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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

ISLAM-OPED: Dr. Kings Legacy Mandates Respect for Due Process, End to Drone Killings and Warrantless Surveillance

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day symbolizes many important moral and ethical principles, including the citizenry's responsibility to end the federal government's abuses of civil and human rights, both at home and abroad.

Dr. King is most often remembered for his leadership in the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, his witnessing the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and his 1963 I Have a Dream speech, which challenged America to achieve a higher sense of morality. Moreover, Dr. King is remembered as being imprisoned by bigoted

Birmingham, Ala., police and having his life threatened by White Supremacists.

What seems to be left out of contemporary MLK Day discussions is that Dr. King was a strong critic of American military actions against civilian populations and was himself the subject of intrusive federal surveillance by the FBI.

Dr. King was one of the first prominent public intellectuals to take a vocal stand against the war in Vietnam. In fact, he specifically declared that America was the greatest purveyor of violence in the world, much of which targeted little brown Vietnamese children.

Dr. King's call for justice for all of humanity caused him to come under intense spying by the FBI and for its director, J. Edgar Hoover, to label him the most dangerous man in America. America has made great progress since the time of Dr. King, yet our nation remains plagued by these same moral challenges created by American violence abroad and by intrusive warrantless surveillance by federal law enforcement.

For example, America's drone program continues to kill civilians under the banner of collateral damage, thus causing the rise of anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world.

According to a recent study by Stanford University and New York University titled Living Under Drones, only two percent of extra-judicial drone killings in Pakistan are of terrorists that pose an imminent danger to America.

Retired General Stanley McChrystal, former top commander in Afghanistan and once a strong proponent of drone strikes, now questions the negative impact that they have on long-term American interests. Simply put, it becomes difficult to justify the deaths of so many civilians, including innocent women and children, and at the same time claim to be the world's torchbearer of liberty and justice for all people.

Regarding warrantless surveillance, the FBI sent uncounted confidential informants and agent provocateurs into Islamic houses of worship without predication of criminal activity to make initial threat assessments.

The tragedy of 9/11 continues to be misused as a justification for blanket monitoring of law-abiding Americans. Along with American Muslims, the FBI in recent years even monitored the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson, and spied on Occupy Wall Street activists for the constitutionally-protected freedoms of speech and assembly. Such warrantless surveillance not only is a waste of tax dollars and does not make the homeland any safer, but is also a violation of the very principles that are supposed to separate us from police states.

In the spirit of Dr. King, our national discussion should not only focus on racial equality, but also must include serious conversations about how the violence that America commits overseas affects the soul of the nation and how intrusive monitoring by the federal government is opposed to the aspirations of the Founding Fathers.

No one can know for certain what Dr. King would say about America's current drone killings and warrantless surveillance under the guise of national security. However, based on what he preached and was subjected to, it is safe to say that those who seek to follow in his footsteps should stand up for due process, question the violence carried out by our nation overseas and call for the cessation of federal law enforcement's intrusive monitoring of law-abiding citizens and legal residents.

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