

THE FOG OF OBAMAWAR IN HI-DEF 1080P

☒ David S. Cloud has what can only be described as an amazing piece in today's Los Angeles Times on the sobering reality and cold hearted bloodlust of remote drone warfare. Cloud's story tells, in gripping, fully fleshed from all angles, detail the story of an United States killer drone operation gone awry.

The Americans were using some of the most sophisticated tools in the history of war, technological marvels of surveillance and intelligence gathering that allowed them to see into once-inaccessible corners of the battlefield. But the high-tech wizardry would fail in its most elemental purpose: to tell the difference between friend and foe.

This is the story of that episode. It is based on hundreds of pages of previously unreleased military documents, including transcripts of cockpit and radio conversations obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, the results of two Pentagon investigations and interviews with the officers involved as well as Afghans who were on the ground that day.

Before you go any further, go read Cloud's full article. Seriously, do it now, because the details of the story – of just this one singular drone strike – are too many and Cloud lays them out to well for me to pick, choose and substitute.

Suffice it to say, by the most conservative casualty report, by the US military naturally, there were at least 16 dead and 12 critically wounded. For which General Stanley McChrystal gave a verbal apology and the oh so benevolent United States government paid blood money stipends of \$2,900 for the dismembered and

disfigured survivors and \$4,800 for the dead. At \$76,800, the combined lives of 16 innocent dead citizens, blown to bits in their own country, is about the cost of one of the Hellfire missiles fired by a Predator drone. The cold and celebratory technician soldiers at the drone pilot center in Nevada, and video review center in Florida, played their war games on video monitors that are worth more than the United States assigns as the value of a developed human life in Afghanistan.

So much of the angst (though certainly not all) from the legal liberal left, whether here at Emptywheel, from our friend Glenn Greenwald, or others, centers on promises and inferences that Barack Obama made to get elected and how he has cravenly turned his back on them. And rightly so, because his track record on the rule of law and civil liberties has been both despicable and deplorable. But accelerated war in Afghanistan and increased use of remote killer drones was one area where he was honest when campaigning for office. He said that was what he was in favor of, how he would do it, and by god that is one promise he has made good on.

But there should have been more circumspection of Mr. Obama's position then, and there certainly should be now. The use of drones and remote decision making in war, when applied to small and isolated battlefield considerations such as were present in the instance documented by David Cloud is too cold and detached. As a full fledged policy, it is imperial, brutish and cowardly. The root truth is it is, to mish mash several legal terms of art together, extrajudicial murder with reckless and depraved indifference.

Consider, if you will, the words and acts of the team, and various members in different detached locales, that collaborated to perpetrate this atrocity. Individually, it is hard to place the real weight of blame on any of them; rather the blame lies with the nature of the government, and its leaders, that put them in the position

where this kind of hell can, and all too commonly will, occur. This is not the technological advancement of an enlightened society, it is the slipping decay into national depravity. Writ large on a global scale.

Just ponder some of the direct words and thoughts uttered by the individuals in this one case:

“Oh, sweet target!” – This was uttered when there was nothing more than a couple of vehicles with citizens in it.

“I really doubt that children call. Man, I really ... hate that,” – the excited utterance of contemptuous denial when one of the team identified the likely presence of children in one or more of the vehicles.

“The weapons we’ve identified and the demographics of the individuals plus the ICOM.” – When there had been NO identification whatsoever of even one weapon, much less multiple/plural weapons and there was NOTHING whatsoever to tie their nebulous “ICOM” chatter to these innocent Afghanistan citizens lawfully going about their business. None. Nada. Zero. Zilch.

When you have a remote and lethal military hammer like the US government possesses, human nails are too easy to find and too easy to pound. When you leave your hammer on permanent war status – in three different wars no less – a lot is going to get nailed. As so many have said, this is not making us safer, it is fueling that which we are so terrified of and lashing out at so ferociously. It is one of the dumbest, most asinine and most craven vicious circles in the history of man and we are being led by a man, again remote and detached, aloof in the White House who is eerily proud of this “strategy”.

It is hard to see how any enlightened discussion would not lend the conclusion that this is criminally reckless behavior under both domestic and international law. There are skilled advocates more than capable of producing legal sophistry to the contrary and, if hired and tasked with doing so, I could too. That is what lawyers do. To be clear, however, I would have no problem defending any individual in the scenario David Cloud so remarkably, and fairly, portrays. What I find indefensible is the strategy and policy of the political leadership in the United States that propagates the killing and the ever more relentless necessity for more of the same. The architects of the vicious circle and the man who has now expanded it to the extrajudicial execution of American citizens.

Today, David Cloud portrays the vignette of the cold, detached remote killing in the Afghanistan countryside. Tomorrow it will be open ground in the vicinity of Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana or Key West. Hammers like this, once set in motion and cravenly unrestrained by the men in American political leadership and White House, always find more nails. Stay tuned, drone life and remote enforcement is coming to a city and town near you. Sooner than you think.