Drones vs. Justice

Dear Senator Cassidy,

I recently heard about the drone attack in Yemen that killed Anwar al-Awlaki. I disagree with the way al-Awlaki was killed because not only was he a citizen of the United States, but when attacked, his sixteen year old son was with him. If the CIA is able to go into a foreign country and assassinate an American citizen and his son without having any repercussions, the drone policy of the United States is obviously faulty. The President should not go without punishment for allowing the CIA to kill someone who did not have the chance to have a fair trial and prove their innocence, and this shows the United States drone policy needs to be reformed.

Anwar al-Awlaki was indeed a terrorist, but his punishment did not necessarily fit his crime; death is not always the answer. His son was not ever connected to any terrorists, yet he was killed solely for being in the same car as his father. The Obama administration decided to be Anwar al-Awlaki’s “judge, jury, and executioner,” and this decision is not legal. Being a citizen of the United States, Anwar al-Awlaki was supposed to be guaranteed a trial. Anwar al-Awlaki was born in New Mexico and attended college at Colorado University. Since he was a United States citizen, this makes his son a United States citizen as well. In the Bill of Rights, the 6th amendment protects all citizens of the United States during criminal proceedings. People accused of any variety of crimes have the right to a fast trial by a jury that consists of impartial people, along with the right to a judge. However, Anwar al-Awlaki and his son were not allowed these fundamental rights. The President should not have been given a choice that gave him so much power; checks and balances should be in place. The CIA should have more restraint when dealing with criminals in this way.

Aside from the fact that illegal drone usage has intended results, there are several unintended consequences in the aftermath of these attacks. Among the most prevalent of these costs include PTSD for the individuals executing the attacks and the possibility of retaliation from citizens affected. A recent study conducted by the Air Force looked at the long term effects of piloting a drone and it was realized that, “drone pilots had higher incidence rates for 12 conditions, including anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation.” Many people have the misconception that because drone pilots are so far away from their targets, they will be less affected by the deaths; however, the feeling of guilt and regret is still there. Conditions like PTSD and depression cannot be reversed, much like inadvertent civilian casualties. When anyone’s loved ones get caught in the “cross fire” of drone strikes, they will have scars that will never truly heal. The wounds often lead to the need for retaliation, which can put American citizens at risk.

Considering that drones are used to keep American soldiers from risking their lives, the moral consequences along with retaliation from victims can cause more harm than is prevented. Incidents like Anwar al-Awlaki need be stopped immediately and everyone involved should be properly reprimanded. These issues surrounding drone attacks should not go unresolved.