

UG#706 - When Are Terrorists Not Terrorists? (States assassinating by drones)

Robin Upton 2015-04-02 16:13

We focus on drone technology, looking at the relationship between language and law. A range of speakers explain how the framing of the War On Terror has served the US military's purposes, and note that the US keeps details of its pretexts for state sponsored assassinations by drone as vague as possible. Plausible deniability is only needed if people are in a position where their actions are subject to informed questions. The core of this week's show is made up with a set of speeches from a 2015 meeting about the use of drone warfare, introduced by Bruce Gagnon and augmented by SAS whistleblower, Ben Griffin and a few classic words of Chris Hedges on how war affects its participants.

We begin with a call by Bruce Gagnon in October 2014 to repurpose the US arms production capacity. After a musical break, we hear the start of Chris Hedges classic speech (from episode 227), followed by SAS whistleblower, Ben Griffin, commenting on the infamous Collateral Murder video leaked by Chelsea Manning.

The majority of our audio comes from the Interfaith Conference On Drone Warfare, by the Peace Action Education Fund held at the Princeton Theological Seminary at the end of January 2015. Our first speaker, Elizabeth Beavers, reviews the basic legal groundwork for assassination by drone - the "Authorization for Use of Military Force" (AUMF), an extremely general law passed a few days after 9-11 which has been used worldwide as a legal pretext for US military involvement. She summarizes the impact of the the AUMF by observing that not only is this used as justification for Guantanamo Bay, it "has essentially turned the globe into a battlefield; it's very easy for the executive to bypass the legislature and decide to go to war, to use lethal force, to use military force against individuals and organization, and this a very novel concept". A DC judge wrote in 2013 that decisions justified under the AUMF have rendered habeus corpus "functionally useless".

Next we hear from Rush Holt, a former U.S. Representative who has taken a special interest in assassination by drone, who concludes that it is of central importance to abandon the language of a "war on terror" and instead apply a criminal justice basis to the area of terrorism.

The International Legal Director of Human Rights First, Gabor Rona, reviews the issue of the legality of assassination by drone. There are two major international legal frameworks which pertain to killing of people with drones, the law of armed conflict and the human rights statutes. Although neither has anything per se to say about kill lists or 'signature strikes', they both limit the grounds which legalize killings. The US is operating in a legal "gray area" and remains vague about the legal justification of its drone strikes in order to avoid the need to adhere to these legal limitations.

We conclude with Wendy Patten, who looks at the US government's use of drones, specifically the policies which guide it. She begins by describing what is currently known of a May 2013 presidential policy guidance (PPG), which purports to constrain use of drones. Only a 2 page 'fact sheet' of this has currently been declassified. Then she looks at what has emerged from the efforts to use litigation as regards drone usage.

Music: In Search of Enemies by Clan Dyken

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2015/04/520046.shtml>