



Drones Are Price of the Perpetual Warfare State

By: Malou Innocent – March 14, 2013

The U.S. government's drone program is the latest example of how war threatens the rights of ordinary citizens and corrodes their constitutional republic.

Domestically, most critics of the administration's drone program have no love lost for Anwar Al-Awlaki. He was the American citizen, online propagandist, and recruiter for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who allegedly (all secret evidence) sought to use cyanide to poison Western water and food supplies, and attack American citizens. When the U.S. government drone-bombed Awlaki in September 2011, it was the first time an American citizen was targeted for death without being formally charged with a crime, without being allowed to contest the evidence against him in court and without being convicted at trial. The drone-bombing was in accordance with the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force.

The Obama administration and its drone policy supporters have argued that Awlaki forfeited his Fifth Amendment protections—which guarantee that a citizen's life or liberty cannot be deprived without Due Process of law—because he plotted to kill Americans. But however evil Awlaki was, drone-bombing advocates' preoccupation with him misses the point.

Since 9/11, Republican and Democratic administrations have been hiding their warfare procedures behind a veil of classification and bureaucracy while steadily increasing their ability to both spy on the private communication of American citizens and kill people based on the president's sole discretion. The judgment of Congress and the president was intended to inform major decisions on foreign policy and national defense in order to protect the rights and liberties of Americans under the Constitution. When secrecy shields government accountability and transparency, it short circuits our democratic process. Currently, the U.S. government operates in the absence of checks and balances when the president and his lawyers can claim that the courts and the Congress cannot rule or set standards on whether its robust executive power violates constitutionally protected Due Process rights. The collateral damage unleashed on foreign civilians by means of war is egregious, but the altering of the structure of institutions dedicated to protecting our liberties is yet another upsetting implication of our permanent state of war.

Texas A&M University Professor Christopher Layne writes in "Kant or Cant: The Myth of Democratic Peace" that the greater the external threat a state faces or believes that it does, the more autocratic its foreign policy making process will be and the more centralized its political structures will become. Layne argues that external threats necessitate a powerful governmental apparatus to mobilize resources for national security purposes; in turn, the more likely these states are to adopt statist forms of democracy or even authoritarian structures. As we have witnessed with past conflicts,

and especially since 9/11, war concentrates power in the executive branch and thus expands the limits placed on our constitutional republic.

Even William F. Buckley Jr., a leader of the modern American conservative movement, recognized that small government at home while maintaining a permanent war footing against the Soviets was impossible. He wrote in a 1952 essay published in *Commonweal* that Americans would have to accept, "extensive and productive tax laws" as well as "war production boards and the attendant centralization of power in Washington." Most Americans should be aware that permanent war requires massive taxation and borrowing. In addition, given the backlash in recent weeks over drones, what Americans may not have expected was, as Buckley wrote, "we have to accept Big Government for the duration—for neither an offensive nor a defensive war can be waged given our present government skills except through the instrumentality of a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores."

It should not be too surprising that a weapons- and surveillance-platform used against foreigners can be redirected against U.S. citizens on American soil. In 1975, Sen. Frank Church, then chairman of the select committee on intelligence, led the famous "Church Committee" investigation of the National Security Agency, an intelligence entity tasked with spying on foreign enemies, not American citizens. But as Church discovered, "That capability at any time could be turned around on the American people and no American would have any privacy left, such is the capability to monitor everything: telephone conversations, telegrams, it doesn't matter. There would be no place to hide." Church warned that if a dictator took over, the national security instruments at its disposal "could enable it to impose total tyranny, and there would be no way to fight back."

The problem, of course, is that Americans don't believe that our strong and expansive national security state, which currently operates in the absence of specific limits and clear legal boundaries, can be exploited for reasons having nothing to do with protecting the country. Many Americans trust and admire President Obama, as others trusted and admired President Bush. The issue, though, is that the president's job is not to protect Americans, but surprisingly enough is to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Luckily, Americans are finally waking up to how policies in the name of endless war and national security can lead to power grabs. Sadly, these policies had to be redirected at the American people for them to see how it would damage their liberties.