The Gamification of Assassination

Dear Mr. Vitter,

In 2011, President Obama ordered Anwar al-Awlaki to be killed because of his involvement with terrorist activities. The CIA was able to pinpoint al-Awlaki’s location and they took advantage of the opportunity to have a drone strike eliminate him. The murder occurred on foreign soil, with the operator of the drone located thousands of miles away. He controlled the drone with a computer system that strongly resembles the video games currently popular with teenagers. The use of drones, in acts like this, has drastically changed the structure and the rules of combat. An executive order signed by every president from Gerald Ford to Barak Obama classifies drone strikes as assassinations. Mr. Senator, drone strikes are in opposition to our national values, detrimental to our national security, and are illegal as defined by United States and international law.

The values of our nation include, but are not limited to: integrity, justice, liberty**,** and the pursuit of happiness. In President Obama’s 2013 speech to the National Defense University, he said that “we are a reservoir of good will”. By using drones in such a secretive manner, we no longer uphold this title and lose credibility of ourselves and to others. Additionally, the issue of killing a U.S. citizen is highly controversial. In the process of eliminatingal-Awlaki, we took innocent lives, which are never justified. After all, the definition of terrorism is killing innocent people for political gain.

There’s an old adage that when you cut off one head, two will rise to take its place. This phenomenon can easily be seen in South-Central Asia. Clearly if people have been oppressed or wronged in the past, they will hold feelings of animosity in future generations. Making these terrorists martyrs is in direct conflict with our desire for peace. Not only is this issue decreasing our security externally, but also for our citizens in the U.S. Noah Shachtman writes in*Wired* that if the Army has its way, drones won’t just be able to look at what you do. They’ll be able to recognize your face — and track you, based on how you look. “If this works out, we’ll have the ability to track people persistently across wide areas,” says Tim Faltemier, the lead biometrics researcher at Progeny Systems Corporation, which recently won one of the Army contracts. The notion of drones tracking you overhead is frightening. It is even more so if you think of their capability to kill citizens.

One solution this is to take the power to use drones from the CIA and give it to the military. This will require congressional support before a drone strike is ordered. Michael Ratner, president of the *Centre for Constitutional Rights* asks, “Is this the world we want? Where the president of the United States can place an American citizen, or anyone else for that matter, living outside a war zone on a targeted assassination list, and then have him murdered by drone strike.”