox News, of course, a few days after 9/11. And he said, We were struggling to build this business and we were looking sort of domestically. After 9/11 our phone has been ringing off the hook. Among the first calls that came in to Blackwater were from the CIA. The CIA ended up hiring Blackwater to reactivate a network of former Special Operations soldiers and CIA paramilitaries to serve as a kind of off-the-radar hit team for the U.S. Government in the early stages of the so-called war on terror. So Blackwater began this relationship where they became essentially like a privatized wing of the CIA, of the Pentagon Special Operations Forces, and as a sort of Praetorian Guard for the Bush and Cheney administration.

I tracked that story of Blackwater for years around the globe. Of course, many people here are aware of the mass killings of civilians that happened in both Iraq and Afghanistan and the fact that no one from Blackwater ever paid any price, really, for any of the criminality that that company was engaged in. Not to mention the waste, fraud, and abuse of money, but just the war crimes that they were involved with committing.

It was through my reporting on Blackwater that I ended up being exposed to this entire world of covert forces. All of us know that the CIA has covert agencies. We know that there have been dirty tricks all around the world. We know that the military has been involved with those things. But when you actually come face to face with modern iterations of it, when you understand that sort of hidden history, it is chilling, the implications it has for any semblance of democracy in our country.

We are living in a moment where we have a Democratic president who won the Nobel Peace Prize, is a constitutional lawyer by training, and is presiding over what is effectively a global assassination program. The most devastating aspect of the Obama presidency, when it comes to what is called counterterrorism—although I think our policy encourages terrorism—and national security—although I think it undermines our national security—is not just that he's doing it but that he is asserting that he is right in doing it and that it is legitimate morally and legally to drone-bomb in countries anywhere where the U.S. pleases, to put people on kill lists who have not been charged with crimes and against whom we may not even have evidence that they are engaged in a terrorist plot against the U.S.

For all of the complaining about President Obama, that he's a Kenyan, a socialist—and when you turn on Fox News, they say Barack Hussein—and then there is like a long pause—Obama. They want the Hussein to really resonate with you. They want you to stew on that for a moment. But for all the conservatives and the neocons complaining about how this Marxist Manchurian candidate who really is the second coming of Stokely Carmichael and wants to resurrect Chairman Mao and put him in charge of our economy, for all of that talk, I guarantee you that Dick Cheney is sitting not so far from here in Wyoming, fly-fishing or something, having a good chuckle about all of this. Because if Barack Obama had not been elected president, many of the core programs that Bush and Cheney and Rumsfeld developed under the auspices of the so-called war and terror would not be expanding in the way that they are, would not be continued in some cases, and that they would not have the right to sort of say, We're going to continue the show the next time a Republican is in office. Barack Obama has legitimized policies and programs that I think many liberals would have been outraged over if a Republican had won in 2008.

Barack Obama, when he was running for president and then when he won the first time, said, “I’m going to have the most transparent administration in history.” Obama the constitutional lawyer would rail against the Cheney and Bush use of the state secrets privilege, which Cheney and Bush used widely to try to quash any attempt to hold them accountable. If families of Guantánamo prisoners who died under mysterious circumstances wanted to get information about those deaths—state secrets privilege. If someone wanted to understand the extent of the CIA’s assassination program—state secrets privilege. They would use it all the time. Obama, to his credit, on the campaign trail, where it’s much easier to do these things than when you’re in office, was railing against that and saying he was going to severely limit the use of the state secrets privilege.

His administration has used it more than Bush and Cheney, and he still has well over a year left in his term. So President Obama talked a good game when he was candidate Obama on many of these issues, but at the end of the day, they have expanded and continued the most egregious aspects of the Bush-Cheney so-called counterterrorism apparatus. The life’s work of Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney boiled down to one of the ideas in the *Federalist Papers*, and that was the idea of the unitary executive—the idea that when it came to foreign policy, when it came to security policy, there should essentially be a dictatorship of the executive branch, and that Congress’s only role in those programs for securing and defending the nation is funding. That Congress doesn’t actually have a say in overseeing the activities of the executive branch when national security is in question. They believed that Iran Contra not only wasn’t a scandal but was a model for how the United States should conduct its foreign policy militarily and use its CIA forces and other intelligence forces. In fact, Dick Cheney was a member of Congress when Iran Contra was being investigated, and he wrote the minority report defending Iran Contra.

These guys came up with the idea of the widespread use of executive orders and signing statements by the White House. You will hear sometimes that the president has issued an executive order or a signing statement. The idea behind that in the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld world was to undermine any ability of Congress to have a say in a variety of policies based on laws that were bills passed by Congress and then signed into law by presidents. So presidents could say, We don’t like this aspect of this bill that we signed into law, so we’re going to issue a signing statement that overrides it. Many of those are classified. Reagan loved doing that, George H.W. Bush loved doing that, Clinton did it, less than them but continued it.

Obama loves those signing statements. They’ve used them repeatedly to justify their drone program, to justify continuing the rendition program, to justify various assaults on civil liberties in this country, to justify giving

aid to human-rights-abusing governments around the world who use child soldiers or who are involved in systematic human rights abuses. They use this secret process that is thoroughly and fundamentally antidemocratic to continue to support despots, dictators, what are effectively death squads, or policies that, if they were brought out into the light, most Americans would find deeply offensive and many lawyers would say are extralegal if not totally unconstitutional. So President Obama in doing this has actually helped to realize the life’s work of Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney.

Let’s be clear. Rumsfeld and Cheney were Murder Incorporated. They were a killing machine around the world. They empowered war corporations in an unprecedented manner. I don’t think it’s a helpful discussion to ask, Is Obama worse than Bush? On a level of pure killing it would be really hard to match what Bush and Cheney did. But in terms of damage to the cause of justice, in terms of damage to the reputation of the U.S. around the world, it would be hard to quantify just how much has been done under this administration. Imagine the perception of the message being sent by the U.S. around the world when this figure Barack Obama becomes president, who is widely viewed as this transformative guy who says, I’m going to hit the reset button with the Muslim and Arab world, and then proceeds to continue the same kinds of policies.

Barack Obama has conducted more drone strikes in Pakistan than Bush and Cheney ever did. In fact, he did more drone strikes in his first term in office than Bush did in two full terms in the White House. Obama expanded the use of what are called signature strikes. There are two kinds of drone strikes. One is a personality strike, so you have an individual whose identity you know, you have evidence that they’re involved with terrorism plots or criminal activity, and you say, We’re going to take this person out. So you go and you find them and you kill them in a drone strike. I have all sorts of problems with that, but that’s one kind of drone strike. What Obama’s administration started doing very, very early on—and this had only been done a couple of times under President Bush—are signature strikes. They mapped out certain areas of Pakistan and ultimately then certain areas of Yemen, and they said, If we do a drone strike in this area, and we kill people who are of military age and they’re male, we will posthumously declare them to be terrorists. We in fact don’t have to know the identities of the people we’re targeting. If the data on their phone indicates that they’re in contact with a certain number of dangerous people, if they live in a certain area, if they’re around these other people, we’re going to assume that they’re going to be up to no good someday, and it’s better to kill them before they kill us. That’s essentially what this White House has embraced as its counterterrorism policy.

They’re engaged in preemptive war. But it’s not actually even a war, because it’s one side pummeling

another on the vague idea that maybe one day these people are going to be engaged in a plot that may or may not succeed against the U.S. That's what it boils down to. It's not that Barack Obama is immune to the reality that civilians are being killed; it's that they're starting to believe their own propaganda, because they're posthumously just saying, Those people were all terrorists. So they've created a mathematical equation to figure out how many civilians are killed that almost always produces the number zero when civilians are in question.

I don't think that Barack Obama set out to engage in this kind of policy around the world. What I think happened is that once he got the nomination for president, he got his first all-access briefing. This was when he was still running for president. He hadn't beaten John McCain yet, but once you get the nomination of a major party, you're entitled to an all-access intelligence briefing from the CIA. So General Michael Hayden, who was the director of the CIA at the time, flew to Chicago and briefed Obama in the federal building after he had gotten the Democratic nomination for president. After he got that briefing, you could see a dramatic change in Obama's rhetoric. He started to become much more militaristic, much more fascinated by the idea of striking terrorists before they strike us, of violating the sovereignty of other nations, for instance, to go and track down Osama bin Laden, something that John McCain stupidly, in terms of conventional politics, attacked Barack Obama for saying.

Then Obama comes into office, and he is overwhelmed by the beast—the beast being the permanent national security apparatus in the U.S. This is a beast that includes huge, powerful players in the military-industrial complex, it includes lifers at the CIA, lifers at the NSA, lifers at the Pentagon, lifers in the 16 intelligence agencies in the U.S. That beast—it's not like the Bilderberg Group or the Illuminati—does not have to be run by one person. It has a life of its own. Its primary objective is its own survival. You don't need to have a conspiracy where one head on this Hydra knows what the other one is doing. They all work in unison, and they overwhelm every president who comes in with the threat matrix. There are thousands of concurrent threats against the U.S. There are people, Mr. President, that are going to be blowing up our embassies around the world, that are going to be engaged in gas attacks against our subways, that are going to try to blow up major sporting events. And they just inundate these guys right when they come into office with every possible threat that could happen. And they always say, If we don't do X, Y, and Z, we're going to get hit, and we're going to get hit hard.

Then you have people like Rahm Emanuel and David Axelrod, the political hacks. They're sitting and they're listening to all of this, and they're envisioning what a one-term presidency looks like if there's an attack inside the U.S.

Obama had campaigned on a pledge not to deploy U.S. troops except in the surge in Afghanistan. So who comes in and offers him a solution on platter? These guys from something called the Joint Special Operations Command, headed for a long time by General Stanley McChrystal and at the time Obama became president headed by Admiral William McRaven. They basically say, We have the capacity, Mr. President, to use Navy Seals, Delta Force commandos, the best pilots in the world. We can engage in covert activities on the ground and through the use of weaponized drones where we will be able to preemptively kill the terrorists before they can engage in plots against us.

President Obama not only embraced JSOC and the CIA's paramilitary division as the implementers of this smarter counterterrorism policy, but he essentially made their perspective of kill/capture the entire counterterrorism policy of the U.S. Government, and in doing so, empowered these forces that had largely existed in the shadows and on the fringes of American foreign policy and put them at the center of everything.

Very early on in the Obama administration, they convince President Obama to start bombing Yemen. In December of 2009, President Obama authorizes the first strike in Yemen. JSOC and the CIA told him that he was hitting an al-Qaeda training camp. They didn't have enough drones to use there at the time because they were being used in Pakistan at the time for his escalated drone-bombing campaign, so they used cruise missiles with cluster munitions. I don't know if many of you know what a cluster bomb is, but it's basically like a flying land mine. It drops from the sky in a little parachute, and then it explodes over a multi-football-field radius and sends shrapnel in all directions. I've seen the aftermath of it the first time in the 1990s in Yugoslavia, and then later I saw it in Iraq. It shreds humans into ground beef if it hits them. It's horrifying. This was the weapon that they used. Most countries in the world have agreed to a ban on cluster bombs. The U.S. is one of the only countries in the world that continues to actively use cluster bombs. So they cluster-bomb this place that they've told President Obama is an al-Qaeda training facility. But they didn't say, "Hey, we bombed Yemen."

What happened is that the Yemeni government put out a press release saying that it had conducted air strikes against an al-Qaeda camp and they had killed 34 al-Qaeda members and it was very successful. The White House sent a cable of congratulations to the Yemeni dictator about his cooperation in fighting against terrorism. It turned out, though—and we know this because a Yemeni journalist went to the scene—that no other nation, certainly not Yemen, had the weapons that were used there that day. So the world then knew that the U.S. was starting to bomb Yemen. Munitions experts looked at all of the shrapnel, looked at the shell casings, looked at the

control system that was on the Tomahawk cruise missiles, and determined beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was the U.S. and that they had started bombing Yemen.

Then they started doing drone strikes in Yemen. And they started hunting people and they started creating these kill lists. Then they implemented these things called Terror Tuesday meetings. They sit around in secret and they actually use baseball-card-type graphics for statistics on potential people to kill. At times they have had baseball cards with teenage girls on them in certain Muslim countries. I don't know that there has ever been an authorized strike against a teenage girl, but they have ended up on the board. They're looking at these statistics, and through a secret process they're determining every week who should live or die around the world at the hands of U.S. drone strikes. This has replaced any semblance of a legal process for dealing with the crime of terrorism—a bunch of people meeting in secret inside of the White House discussing who should live and who should die.

The stories that I've been covering have a connection here to Fort Collins, because the first American citizen that we know of that was directly targeted for assassination on orders from President Obama was a guy named Anwar al-Awlaki, who actually went to school here at CSU. He was an American citizen who was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico. His father was here as a visiting scholar from Yemen. He was born here and ended up coming here for university. During the Gulf War in the early 1990s, he became politicized here in Fort Collins and then ended up moving to Denver, where he became an imam. In 1995, his first child was born in Denver, named Abdulrahman Awlaki.

Awlaki himself, the older, Anwar Awlaki, was a very many prominent imam on 9/11. He was head of a big religious center called Dar Al-Hijrah Religious Center in Falls Church, Virginia. I remember seeing him on TV, because he was condemning the 9/11 attacks, was condemning al-Qaeda, was talking about the perversion of the religion of Islam by Osama bin Laden and others, was arguing that the U.S. had a right to go into Afghanistan, and was generally considered a part of the discourse and dialogue in Washington. He was profiled in the *Washington Post*, he was on the *NewsHour* on PBS, he was on *Talk of the Nation* on NPR.

In addition to talking about 9/11, he also as an imam was dealing with the hate crimes against so many Muslims around the country, where businesses were being attacked and taxi drivers were being attacked and students were being attacked, and people were starting to disappear, and there was this whole thing about secret INS detention centers, and then Guantánamo opened up. And you see this sort of radicalization or politicization in Awlaki, where he starts to cross this line and starts to get sharper and sharper. He ends up leaving the U.S. and, to make a long story short, goes back to Yemen. He has an increase in the popularity of his sermons around the world. A lot of

young Muslims in the English-speaking diaspora were taken with his message, because he would include pop cultural references and was sort of living in modern times but telling older stories.

As he started to become more radical, the U.S. started to become concerned that he was going to inspire young people to potentially go to Afghanistan or elsewhere. So the U.S. tells Yemen to arrest Anwar Awlaki. They arrest him. This is the U.S. Government telling the human-rights-abusing government of Yemen to arrest one of their own citizens. Arrest Anwar Awlaki. We want him kept in prison for four or five years so that people forget about him. So they stick him in prison, and he ends up spending 18 months in prison, 17 in solitary confinement. He comes out of prison a totally changed person. His sermons become incredibly radical at that point. By the time Barack Obama comes into office, Anwar Awlaki had crossed the line from condemning U.S. wars around the world to actively calling on young people, young Muslims in the U.S., in Europe, and elsewhere, to engage in armed jihad in their own countries or to come to Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen and join the mujahideen there in fighting against the dictators of those countries but also against the U.S.

I've listened to probably a thousand hours of Anwar Awlaki talking and am very familiar with his trajectory. Then I've seen all of the YouTube videos. Anwar Awlaki, in my mind, had very reprehensible ideas about the world. I think that the U.S. Government probably could have made a case against him in some form or another, especially when he called specifically for the assassination of individual cartoonists who had drawn demeaning pictures of the Prophet Muhammad in their cartoons. He actually listed their names in a publication and said people should go and kill them, shoot them. There was a young woman in Seattle, Washington, who actually had to go underground, change her name, be relocated as a result of that threat.

I don't have all the intelligence or evidence that they have at the White House, and I am willing to believe that they had all sorts of evidence to indicate that Anwar Awlaki was involved in some sort of terrorism plot. They've never proven that, they've never shown that evidence, but I'm willing to give them the benefit of the doubt for purposes of this story. Let's say he's involved in all sorts of act of terrorism plotting.

Why not indict him? You know where he is. It's not like he's in Afghanistan murdering U.S. troops. You know where he is. He's in a place where you could probably snatch him fairly easily. They never indict him with a crime. Instead—and this is a U.S. citizen—they engage in this secret process where Mr. constitutional lawyer, Nobel Peace Prize winner serves as the prosecutor, the judge, the jury, and ultimately the executioner of a U.S. citizen they had never bothered to charge with a crime.

They killed him in a drone strike in September of 2011, when he was in a village that had 10 small dwellings in it in a rural part of Yemen. They made no actual attempt that we're aware of to try to capture him. There are some things that we've learned about this. There may have been an attempt that got aborted. But the point of it is, they knew where he was, they had him under surveillance for an entire month before they killed him, maybe longer, and then they killed him.

In that same strike where they killed Anwar Awlaki, they killed another American citizen named Samir Khan, who was a Pakistani American from North Carolina whose parents had actually been told shortly before he was killed that there were no charges against him, there was no indictment against him, and they were trying to encourage his parents to get him to come home. They told them that there were no charges against their son. He gets killed in that action.

So the news reaches the U.S. President Obama doesn't say, "We killed one of our own citizens." He announces that Anwar Awlaki has been killed in Yemen and that it's a great victory for the U.S. And for the first time he uses a label that al-Qaeda itself never used and Awlaki himself never claimed—President Obama called him "the head of external operations for al-Qaeda in the Arabian peninsula." Al-Qaeda is actually a remarkably transparent organization. They are very adept at taking credit for what they do and promoting their leaders and celebrating them as martyrs. They never claimed that he was a member of al-Qaeda. They certainly had an affinity for him, because his message was very consistent with theirs. But Obama labels him as "the head of external operations."

The reaction to the killing of these two American citizens in a drone strike, neither of whom had been charged with any kind of a crime, fell into two camps in Washington: silence or celebration. Hillary Clinton and John McCain sounded like twins separated at birth in praising the strike. The only actual objection came from Dennis Kucinich on the one hand and Ron Paul on the other. Almost no one else in Washington raised a peep about this. In fact, one member of Congress was so excited about the killing of Samir Khan, this other American, that he said, if he wasn't a target, then it was "a bonus," it was "a two-fer," like a two-for-one. They all talk in this sort of sports lingo. We're talking about killing people. We're talking about actions that are going to cause blowback and collateral damage.

Two weeks after this killing, Anwar Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman, who was born in Denver in August of 1995, was sitting at an outdoor restaurant with his teenage cousin. He had just turned 16 years old. He's sitting in this café—his father has been killed two weeks earlier—when a drone appears above them and a missile is fired and blows up the kid, his cousin, and their friends. The Obama administration has never explained why they

killed that kid. It's hard to imagine it's a coincidence that two weeks after you kill the father you kill the son. They haven't been able to identify a member of al-Qaeda that they actually killed. When the press reports first came out saying that Abdulrahman Awlaki, a 16-year-old American citizen, had been killed, an anonymous U.S. official said that he was 21 years old. Then the family produced his birth certificate from the State of Colorado showing that he had just turned 16. They tried to say, Well, he was at a meeting of al-Qaeda figures, and a guy named Ibrahim al-Banna was killed with him. Ibrahim al-Banna is still alive to this day.

Why was that drone strike authorized? I don't have the answer to it, but I know what it's very difficult to believe, which is that it was just a coincidence. In fact, I know from my own reporting that John Brennan, who now is the director of the CIA, said at the time that he didn't believe it could be a coincidence, and he ordered a review to figure out why the kid was killed. The White House will not release that review. In fact, they won't ever discuss any specific strikes. But the only public statement we really have from any U.S. official about this, other than anonymous officials saying it was an accident or he was collateral damage or all these things, was Robert Gibbs, who was the former White House press secretary. At the time he said what I am about to tell you, he was the spokesperson for President Obama's reelection campaign. He was asked by a young, independent reporter at one of those press gaggles after one of the debates about the killing of Abdulrahman Awlaki. What Robert Gibbs told him was, "He should have had a more responsible father." There are few things in history that are more reprehensible than blaming the killing of children on who their parents are—sins of the father, or whatever the saying. Robert Gibbs should be ashamed of himself, first of all.

The last time that I was on Rachel Maddow's show—and I'm not sure that I will ever be invited back—Robert Gibbs was on right before me. Because who is Robert Gibbs today? He is a paid pundit for MSNBC. So Robert Gibbs is on MSNBC right before me talking about the economy or something. I come on and I'm talking about what I'm telling you about, the Awlaki killings, with Rachel Maddow. At the beginning of the interview I said, "Well, Rachel, you just had on Robert Gibbs, who is on your payroll, and he should be ashamed of himself for what he said about this killing, because he said that Abdulrahman Awlaki should have had a more responsible father." Rachel Maddow was livid with me. She would barely say goodbye to me when I left. I have never been invited back on that show. I called out Robert Gibbs, who had just been on right before me.

Again, I don't know why that kid was killed. But the answer to why says a lot about who we are as a society. We don't define our values based on how we treat law-abiding citizens. We don't base our values on how we treat the people we like or how we view those in power,

whether we voted for them or not. When your principles are tested is when it's tough. Your principle on the death penalty is not tested on the exoneree or the person whose DNA evidence is going to save the day for. It's tested on someone who is dead guilty, who is a serial child murderer and rapist. That's where your principle is tested on whether you support or oppose the death penalty on moral grounds. If you're against it for those people, then that's an actual principle. If you start to say, "Well, I'm against it in this case and that case," that's politics.

The same is true of the times in which we live. It's easy—easy—to be against these things when cartoonish villains like Dick Cheney are in power. And I truly do imagine Dick Cheney sitting in a cave somewhere saying, "Let's [beep] the world today. I actually think that that guy—I don't see Obama in that way at all. I certainly don't want Republicans picking Supreme Court justices and having any control over the health care of women in our society. I definitely don't want Rand Paul to be running our economy. But at the same time, I don't want a guy who people think is such a great alternative to the Republicans' militarism cleaning up the empire so that it can continue on and justifying things that, if a Republican did them, people would be in the streets about. It's like many liberals have checked their consciences at the door of the Obama party. We're going to look back years from now and realize that lines were crossed here that we're never going to be able to go back and rethink those decisions. We have crossed some very, very serious lines.

I talked about the beast before, the national security beast. That beast knows that it can wait out any president, for four years or for eight years. Some presidents try to tangle with the beast or they maybe want to try to put it a little bit in the corner or cut some part of it off. But at the end of the day that beast knows that this is a war economy in this country, that the only beneficiaries of American foreign policy are huge corporations. Those are the only entities in our society that have benefited from any of this: major corporations who make a killing off of the killing. No matter what issue you organize around or you find important in your life, whether it is access to comprehensive health care for everyone, whether it's the struggle for immigrants to gain their rights and preserve their rights in this country, or it's police brutality or it's prisons or it's the environment or it's issues about war or neoliberal economic policies, whatever issues you find important in your day-to-day life, nothing will ever change in this society until we get corporations out of our political process. Nothing.

In some countries you take a suitcase full of cash and you pay off the dictator, and that's how it works. In this country we're a little more sophisticated. We have a legalized form of corruption and bribery called campaign finance. That's where corporations can purchase members of the U.S. Congress. And almost every single member of Congress is bought by some big corporate interest.

Ordinary people cannot compete with the huge bundling of these megacorporations, of the drowning of the airwaves in ads. The war industry knows which way the wind is blowing. If you want to know who is going to win any given election, start to track who the war industry is giving money to. They gave way more money to Barack Obama than they did to John McCain, because they knew from their own internal analysis that Barack Obama was going to win. What's interesting is that active-duty troops gave more contributions to Ron Paul than to any of the other candidates, which gives you a sense that when we're all told the military, hoo-ha, we're doing this for the troops, actually a lot of the troops are fed up with all of this and want it to end. I think that was a statement for why he got so much money from them.

We are at an all-time low in the state of media in our country. Why is that? It's because of an utter failure on the part of journalists and media organizations to present information to the American people that they can use to make informed decisions about what policies to support and what policies to oppose. Where I think we see an example of what really powerful media coverage is in the aftermath of these school shootings or incidents like the Boston Marathon bombing.

Remember, in the Boston Marathon bombing, three people were killed. One was an American citizen who was a woman who was a graduate student, another was a graduate student who was Chinese and she was from Taiwan, and then the third was this 8-year-old boy. How many of you remember the picture that that boy had drawn shortly before he was drawn up? It was a peace sign. It went viral all over Facebook and it was on the news. His parents, you watch them on TV, and their lips are quivering trying to explain how incredible their son was and not break down while they are doing it. Barack Obama spoke about those three people who died and he told stories about each of them, including this woman who was from Taiwan.

There was a blog post the next day that went viral around the Chinese-speaking world. The title of the blog post was "Where you die matters." The story that was told in it was, Barack Obama, the most powerful person in the world would never have said the name of that woman if she had died in a factory making components for iPhones that were destined for use in Western markets. But because she died in that bombing, her life actually mattered enough to be recognized by the most powerful person in the world.

I've thought a lot about that, and I've thought about the aftermath of the Newtown shooting. When I was watching all that coverage, the endless O.J. Simpson-style coverage we have of everything, and it's awful and sensationalized and horrible, I didn't have any real emotional reaction to watching that other than just being horrified at all these little kids being killed. But then the next day the front page of *The New York Times* was—I'm

sure people will remember this—was just the names and the ages of the people killed. This name, 6 years old; this name 7 years old; this name, 6 years old. I cried looking at that. I wondered, Why is that?

I've come to the realization that it's because looking at that list of names and seeing those ages, you can imagine someone you know, whether it's your child or your niece or your nephew or your cousin or your younger sibling. You see yourself in that story, you see your neighbor or your loved one in that story, so you have empathy. And it causes a reaction and it makes you ultimately, then, angry, and you say, "We have to do something about this in our society." We don't have enough of a debate in our society about guns, about legally purchased guns, not to mention guns that are being sold on the down low. But we had more of a discussion about it in this country than we had in a while. And why? It was because people were horrified and they empathized and they said, "This is enough. This can't keep happening."

What if our coverage of war looked like that, too? What if when we covered drone strikes in Yemen, we never used "collateral damage" or "casualties," but instead we actually understood the lives and deaths of those who live on the other side of the missiles. If we heard stories about a little girl in Yemen who was killed, a picture she had drawn a few days beforehand. Or if we learned about the heroic act of someone who, after a drone strike, ran and pulled someone out of a house that was burning? What if we knew those stories? I'm not saying that this would all end, but what I'm saying is that we would have totally different discussion in this country if we weren't just inundated with that crap reality television but instead had some part of our day spent reflecting on the lives involved in all of these wars—the lives lost, the soldiers who were killed, the civilians who are forced to live in that way, and the officials, many of whom never have their children in danger in these war zones, who seem all too willing to vote to have other people's children go to kill and be killed. If we had that, then we would have empathy. Then I think we would have a totally different debate in the country.

I really think that is part of our challenge in this society, is to get those corporations out of our lives and get empathy back into it. Thank you.

Q&A

Basic issues about corporate influence in the media. I think it's an interesting discussion. One thought, as you were talking, that popped into my head was how incredible these major acts of whistleblowing have been lately. If you think of everything that Chelsea Manning did, it started with the collateral murder video. Then there were the Iraq war logs that were released, the Afghan war

logs that were released. And then when all the State Department cables were released. We all, of course, followed that story. And what an incredible injustice that Chelsea Manning is in prison right now. An incredible injustice. But what happened was that these powerful corporate journalists who work for big publications, who are used to being the recipients of any leaked document, especially those coming officially from the White House, were knocked off their pedestal. And all of a sudden someone creates a system where we can all go online and look up, What did the U.S. do in Nigeria, what did the U.S. do in Libya, What did the U.S. do in Mexico, and we're reading through these cables.

There was something that was so refreshingly democratic about that that I think it will be hard for them to go back on it. I think it really changed journalism. The *Washington Post* has done some interesting coverage with the NSA documents that they've gotten. I've been critical of it, but I do think that we're in an era now where a lot of citizen journalists are calling out on famous journalists. And the forum where it happens most frequently is on Twitter, but you will see in real time especially young people who are really sharp and creative go after these iconic figures and take them down. I love searching what people say to Nicholas Kristof, because there are so many people that are just brilliant in their critiques of Nicholas Kristof. But also of all sorts of journalists. I get it, too. And sometimes errors are pointed out that you didn't realize.

I think the power of social media, the future of good journalism is going to boil down to this: How to take the innovation and the creativity of so many young minds in our society and around the world, who are far more tech-savvy than I am and understand how to communicate in very rapid ways, and fuse it with the old-school, proven tactics of good muckraking journalism. We need a sort of modern version of I.F. Stone's document digging, where we still have fact checkers and we have editors and we have some semblance of peer review and we get away from our computers and go out into the world and do actual reporting. If we fuse those two things together, then I have a lot of hope. I see a lot of young journalists and aspiring journalists talking about those kinds of alternative models.

The question is how to fund them. Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras and I started working with Pierre Omidyar from eBay in part because he said we could have autonomy. All of us are trying to figure out how to fund good adversarial journalism, and it's tough. Community radio stations are struggling, community media outlets are struggling. But I absolutely have hope.

And I also think that media consolidation is a very serious crisis and is fundamentally antidemocratic. Those

airwaves don't belong to CNN and Fox and MSNBC. Let's be honest. What's the range of views there? MSNBC is like one huge Obama pep rally or an Obama for America meet-up. And then Fox is like a parody of itself. *Saturday Night Live* doesn't have to make fun of Fox News, because you can just watch Fox News and pretend it's *Saturday Night Live* and it's much funnier. And then CNN is sort of like Xanax on TV.

The question was about education and how much of an emphasis should we place on current events or current policies in education. It depends. Obviously, I think that from a very young age kids should be taught that you should be paying attention to everything happening around you in your world, regardless of what you want to be in life. It used to be that your parents could say to you when you're sort of hitting second, third, fourth grade, "You should read part of the paper in the morning," or they'll slide it over to you. Now kids all have these devices. And what are they actually looking at? They're looking at Instagram, they're looking at ask-fm, they're sending Snapchat pictures to each other. I worry about that. And I do think that we have to make it a priority for them to pay attention, particularly to what's happening locally around them.

Also, stories from throughout history can provide great inspiration for students. That's why I still think to this day Howard Zinn's work is like dropping a piece of magic into a kid's lap at some point in their development. I think that's part of how we fight for a better society. Teachers are so important, and they're so disregarded in our society—underpaid, undervalued. There's a war against teachers, there's a war against particularly teachers' unions. If we lose teachers who actually care about the world and care enough to try to make the world understandable to their students, that harms our society.

I wish more current events curriculum existed. My sister is a teacher and my sister-in-law also. Both of them talk about this. I was just at their schools last week in the Midwest, in the Chicago area and in Milwaukee. One of the schools that I went to was well funded and the kids asked great questions, and the other one is a very poor school with no funding, and they seemed totally clueless about what I was talking about. The same age groups; totally different universes. There's a lot of disparity in the treatment of young people in this country in our educational system. But it's great if people like you actually care enough about the world that we live in to make sure that it's in the classroom, too.

I was counting the other day, because someone asked me this. I've known 13 journalists who have been killed since 9/11, people I knew personally. Thirteen. I think a lot of people who get involved with war reporting or conflict

reporting, it all starts with an initial act of incredible stupidity and naïveté, where you say, "Oh, I'll be fine." And then you look back and you've been doing it for three years, and you realize that you took a lot of risks that were probably idiotic. So there is not like some glamorous path to how to be a war reporter and be safe.

Most of the people I know who spend a lot of time doing war journalism, didn't study journalism. They either studied something else or they were working as a technician on like a satellite crew. Nick Robertson, who is actually one of the best reporters at CNN right now, was Wolf Blitzer's satellite uplink technician during the Gulf War and didn't really have journalistic training. He was the tech guy and then ended up becoming a reporter. Ivan Watson, another reporter, was the sound guy for CBS radio and ended up becoming a correspondent. I know people who rode their motorcycles from one part of Europe to Bosnia during the war in Yugoslavia and started shooting pictures and sending in story pitches. A lot of the journalists right now covering Egypt or Libya don't necessarily have journalism degrees. Most journalists covering war are not Americans. Most journalists are local to whatever country they're in. There's no one path.

What happens in black communities every day in this country from the police? The Halliburton, Blackwater thing. Halliburton and Blackwater worked together for many, many years, starting very certainly on in the wars. Blackwater has gone through five different name changes and is not the company that it once was. There are hundreds of these companies now. It's a huge, thriving industry.—private security, private intelligence. We talk a lot about the NSA and its violation of the privacy of Americans and others around the world alike. That's real. Believe me, I know, because I've seen the Snowden documents firsthand.

But in many ways the greatest violators of our privacy or our rights are local police forces, the FBI, the DEA. Various entities at local and state levels are far more into our communications than the NSA is in terms of actively monitoring them and pursuing them. There is a paramilitarization of law enforcement in this country. Police forces can get equipment from the military donated to them. After the military leaves Iraq or Afghanistan, they're giving their military equipment to local police forces. That was part of what I was alluding to earlier. I'm not as concerned about the CIA or the FBI doing drone strikes in America as I am about all of this sort of permanent state of war bleeding down into the culture of what is called law enforcement in this country.

They are definitely going to start using drones, and they have in some cases. When the former L.A. police officer was engaged in that shooting last year, drones were used

to try to track him down and hunt him. Eric Rudolph, whom they were hunting for many, many years in connection with the Olympic bombing, they used drones to try to locate him. They weren't weaponized drones. Maybe someday they will use weaponized drones. I think it's more likely that they will use it along the U.S.-Mexico border than they will in what we think of as conventional law enforcement activity in the U.S. But it's the paramilitarization of law enforcement that I think is of really, really great concern in communities across this country.

Other AR Jeremy Scahill programs:

License to Kill

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David Barsamian
Alternative Radio
P.O. Box 551
Boulder, CO 80306-0551
(800) 444-1977
info@alternativeradio.org
www.alternativeradio.org
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