

By Fred Branfman

From [Alternet](#) | Original Article

Many have expressed surprise that under President Obama - a former Constitutional Law Senior Lecturer who promised [transparency](#) , protection for [whistleblowers](#) and respect for [international law](#) when running for office - U.S. Executive Branch agencies have:

- Built up a fleet of [7,000 drones](#) , operating from a growing number of secret [bases](#) around the world, as they [train](#) more drone than conventional pilots; waged automated war in an [ever-expanding](#) number of nations, lawlessly [murdering thousands of human beings](#) [without](#) even knowing their names, while greatly strengthening America's foes (see chart below), [destabilizing](#) allied governments and, in the case of Pakistan, greatly increasing the risk of [nuclear materials](#) falling into anti-American hands;
- Created the top-secret Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) consisting of [60,000](#) persons operating in [75 nations](#) , the first unit of American assassins in U.S. history, who have illegally murdered many [thousands more](#) people and conducted night raids recalling World War II Gestapo movies which, according to Afghan President [Karzai](#) , have helped strengthen the Taliban and destabilize his government;
- Prosecuted more [whistleblowers](#) and [journalists](#) than even Messrs. Cheney and Bush;
- Collected records of millions of phone calls of Americans citizens from [Verizon](#) , [Sprint](#) , ATT and other phone carriers, and [spied](#) on millions more Americans' search histories, email content, file transfers and live chats while on the Internet;

- [Authorized](#) the use of drones in the United States, which the Federal Aviation Administration estimates could lead to 30,000 drones in U.S. skies by 2020, leading privacy advocates to fear their massive use by police departments to spy on Americans;
- Claimed the President's right to [kill or imprison without trial](#) any American citizen;
- Increased [paramilitary](#) training and equipment, and created secret police spying operations in thousands of states and cities around the nation (see chapter 7, "Report Suspicious Activity", Top Secret America, by Dana Priest and William Arkin);
- Created "huge biometric databases – with fingerprints and iris scans – of nearly 100 million people" (Top Secret America, p. 53);
- As Priest and Arkin have also revealed, the Executive Branch has created "a jaw-dropping 1,074 federal government organizations, and nearly two thousand private companies involved with programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security, and intelligence in at least 17,000 locations across the United States – all top secret. The biggest growth had come within the many agencies and large corporations that had existed before the attacks and had since inflated to historic proportions." This has amounted to "a parallel top secret government whose parts had mushroomed in less than a decade into a gigantic, sprawling universe of its own, visible only to a carefully vetted cadre, and its entirety, as Pentagon intelligence chief James Clapper admitted, visible only to God." (pp. 52, 86).

Under Mr. Obama, America is still far from being a classic police-state of course. But no President has done more to create the infrastructure for a possible future police-state. This infrastructure will clearly pose a serious danger to democratic ideals should there be more 9/11s, and/or increased domestic unrest due to economic decline and growing inequality, and/or massive global disruption due to climate change, and/or a President with even less scruples than Mr. Obama.

What gives? How could a fellow who spoke so eloquently of the need for the rule of law when running for President now be presiding over a lawless ["industrial-sized killing machine"](#) abroad and a massive threat to civil liberties at home? Why has Mr. Obama made the U.S. even [more hated](#) in the Muslim world than when he took office - even though his [stated goal](#) in 2009 was to reshape U.S. policy in the region? How is it that both he and Mitt Romney both ran on essentially the same [foreign policy](#), despite significant differences between them on domestic policy?

Much of the answer to such questions lies in something that we rarely do in this nation - seeing the U.S. Executive Branch Mr. Obama nominally heads for what it really is: the most powerful **institution**

in the history of the world, one that has killed, wounded or made homeless well over 20 million human beings

(

"Dollars and Deaths,"

Cong. Record

, 5-14-75, p. 14262), mostly civilians, since 1962 - far more than any other government in the world.

Nothing demonstrates this institution's power more than Mr. Obama himself. The fact that he has so violated his own values and belief system as Commander-in-Chief is not merely a matter of personal hypocrisy; it is a dramatic illustration of how the Executive's institutional violence, secrecy and deceit overwhelm even Presidents who begin their terms with relatively good intentions.

Just six days before Mr. Obama's recent [speech](#) stating that "perpetual war — through drones or Special Forces or troop deployments — will prove self-defeating", Pentagon officials gave [testimony](#)

to Congress calling for just such perpetual war. If Mr. Obama is serious about actually changing present U.S. policy, he will find himself blocked at every turn by powerful Executive Branch officials whose salaries, promotions, agency budgets and future well-paying private sector jobs depend upon perpetual war, at home and abroad.

Americans have been conditioned to focus on the personality of the President, and to see the giant Executive Branch as a mere servant of its "Commander-in-Chief." Countless books and newspaper stories have been written about the differences between the "Reagan", "Carter" or "Clinton" foreign policies. There are of course significant differences between Administrations, though often due as much to differing objective conditions as Presidential desires. But the simple fact is that these differences have been far outweighed by a remarkable consistency in U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II. And a President is far more limited in his options than popular folklore suggests. It is only when one understands the Executive Branch as an institution that one can make sense, not only of Mr. Obama, but much of both America's postwar history and frightening future.

Famed Watergate reporter Bob Woodward's *Obama's Wars* reporting on Mr. Obama's

Afghanistan Policy Review in the fall of 2009 provides an instructive case-study of just how limited a President's options are when faced with institutional opposition from within the Executive Branch.

Woodward reported that after Mr. Obama had acceded to the military demand for an additional 21,000 troops shortly after taking office, he asked them to produce a set of options that would include a reduced U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. The Pentagon refused to do so and instead began publicly lobbying for an additional 40,000 troops. Joint Chief of Staff head Admiral Mike Mullen first [pushed](#) for a troop increase at a September 15 Senate Armed Services hearing. White House aides Rahm Emanuel and Tom Donilon were, Woodward reports, "furious. The president is being screwed by the senior uniformed military, they (said). The generals and admirals are systematically playing him, boxing him in." Mullen apologized and said it wouldn't happen again.

But then two weeks later, on October 1, 2009, U.S. Afghan military commander Stanley McChrystal committed an act of insubordination far more serious than the later *Rolling Stone* interviews which got him fired. He again publicly lobbied for more U.S. troops to Afghanistan in a major speech in London. Woodward reports that "McChrystal's comments marked a seminal moment for the White House staff. What better proof that the military was on a search-and-destroy mission aimed at the president? (National Security Advisor) James Jones said that McChrystal's speech was either "insubordination or stupid. It read like a direct challenge to the president. 'It is a firing offense, but McChrystal won't be fired because we need him.'" Woodward also reported that "Obama felt disrespected and trapped. The White House saw the speech as a scheme on the part of McChrystal, Mullen and Petraeus."

And Mr. Obama was indeed trapped, far more controlled by the military than its actual "Commander-in-Chief". As CIA chief Leon Panetta summed up the situation: "no Democratic president can go against military advice, especially if he asked for it. So just do it. Do what they say." Mr. Obama was thus forced to accede to the Pentagon's harebrained scheme for a "surge" that *increased* U.S. troops in Afghanistan by 30,000 (with an additional 10,000 from NATO allies) that achieved little and continued to weaken U.S. national security by worsening conditions in neighboring, and far more important, Pakistan.

The logic behind Panetta's "give them what they want" mentality is obvious. A President might conceivably survive another 9/11 or losing in Afghanistan - but not if military sources continually leaked information to the media and Congress blaming it on his or her failure to support the military. And, for the same reason, a President is often "trapped" by the NSA, CIA or any other major Executive agency.

A President also rarely takes the initiative in developing such military strategies as drone and ground assassination, or major surveillance operations. Such operations are initiated and developed within the CIA, Pentagon or NSA, and then presented to the President as a near fait accompli. It would require a very high profile in courage indeed for a U.S. President seeking reelection or governing mandate to abort such an operation at that point. Presidents come and go. The Executive Branch endures, often setting the terms under which any President must operate. We understand this when looking at institutions like the Chinese or Soviet Politburos. But we fail to apply this obvious truth when looking at our own Executive Branch.

The U.S. Executive Branch agencies that conduct U.S. foreign military and domestic police operations - the White House, National Security Council, Pentagon, CIA, Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security, National Security Agency and FBI - have an overall budget of well over [\\$1 trillion](#) , employ 3-4 [million](#) people, and spend more money on the military than the next 10 nations [combined](#) . Its enormous power has allowed it to operate unilaterally since the end of WWII, with little meaningful oversight or even the knowledge of Congress and the American people.

The Executive has had one overriding purpose since it emerged from the ashes of World War II: to keep foreign governments deemed "pro-U.S." in power, and to weaken or overthrow those considered "anti-U.S." The first key feature of a "pro-U.S." government is that it permits U.S. corporations and Wall Street investors access to its natural resources and cheap labor. As former Federal Reserve Board Chair Alan Greenspan [stated](#) , "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil." The second is that it allows the U.S. military and spy agencies to operate freely in its territory, including building military bases and conducting clandestine operations.

While convincing its own people that its policies are meant to support "freedom" and "democracy" around the world, its practice has often been exactly the opposite. It has installed and/or supported dozens of brutal, police-state regimes and paramilitary forces in every corner of the globe which are the very antithesis of democracy – including the Somoza family (1936-79) and then Contras in Nicaragua (1980s); death squads in El Salvador (1980s); vicious military regimes in Chile, Colombia, Argentina and Brazil in Latin America from WWII until the 1990s; the Mobutu (1965-97) and South African apartheid regimes (until 1990) in Africa; police-state and military governments in South Vietnam (1956-75), Cambodia (1970-5) and Indonesia (1967 until the present); and the despotic regimes of Mubarak in Egypt (1981-2011), Ben Ali in Tunisia (1987-2011), the Shah of Iran (1952-79), Saudi Arabia (1945-present), and Bahraini (1971-present) in the Middle East. It has also supported the Israeli government's mistreatment of the Palestinians and refusal to negotiate a settlement based on countless U.N.

resolutions.

In general the U.S. Executive prefers to achieve its goals without overt violence. As President Bill Clinton himself later [acknowledged](#) with regard to Haiti, for example, his Administration's "free trade" policies featuring NAFTA and the World Trade Organization impoverished hundreds of millions of poor rural and slum dwellers around the world by giving U.S. corporations unprecedented access to Third World markets and labor, and extending loans that enriched local elites while forcing the population as a whole to repay them by cutting health, education and other social services.

But when such nonviolent means have not sufficed to fulfill Executive Branch aims, it has ruthlessly used massive violence to achieve its goals - from dropping 6.7 million tons of bombs on Indochina and invading it with 550,000 troops; imposing and supporting brutal police-state regimes around the world; and, more recently, relying on drone and ground assassination.

Any individual joining Executive Branch agencies conducting U.S. foreign and police policy automatically finds her or himself part of an institution whose most noteworthy feature is a culture of violence relying upon secrecy and deceit to achieve its goals. Whatever his personal beliefs prior to becoming President Mr. Obama, as the Executive's titular leader, has necessarily signed up to support the secrecy, lying, and disinformation it employs to enjoy maximum flexibility from democratic oversight in order to pursue its policies of overt and covert violence.

Two important new books - Jeremy Scahill's *Dirty Wars* and Mark Mazzetti's *The Way of the Knife* - describe how, in near-total secrecy, the U.S. Executive is a world of its own. Over the last 12 years, Executive officials have unilaterally and secretly launched, escalated or deescalated wars; installed and supported massively corrupt governments, savage warlords, or local paramilitary forces, and overthrown leaders that have displeased it; created the first unit of global American assassins and fleets of machines waging automated war; engaged in vicious turf wars for more money and budget; spied on Americans including the media and activists on a scale unmatched in U.S. history; compiled 3 different sets of global "kill lists" independently operated by the White House, CIA and Pentagon/JSOC; used police-state tactics while claiming to support democracy, e.g. when it fed retina scans, facial recognition features and fingerprints of over 3 million Iraqi and Afghani males into a giant data base; incarcerated and tortured, either directly or indirectly, tens of thousands of people without evidence or trial; and much more.

All of these major activities are conducted entirely by the Executive Branch, without meaningful Congressional oversight or the knowledge of the American people. The foundational principle of the U.S. Constitution is that governments can only rule with the "informed consent" of the people. But the U.S. Executive Branch has not only robbed its people of this fundamental right. It has prosecuted those courageous whistleblowers who have tried to inform them.

The U.S. mass media, dependent upon the Executive for their information and careers, and run by corporate interests benefiting from Executive largesse, predominately convey Executive Branch perspectives on an hourly basis to the American people. Even on the relatively few occasions when they publish information the Executive wishes to keep secret, it has little impact on Executive policies while maintaining the illusion that the U.S. has a "free press". The U.S. Executive is essentially free to conduct its activities as it wishes.

In future articles in this space we will explore three key features of the U.S. Executive Branch:

(1) Evil - If evil consists of murdering, maiming, and making homeless the innocent, and/or waging the "aggressive war" judged the "supreme international crime" at Nuremberg, the U.S. Executive Branch is today clearly the world's most evil institution. It has killed, wounded or made refugees of an officially-estimated 21 million people in Iraq and Indochina alone, far more than any other institution since the time of Stalin and Mao. President Obama is the first U.S. President to acknowledge, in his recent "counterterrorism" speech, that this number has included killing "hundreds of thousands" of civilians in Vietnam whom it officially claimed it was trying to protect. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara put the total number of Vietnamese killed at [3.4 million](#).

(2) Lawlessness - If illegality consists of refusing to obey the law, the Executive is clearly the most **lawless** institution in the world. It routinely violates even timid legislative attempts to control its unilateral war-making. And no nation on earth has signed fewer international laws, and so failed to observe even those it has signed. These include measures like those intended to clean up the [tens of millions of landmines and cluster bombs](#) with which it has littered the world, refused to clean up, and which continue to murder and maim tens of thousands of innocent people until today.

(3) Authoritarianism - And if "authoritarianism" consists of a governing body acting unilaterally, regularly deceiving its own citizenry, neutering its legislature, and prosecuting those who

expose its lies, the U.S. Executive is clearly the most undemocratic institution in America. Indeed its deceiving its own people - keeping its activities secret and then lying about and covering them up when caught - throws its very legitimacy into question. How can these giant agencies claim to legitimately represent an American people if they do not truthfully inform them about its activities? And how much loyalty do the American people owe to such an institution which does not in fact represent them?

In seeking to understand the U.S. Executive Branch, and its evil, lawlessness and authoritarianism, it is important to note that we are not delving here into "conspiracy theory". On the contrary. U.S. Executive Branch policy is determined not by conspiracy by a few but rather out of the interaction of hundreds of semi-independent power centers within the bureaucracies and corporate world, the huge agglomeration that [Eisenhower](#) termed the "military-industrial complex." Policy emerges as a result of countless meetings, lobbying sessions, phone calls, meals, negotiations, promises of future jobs in the private sector in return for government contracts, forming and breaking alliances, promoting and demoting individuals.

It is also important to note that when we speak of "evil", we are not speaking of evil individuals as normally understood. The term is conventionally applied to the clearly demonic monsters who periodically pop up in world history, most notably of course Hitler and other Nazi leaders, i.e. the standard humanist understanding of what most people call evil.

By contrast, most U.S. Executive Branch leaders tend to be rather conventional types before they join the Executive. Like Mr. Obama most have some feeling for their mates, children and/or dogs, give to charity, and hold accepted beliefs about democracy and the rule of law. They do not lie as a matter of course to family and friends, or commit face-to-face violence against those with whom they disagree.

But in the postwar Executive world one need not *be* classically evil to *do* evil. It is *institutional* evil, e.g., mass murder, conducted by normal individuals which poses the greatest threat to human life, decency, democracy and the rule of law in our time. Top Executive Branch leaders are not motivated by grand theories of "purifying the race" or "thousand year Reichs", but rather simply succeeding in their jobs, advancing in their careers, making more money, being promoted, and gaining more power.

[Henry Kissinger](#)

obviously did not devastate Indochina because he cared about the wellbeing of the 6 million people he helped kill, wound or make homeless; nor did he wish to promote democracy when supporting a savage police-state in South Vietnam which held more political prisoners than the rest of the world combined. Those who know him best say he was motivated by simple

careerism – a desire not to be blamed for the fall of Indochina while in office, and to be admired - and rewarded for - being seen as a “statesman” after leaving it.

As important as it is to understand the U.S. Executive's institutional evil, lawlessness and authoritarianism, however, there is one question that must be addressed first: its claim to be protecting "national security."

For this claim is the foundational rationale of all Executive action. American democracy has become so debased that most Americans passively accept the fact that the public servants whose salaries they pay routinely lie to them; wage losing and murderous wars that waste trillions of dollars that they need at home to make a living and support their families; send their sons and daughters off to be senselessly killed; and routinely break the domestic and international laws in which all Americans claim to believe, and upon which Executive officials base their right to rule.

They accept these Executive Branch violations of the most basic principles upon which their country was founded for one basic reason: they believe Executive Branch leaders are protecting them, that even clearly illegitimate activities are legitimate because they protect U.S. "national security."

So deep is the unconscious need to be protected that the words "national security" have acquired a near-mystical power that overwhelms the undeniable factual evidence that U.S. Executive Branch leaders are endangering not protecting Americans, as they lose U.S. influence around the world. The U.S. Executive has maintained much of its influence in key areas where it has not engaged in violence, notably Europe and Japan. But since the end of World War II in more problematic areas:

- U.S. Executive Branch leaders have not won a single major war they have waged, fighting to a stalemate in Korea, losing massively in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (though destroying these nations' ability to create alternative economic models), being forced to retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of Americans have died, trillions wasted, in war-making that has weakened not strengthened America.
- They massively miscalculated in the Middle East by supporting the Shah of Iran until the very end. Just three months before the Shah fell, a clueless U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan predicted that " the riots erupting in provincial cities would play themselves out and were not a cause of major concern." The regime that replaced the Shah has become America's major foe in the Muslim world, and the Executive has foolishly strengthened it far further by invading Iraq.

- By its support for death squads, torture and mass incarcerations by the brutal regimes it imposed upon the people of Central and Latin America, it has understandably turned most of the subcontinent against the U.S. today;
- U.S. influence is waning in Asia, as China's rises due to the U.S. financial and corporate sector having exported millions of jobs and ever-more sophisticated manufacturing and high-tech technology there, even as a debt-ridden U.S. economy has allowed its industrial base, infrastructure, and schools to precipitously decline.

U.S. Executive Branch foreign and military policy is characterized above all by two fatal flaws. In the 1960s Senator William Fulbright criticized the Executive's "arrogance of power", and this arrogance - combined with ignorance about the countries they attack - has continued until today. U.S. officials regularly try to force local leaders to behave as the Executive wishes, even when these leaders believe it is against their national interests. And the Executive ignores the local public opinion that is increasing the power of anti-U.S. groupings throughout the Third World.

Its second flaw is conducting a short-term, tactics-oriented foreign and military policy at the expense of long-term strategic U.S. interests. For nearly a decade, for example, U.S. Executive military and political leaders were so obsessed with achieving short-term military successes in Afghanistan that they endangered far more important long-term U.S. strategic interests in nuclear-armed Pakistan.

In actual practice U.S. Executive foreign and military policy is above all driven by ambitious politicians, military and intelligence officials looking to further their careers in the short-term, as when David Petraeus managed to become the head of the CIA after totally [mismanaging](#) U.S. policy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan; bureaucracies fighting vicious turf wars in an attempt to increase their budgets for the upcoming fiscal year; and U.S. corporations seeking to boost next quarter's profits.

Both arrogance and short-term thinking are in dramatic evidence today in what is the U.S. Executive's single greatest strategic error since Vietnam: its waging an expanding war in the 1.8 billion strong, nuclear-armed and oil-rich Muslim world. Its policies are turning hundreds of millions of Muslims against the U.S., including countless potential suicide bombers, as it creates far more enemies than it kills. If Executive actions were protecting the U.S., the numbers of U.S. foes would be decreasing. Instead they are exponentially increasing, and spreading to an increasing number of nations.

Executive arrogance, ignorance and short-term thinking are most dangerous today in Pakistan, a nation of 180 million people possessing well over 100 nuclear weapons. This nuclear stockpile, a Harvard Study has [reported](#), is the fastest-growing and least stable in the world. It was for this reason that President Obama said "Pakistan" in response to actor George [Clooney's](#) question as to what issue most keeps him up night.

But despite Mr. Obama's realization of the dangers the U.S. faces in Pakistan, both he and George W. Bush have catastrophically mishandled U.S.-Pakistani relations, irresponsibly putting America at risk. In the immediate wake of 9-11, Pakistan's powerful ISI (Directorate of Interservices Intelligence) agreed to cooperate with the CIA, and within a few years had helped capture top al-Qaeda operatives Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi bin al-Shibh. This, Mark Mazzetti reported, "led many top Bush officials to believe the partnership was working." He also reported that Brigadier-General Asad Munir "thinks about the respect the two spy services had for each other, respect that might have been something approaching trust."

But the cooperation did not continue because Executive officials decided to pressure Pakistan to support the U.S. war in Afghanistan, against what the ISI and other top Pakistanis felt was their national interest. The Executive also conducted dozens of drone strikes in Pakistan, infuriating the populace and helping to [convince](#) 74% of the population - over 125 million people - that the U.S. is their "enemy." This in turn, as U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson revealed in the Wikileaks cables, made it impossible for the Pakistani government to cooperate with the U.S. on safeguarding its nuclear materials and reduce the risks of nuclear proliferation. She [explained](#) that "the negative media attention has begun to hamper U.S. efforts to improve Pakistan's nuclear security and nonproliferation practices".

Although Pakistan is the most flagrant example of U.S. Executive incompetence, however, its general pattern of ignoring Arab public opinion has sown a whirlwind throughout the Muslim World, from Egypt to Asia to Africa. Its support for the hated Hosni Mubarak in Egypt until the very end has helped bring the far more anti-U.S. Muslim Brotherhood to power in that pivotal nation. And hatred of the U.S. has also fanned the flames of jihadism and helped extremists increase their power and influence throughout the Muslim World. The U.S. Executive's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq while Mr. Bush was President, and its escalation of drone strikes under Mr. Obama, has dramatically reduced U.S. national security and could well cost many U.S. lives at home and abroad in the coming decade.

Equally significantly, Executive incompetence, by making future 9/11s more likely, has seen it increasingly turn to police-state measures back home. Bob Woodward has [warned](#) that “another 9/11 ... could happen, and if it does, we will become a police state .”

This threat will grow until the U.S. Executive is thoroughly transformed.

As noted, many American accept the Executive's immorality, illegality and incompetence out of a desire to be protected. But if the public was to realize that Executive policies are in fact endangering their lives, harming not strengthening our national security, it could lead to a movement to rein the Executive in, cut its budgets and demand the transparency upon which Mr. Obama ran for President.

In his [recent counterterrorism speech](#) and background briefings, the Obama Administration promised to halt signature drone strikes, target only people actively planning to kill Americans instead of also targeting those only trying to change their own governments, and to make greater efforts to avoid killing civilians.

If implemented, these will be welcome steps. As pushback begins from within the Executive, and from outside it from conservatives, however Mr. Obama will be hard-put to fulfill his pledges. It will also be of great moment to see if these changes can be institutionalized or whether, say, the election of a Republican President in 2016 will undo them.

Policies toward the Muslim World that will enhance U.S. national security are obvious. Above all the U.S. needs to be perceived as an ally not enemy by Pakistan, so that cooperation on safeguarding its nuclear materials can once again become possible. This will require the immediate cessation of all *negative* U.S. activities, e.g. drone strikes and other incursions of Pakistani territory, and withdrawing clandestine CIA personnel like

[Raymond Davis](#)

whose murder of two Pakistanis, as Mark Mazetti reports, outraged Pakistanis even more than the capture of Bin Laden.

But these would only be first steps. Far more importantly as Mr. Obama implied in calling for more foreign aid, reducing the anti-U.S. hatred generated over the past decades will require a whole series of new *positive* steps. First and foremost among them will be extending massive aid to help the Pakistani government achieve its [main goal](#) : providing 24 hour a day electricity to every home in the nation. Would America have been safer

today had it brought electricity rather than drones, cross-border incursions and violent CIA and JSOC personnel to Pakistan? If it had continued to work with the ISI and been seen as an ally, would it have captured Osama bin Laden years earlier and helped make Pakistan's nuclear stockpile safer? To ask such questions is to answer them.

As we shall explore in coming articles in this series, achieving the massive shift in U.S. priorities in the Muslim World needed to enhance not weaken U.S. national security will not only require fundamental changes in U.S. policies abroad. Achieving them will also necessitate massive institutional changes within the U.S. Executive branch at home. Over the past 70 years its evil, lawless and authoritarian culture of violence has produced national security disaster after disaster. The institution itself must be changed if the Executive is to genuinely protect the American people.

Mr. Obama himself acknowledged this when he stated that "in the absence of a strategy that reduces the well-spring of extremism, a perpetual war — through drones or Special Forces or troop deployments — will prove self-defeating, and alter our country in troubling ways." The strategy he called for involved support for democracy and more economic aid in the Muslim world.

This part of his speech was particularly noteworthy because it repudiated the very "National Strategy for Counter-Terrorism" that Mr. Obama released just two years ago, a strategy that called for precisely the "perpetual war" that he now claims is "self-defeating".

His previous "counter-terrorism" strategy reflected the thought and practice of the U.S. Executive Branch over the past 70 years. To now change it so dramatically would thus be a tremendous undertaking, requiring dismantling much of the "counter-terror" apparatus the Executive has built up over the past decade, opening up many of its activities to public and Congressional scrutiny, ending prosecution of whistleblowers, bringing Executive officials who violate domestic and international law to justice, and both ratifying and obeying the numerous international laws that the Executive now ignores.