



Culture of Peace

Drone Assassinations are Illegal ~ Adapted from an article by Bill Quigley

US civilian and military employees regularly target and fire lethal unmanned drone guided missiles at people across the world. Thousands of people have been assassinated. Hundreds of those killed were civilians. Some of those killed were rescuers and mourners. These killings would be criminal acts if they occurred inside the US. Does it make sense that these killings would be legal outside the US?

US Defense of Drone Assassinations

US officials claim these drone killings are not assassinations, because the United States has the legal right to kill anyone considered a terrorist, anywhere in the world, if they can argue it is in self-defense. This argument is based on the highly criticized claim of anticipatory self-defense which justifies killings in a “global war on terror.”

Assassination by the US government has been illegal since 1976

Drone killings are acts of premeditated murder. Premeditated murder is a crime in all fifty states and under federal law. These murders are also the textbook definition of assassination, which is murder by sudden or secret attack for political reasons.

United Nations questions the legality of US drone killings

The UN directly questioned the legality of US drone killings in a May 2010 report by NYU law professor Philip Alston. Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, said drone killings may be lawful in the context of authorized armed conflict. Outside the context of armed conflict, the use of drones for targeted killing is almost never likely to be legal. Drone killings can't be justified as anticipatory self-defense. Countries which engage in such killings must provide transparency and accountability, which no country has done.

Military law of war does not authorize widespread drone killing of civilians

According to the current US Military Law of War Deskbook, the law of war allows killing only when consistent with four key principles: military necessity, distinction, proportionality, and humanity. These principles preclude direct targeting of civilians and medical personnel, and also set out how much “incidental” loss of civilian life is allowed.

Some argue precision-guided weapons like drones can be used only when there is no probable cause of civilian deaths. But the US military disputes that burden and instead directs “all practicable precautions” be taken to weigh the anticipated loss of civilian life against the advantages expected to be gained by the drone strike.

Even using the more lenient standard, there is little legal justification of deliberately allowing the killing of civilians who are “incidental” to the killings of people whose identities are unknown.



Predator Drone firing a missile.

Drone Assassinations (Cont.)

Conclusion

There is incredible danger in allowing US military and civilians to murder people anywhere in the world with no public or Congressional or judicial oversight. This authorizes the President and the executive branch, according to the ACLU and the Center for Constitutional Rights, to be prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner.

The use of drones to assassinate people violates US and international law in multiple ways. US military and civilian employees, who plan, target and execute people in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia are violating the law and, ultimately, risk prosecution. As the technology for drone attacks spreads, protests by the U.S. that drone attacks by others are illegal will sound quite hollow. Continuation of flagrantly illegal drone attacks by the US also risks justifying the exact same actions, taken by others, against us.

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Other references:

<http://www.codepink4peace.org>

The FCNL Newsletter of September 21, 2012 contains a three-page, comprehensive article on Drones.

Friends Committee on National Legislation <http://fcn1.org>

Millennium Development Goals Update

In the 2012 review it was noted that three important targets on poverty, water and education have been met.

- For the first time since poverty trends began to be monitored both the number of people living in extreme poverty and the poverty rates have fallen in every developing region.
- The target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved drinking water has been achieved.
- Parity in primary education between boys and girls has also been achieved.

“These results represent a tremendous reduction in human suffering and are a clear validation of the approach embodied in the MDGs” reported Ban Ki-Moon. However he also noted that in 2015 more than 600 million people worldwide will still lack access to safe drinking water, and almost one billion will be living on an income of less than \$1.25 per day.

To achieve the 2015 goal, governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector need to intensify their contribution.



From: Partnership for Global Justice:
UN Update, July 2012

<http://partnershipforglobaljustice.com>

Ecospirituality Resource for Advent 2012

Last Lent many groups throughout the world used discussion material written by Terri MacKenzie, SHCJ, that focused on air. Terri has a similarly-arranged resource for Advent 2012, Paths to Peace, that can be found on her website. These free and ecumenical guides integrate the New Universe Story with matters of concern to our planet: air, soil, water, light, peace, and spirituality. They follow the week's Scripture readings.

See: <http://ecospiritualityresources.com>

SOA Watch Annual Protest at Ft. Benning, Georgia

The annual SOA Watch protest at the gates of Ft. Benning, Georgia will take place on November 16-18, 2012. The organization continues to work through the US Congress to close down the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly School of the Americas) located at Ft. Benning.

The goal of closing down the school is closer to reality because six Latin American countries will no longer send their troops to be trained at the school. SOA Watch continues to urge other countries to withdraw their troops and follow the example of Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina and Venezuela.

<http://www.soaw.org>