

By Kevin Gosztola

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The *New York Times*' Mark Mazzetti [reports](#) Gen. David H. Petraeus has signed a "secret directive" that orders a "broad expansion of clandestine military activity in an effort to disrupt militant groups or counter threats in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and other countries in the region."

According to Mazzetti, the directive was signed in September and would send "small teams of American troops" to "both friendly and hostile nations in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Horn of Africa to gather intelligence and build ties with local forces." More importantly, "the order also permits reconnaissance that could pave the way for possible military strikes in Iran if tensions over its nuclear ambitions escalate."

Gen. Petraeus suggested at the bottom that this would give troops, foreign businessmen, academics and others "persistent situational awareness." This may be something like "total information awareness." Most likely it's the general euphemism for paranoia.

Out of context, it might seem like permission for secret operations is going in a direction that America may want to consider not going in. Secret operations, especially if so-called terrorists knew to expect them, might lead to more destabilization of the world, more deaths and destruction. Do people really want that?

This would be a huge revelation if history didn't indicate that departments handling foreign and domestic defense or security operations have claimed the authority to engage in covert activity time and time again.

Mazzetti ends the article reminding Americans, "During the Bush administration, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld endorsed clandestine military operations, arguing that Special

Operations troops could be as effective as traditional spies, if not more so."

In 2004, *The Jerusalem Post* [reported](#) that Rumsfeld considered provoking Syria by deploying U.S. Special Forces to attack Hezbollah bases near the Syrian border. It outlined how this could satisfy U.S. strategy by pressuring Damascus into ending support for anti-Israel Palestinian groups, persuade Syria to abandon its WMDs and withdraw troops from Lebanon, stimulate a situation where Syrian leader Bashir Assad could be ousted, and crush Hezbollah and end Syria's connections to al Qaeda.

Such a plan can be linked to those within the Pentagon who believe in order to fight the "war on terror" elite secret armies with permission to use all covert capabilities must be utilized. In 2002, William Arkin [reported](#) for the *Los Angeles Times* on Rumsfeld's fetish for black ops and a briefing drafted by the Defense Science Board called the "2002 Summer Study on Special Operations and Joint Forces in Support of Countering Terrorism."

The Board recommended, according to Arkin, the "creation of a super-Intelligence Support Activity, an organization it [dubbed] the Proactive, Preemptive Operations Group, (P2OG), to bring together CIA and military covert action, information warfare, intelligence, and cover and deception.

P2OG would "launch secret operations aimed at 'stimulating reactions' among terrorists and states possessing weapons of mass destruction -- that is, for instance, prodding terrorist cells into action and exposing themselves to 'quick-response' attacks by U.S. forces."

One might remember news from June 2009 uncovered by Seymour Hersh that an "executive assassination ring reporting directly to Vice President Dick Cheney" existed.

Of the ring, the *Guardian* reported, " [Dick Cheney](#) , the former vice president, [ordered a highly classified CIA operation](#) hidden from Congress because it pushed the limits of legality by planning to assassinate [al-Qaida](#) operatives in friendly countries without the knowledge of their governments." The "hidden operation [also] involved plans by the [CIA](#)

and the military to launch operations, similar to those by Israel's Mossad intelligence service, to hunt down and kill al-Qaida activists abroad without informing the governments concerned, even though some were regarded as friendly if unreliable."

The news made headlines for a day or two and then quickly dissipated as everyone went back to viewing their regularly scheduled programming. Most probably assumed that the program was over. No. Glenn Greenwald [reported for Salon](#) in January and April of this year that the Obama Administration was claiming the authority to assassinate U.S. citizens without according U.S. citizens who might be terrorists due process.

"No due process is accorded. No charges or trials are necessary. No evidence is offered, nor any opportunity for him to deny these accusations (which he [American-born Anwar al-Awlaki] has [done vehemently through his family](#)). None of that.

Instead, in BarackObama's America, the way guilt is determined for American citizens -- and a **death penalty imposed**

-- is that thePresident, like the King he thinks he is, secretly decrees someone's guilt as a Terrorist. He then dispatches his aides to run to America's newspapers -- cowardly hiding behind the shield of anonymity which they're granted -- to proclaim that the Guilty One shall be killed on sight because the Leader has decreed him to be a Terrorist. It is simply asserted that Awlaki has converted from a cleric who expresses anti-American views and [advocates attacks on American military targets](#)

([advocacy which happens to be Constitutionally protected](#)) to Actual Terrorist"involved in plots." These newspapers then print this ExecutiveVerdict with no questioning, no opposition, no investigation, no refutation as to its truth. And the punishment is thus decreed: this American citizen will now be murdered by the CIA because BarackObama has ordered that it be done. What kind of person could possibly justify this or think that this is a legitimate government power?"

Presumably, the same infrastructure, individuals, and teams that were employed for Cheney's assassination squads would be used for Obama's assassination squads. And, this type of activity by government in the name of freedom and preservation of national security has been a feasible option for decades.

ABC News [officially reported](#) in 2001 (although it had been known long before 2001) that back in the 1960s, under President Kennedy, "America's top military leaders reportedly drafted plans to kill innocent people and commit acts of terrorism in U.S. cities to create public support for a war against Cuba."

The plan known as Operation Northwoods "included the possible assassination of Cuban émigrés, sinking boats of Cuban refugees on the high seas, hijacking planes, blowing up a U.S. ship, and even orchestrating violent terrorism in U.S. cities." All of this was to be done "to trick the American public and the international community into supporting a war to oust Cuba's then new leader, communist Fidel Castro."

Perhaps, thirst for glory, super-patriotism, and the hyper-masculinity of all those involved in the military and defense agencies that put together secret operation plans has something to do with the willful disregard of human life and rule of law.

Members of the Pentagon and CIA probably view themselves as players in a Tom Clancy novel, stars in a Hollywood espionage-action-thriller, or perhaps consider their selves to be Jack Bauer-like heroes. They see themselves as actors who could be thrown into a ticking time bomb scenario at any moment.

Whatever motivations within defense and intelligence departments may be, it's important to understand that Gen. Petraeus isn't abruptly taking the Pentagon in a questionable direction; the Pentagon (and other parts of government) have been supportive of murky and illegitimate operations as long as the end justified the means for some time.

Allowing Gen. Petraeus to do this isn't a mistake by President Obama either. This is what conventional wisdom within military and defense deems permissible in the "war on terror." This is what Congress allows to go on without any noticeable objection at all (that is, unless the public becomes aware of it. Then they can't wait to put a stop to secret operations that have been happening without proper oversight.)

And, [Congress wasn't always this permissive of secret operations](#) . Stephen F. Knott, author of *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* wrote, "in the aftermath of Vietnam, Watergate, and revelations of CIA assassination plots and

domestic spying, Congress moved in the mid-1970s to "reassert' its role in shaping American foreign policy, including the most controversial tool of that policy, covert action."

"Secrecy was seen as antithetical to the American way, and there was widespread agreement that "rogue" agencies such as the CIA were a threat to liberty. Proponents of congressional intelligence oversight argued that openness and accountability were the cornerstone of a legitimate foreign policy, and it was believed that Congress, due to its diversity of opinion, possessed greater wisdom than the executive branch. Spurred on by the sensational revelations of the Church Committee hearings in the Senate and the Pike Committee in the House, both bodies established permanent intelligence committees.

It is still widely believed that the Church and Pike reforms were an attempt to cure a "cancerous" growth on the Constitution that had developed during the Cold War, an era which witnessed an increasing reliance on executive secrecy and the creation of a "private army" for the president in the form of the CIA"

..."On some occasions, members of Congress threatened to leak information in order to derail covert operations they found personally repugnant. Leaks are a recurring problem, as some member of Congress, or some staff member, demonstrated in the aftermath of the September 11th attack. President Bush's criticism of members of Congress was fully justified, despite the protests from Capitol Hill. Leaks have occurred repeatedly since the mid-1970s, and in very few cases has the offending party been disciplined. One of the Founding Fathers of the new oversight regime, former Representative Leo Ryan, held that leaks were an important tool in checking the "secret government."

Until the "war on terror" comes to an end, any number of fantastical and reprehensible plans will be drafted and implemented in secret until someone like Mazaretti publishes information about the plans. Then, they will be stalled, redrafted, altered, and reformed to seem new and different and unlike anything done before. This will go on and on and on as long as we are fighting "terrorists" over there so we don't have to fight them over here or as long as we are accepting less liberty for more safety from people above described operations have radicalized.

From where I'm sitting, it looks like America's going to be fighting this "perpetual war for perpetual peace" for the next century, which means anyone the U.S. wants to target will be put in the crosshairs.

