Case 3: Game of Drones

As a result of the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, the US military ramped up development of a lethal force of aerial drones. Fleets of American unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) stationed around the globe have become the weapons-of-choice against known and suspected terrorists in a number of countries. The program to hunt down and take out terrorists was first revealed to the American public in 2013. It was made public by a government whistleblower, as reported in the book, *The Assassination Complex*, by Jeremy Scahill along with reporters for the intercept.com website.

The book and subsequent coverage by the news media generated concern about the way the US government was deciding which of the reported 460,000 people, suspected as terrorists by the CIA and the military, were being added to the list of potential drone targets. A panel of national advisors is responsible for selecting those to be added to the kill list, sometimes reportedly listing individuals who had merely drawn the attention of authorities by their posts on social media. The President is ultimately responsible for signing off on their fate as clear and imminent threats to American lives.

At the time, one of those names belonged to an American citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki. Legal experts noted that he was not being accorded due legal process, including the right to stand trial for his alleged activities. In October of 2011, he was killed by a drone strike in Yemen. Two weeks later, his son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, who was also a US citizen but not on a kill list, also died in a US drone strike against someone else, thus becoming collateral damage in the war on terrorism.

While scores of intended targets have been killed, so have hundreds of innocent victims, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

Aside from Constitutional and moral questions raised by the drone program, a Defense Department task force has concluded that, rather than killing terrorists, it would be preferable to capture them along with any matériel. Furthermore, many US commanders have been quoted as saying drone attacks have led to increasingly radicalized terrorists and the recruitment of new members to their ranks.

Case from the 2017 International Ethics Bowl on February 26, 2017 in Dallas Texas

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