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As the Obama administration prepares to release for the first time the number of people it believes it has killed in drone strikes in countries that lie outside of conventional war zones, we look at a new book out today that paints a very different picture of the U.S. drone program. "The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program" is written by Jeremy Scahill and the staff of The Intercept, and based on leaked government documents provided by a whistleblower. The documents undermine government claims that drone strikes have been precise. Part of the book looks at a program called Operation Haymaker in northeastern Afghanistan. During one five-month period, nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets. The book is based on articles published by The Intercept last year. It also includes new contributions from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and The Intercept's Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald. We speak with Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald.

**AMY GOODMAN:** This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](#), *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman. We're on the road in Sarasota, Florida. I'll be speaking in [Atlanta, Georgia](#)

, tonight. But here in Sarasota, we're less than an hour from Tampa, which houses the United States Special Operations Command. It's the epicenter of planning for the global targeted killing program and other covert military action. Well, we turn now to look at President Obama and drones. On Saturday night, Comedy Central's Larry Wilmore criticized Obama's reliance on drone warfare during his remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner. He compared Obama's foreign policy to that of reigning NBA MVP Steph Curry.

**LARRY WILMORE:** It looks like you're really enjoying your last year of the presidency. Saw you hanging out with NBA players like Steph Curry, Golden State Warriors. That was cool. That was cool, yeah. You know, it kind of makes sense, too, because both of you like raining down bombs on people from long distances, right? Yeah, sure. What? Am I wrong?

**AMY GOODMAN:** Larry Wilmore's comments come as the Obama administration prepares to

release for the first time the number of people it believes it's killed in drone strikes in countries that lie outside of conventional war zones. Speaking last month in Chicago, President Obama addressed the issue of civilian deaths in drone strikes.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** There's no doubt that some innocent people have been killed by drone strikes. It is not true that it has been this sort of willy-nilly, you know, "Let's bomb a village." That is not how it's—folks have operated. And what I can say with great certainty is that the rate of civilian casualties in any drone operation are far lower than the rate of civilian casualties that occur in conventional war.

**AMY GOODMAN:** A new book being published today paints a very different picture of the U.S. drone program. It's titled *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. It's written by Jeremy Scahill and the staff of *The Intercept*, based on leaked government documents provided by a whistleblower. The documents undermine government claims that drone strikes have been precise. Part of the book looks at a program called Operation Haymaker in northeastern Afghanistan. During one five-month period, nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets. The book is based on articles published by *The Intercept* last year. It also includes new contributions from NSA whistleblower Ed Snowden and *The Intercept*'s Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald. Snowden's [introduction](#) to the book has just been published on *The Intercept*'s website.

Joining us now, still with us, Jeremy Scahill, and Glenn Greenwald is joining us from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They founded *The Intercept* with Laura Poitras. Jeremy, let's go back to you. Lay out the scope of *The Assassination Complex*, especially now as President Obama is about to reveal at least what the government is willing to admit are the number of people killed in drone strikes.

**JEREMY SCAHILL:** Right, well, Amy, you know, the covert drone program, for the majority of its lifespan, has been shrouded in secrecy, and it was sort of a kind of macabre joke in Washington, because the entire world could see that the U.S. was raining bombs down on people across the globe and in an increasing number of countries in the early stages of Obama's presidency, and yet the United States would never officially confirm that it had conducted a drone strike. And instead, you would see President Obama making jokes at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner about how he was going to conduct a drone strike against the Jonas Brothers if they came near his daughters, and everybody yucks it up and laughs in Washington about it. He then answered a question on a Google Plus hangout, but never gave a substantive policy speech on the use of drones, really, until 2013.

And what the Obama administration is doing right now is basically trying to rebrand and engage in historical revisionism about what is going to be one of the most deadly legacies of the Obama era, and that is that somehow they came up with a cleaner way of waging war. I would say that the most significant aspect of what President Obama has done, regarding drones and regarding the so-called targeted killing program around the world, is that Obama has codified assassination as a central official component of American foreign policy. And he has implemented policies that a Republican probably would not have been able to implement, certainly not with the support that Obama has received from so many self-identified liberals. It will be very interesting to see, if a Republican wins, how many of the MSNBC pundits and other, you know, so-called liberals—what their position will be on these very same policies.

But the fact is that the White House—we understand the White House is going to be releasing statistics, that some indicate are going to say that upwards of 60 people—six-zero people—have been killed in drone strikes outside of Iraq and Afghanistan, which is a—it's a horrifying piece of propaganda, if that is—if that's true. The reason that the Obama administration and that the president can say to the American people, "Well, we've only killed a small number of civilians," is because—and our documents in the book show this—because they have embraced a system of counting the dead which almost always will result in zero civilians killed, because anyone who is killed in a drone strike, under this administration, is labeled as an enemy killed in action, an EKIA, until or unless posthumously proven to have not been a militant, a terrorist, what have you. This is a global assassination program that is authorized and run under what amounts to a parallel legal system or judicial system where the president and his advisers serve as the judge, jury and executioner of people across the globe. And so, the documents that we obtained will give lie to the proclamations that this somehow is a saner, less deadly form of warfare when it comes to impacting civilians.

And the final thing, Amy, that I would say is that I think what you really see come through in the military's own assessments, that we're publishing in this book, of the drone program is that the U.S. is creating self-fulfilling prophecies. Rather than stopping terrorism, the U.S., through its

drone program, is encouraging terrorism and providing terrorist organization with recruitment material, just as the Guantánamo prison serves as recruitment material for the people that the Obama administration claims it's trying stop from conducting acts of terrorism.

**AMY GOODMAN:** That's Jeremy Scahill. We're also joined by Glenn Greenwald. He's in Rio de Janeiro, and I'm in Sarasota, Florida, right near SOCOM, the Special Operations Command. In the afterword, Glenn, of *The Assassination Complex*, you say that most of the revelations in the book, quote, "signify one of the most enduring and consequential aspects of the Obama legacy: the continuation of endless war." Can you expand on this?

**GLENN GREENWALD:** It seems like a really distant memory now, but if you look back to what President Obama, then-Senator Obama, was saying in 2006, 2007, as his critique of the Bush administration's approach to terrorism, he was essentially railing against not just the policies, but the mindset and the approach that, once he became president, he ended up not only embracing, but strengthening and increasing. He talked all the time about how terrible it was to treat somebody like a terrorist and punish them with imprisonment in Guantánamo, with indefinite detention, without so much as giving them the right to have a trial. And not only has he continued the system of indefinite detention—and he intended to continue the system of indefinite detention, even if he were able to close Guantánamo; his plan was simply to shift it to American soil—he's done much more than that. He has institutionalized a program where now we don't only just imprison people without any charges or due process, we don't just eavesdrop on them, which was one of his big critiques of the Bush administration, without first giving them due process or a trial, we now just target them for execution, for death, for a death penalty.

You know, for a long time, a staple of Democratic ideology has been that the death penalty is wrong, even with a full trial and appeals and due process and lawyers and all of the constitutional rights that are afforded to criminal defendants. And yet President Obama has embraced a policy that says that he can literally go around the world, target people for death anywhere in the world that he wants, including places where we're not at war, including even American citizens, and simply eradicate their lives based on his order—not in a war zone, people who are not engaged in combat at the time they're killed. They're killed in cars, in their houses, while they're working, driving with their children, at funerals, rescuing people. Wherever it is that they might be found, they can simply be killed.

And the most extraordinary aspect about it is that Democratic partisans, who were cheering his

critiques in 2006 and 2007 and pretending to oppose this approach because it was a Republican who did it, switched completely on a dime. And the minute that President Obama embraced these policies, they, as public opinion polls show, completely switched how they think about all of these policies and started supporting them. And what this has meant is that these policies have shifted from being just a right-wing, extremist, Republican framework into one that is fully bipartisan, and therefore will be institutionalized and has been strengthened for years, if not decades, to come, in a way that George Bush and Dick Cheney could only have dreamed of.

**AMY GOODMAN:** I want to turn to a clip from *National Bird*, a new documentary on drone warfare that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival last month. This is Lisa Ling, a former drone system technical sergeant.

**LISA LING:** This is global. This is getting information anywhere at any time, shooting people from anywhere at any time. And it's not just one person sitting there with a little remote control, a little joystick, moving around a plane that's halfway across the world. That's not all there is. It's like borders don't matter anymore. And there's a huge system that spans the globe, that can just suck up endless amounts of your life, your personal data. I mean, this could grow to get so out of control. And we're not the only ones that have this. This is going to be commonplace, if it's not already. It's a secret program. And what that means is that I can't just go shouting off the hilltops telling the public what it is. What I can tell you is that, to me, one person who worked within this massive thing, it's frightening.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Drone whistleblower Lisa Ling in the documentary *National Bird*.