In the American justice system, there are always loopholes. It is our job to maximize the equality granted by this system. If one case was not given fair trial, the legality of every case is in question. Anwar al-Awlaki was an American citizen who obtained the rights of that status, whether he deserved them or not.

It was easy for the U.S. Government to ignore legalities because of their distance from the actual attack. Drones eliminate the immediate danger of being killed in combat but introduce the danger of the law appearing inapplicable. Consequences of these attacks may not seem tangible at the time but will later cause damage to the ethics of the situation. During the attack eliminating a major threat, an innocent 16 year old boy was also killed. The American justice system embraces the ideal that the accused is innocent until proven guilty. The process of being proven guilty was nonexistent when death was granted to both after Anwar al-Awlaki was determined guilty by intelligence instead of by trial. The American justice system takes pride in the right to a fair trial, so what justice is being served if that trial is taken away?

If American citizens travel out of the country and commit a traffic violation then they will answer to the law of that country. This poses the question: Does the U.S. have the jurisdiction to execute penalties in other countries without being officially at war? Anwar al-Awlaki was a threat to the U.S. and not Yemen, so this resulted in the American government questioning whether Yemen would serve him justice. Taking things into our own hands, we launched the drone attack to eliminate our threat, but simultaneously threatening the innocents of Yemen. Imagine if a foreign criminal or terrorist was hiding in the United States, and the country at risk decided to launch an attack on the U.S. to eliminate their danger. If you can imagine it, Americans would respond with hostility regardless of the actual target. Without doubt, war would be declared if an innocent was killed in the crossfire. In al-Awlaki’s case, an innocent was killed therefore Yemen declaring war would have been a logical result. The son was not a threat to the U.S. and would not have been subject to trial like his father, so had the protocol of justice been followed, he would still be alive today. This could be considered murder requiring its legality investigated. This assassination could have resulted in years of war with Yemen which could have been avoided with a fair trial to al-Awlaki. A war would take more lives than al-Awlaki ever could, defeating the purpose of justice.

When controlling drones, the priority is achieving the objective while minimizing the amount of unnecessary casualties. Now, an innocent is dead along with the threat to a nation, but the controversy of legality lives. His and other innocents’ deaths should not just be considered collateral damage when the chasm between the law and its execution grows.