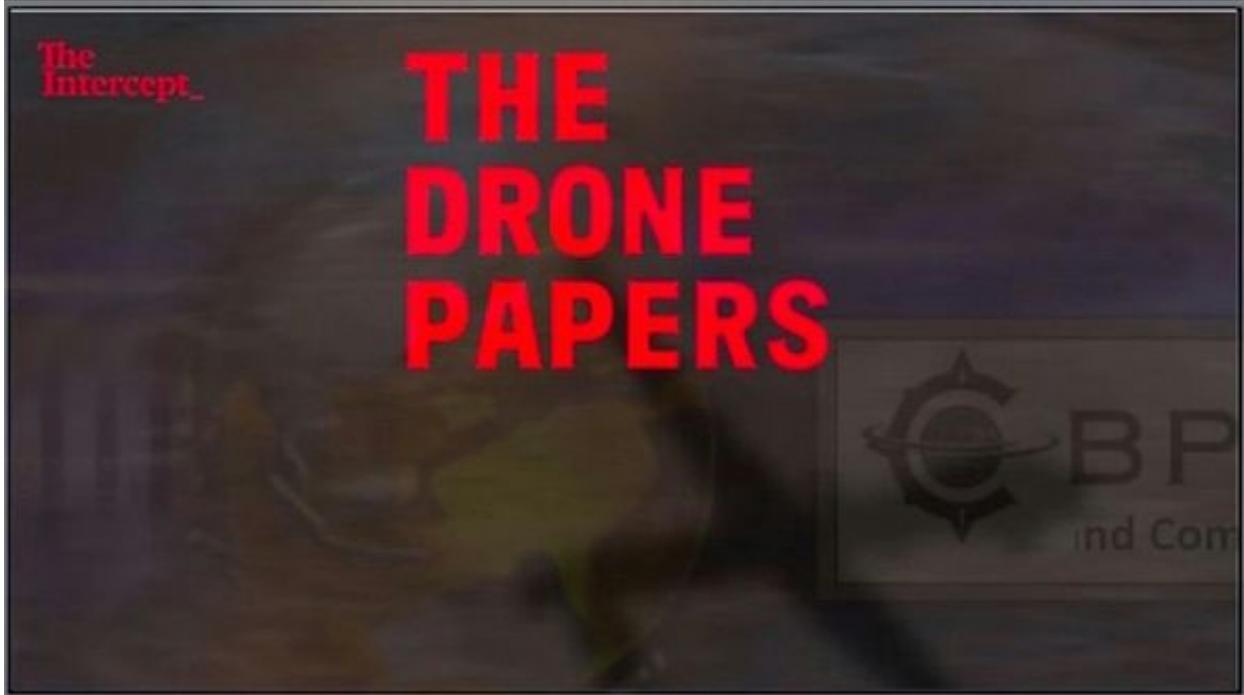


Truthdigger of the Week: The ‘Drone Papers’ Whistleblower

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The Young Turks / Youtube

No U.S. drone strike has been made without “near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured,” President Obama assured us in a 2013 speech. Last April, when the long civilian death trail left in the wake of his drone war finally claimed **an innocent American life**, he declared: “It is a cruel and bitter truth that in the fog of war generally, and our fight against terrorism specifically, that mistakes, and sometimes deadly mistakes, can occur.”

Such words, we learned this week, are nothing but cruel and bitter deception. Thanks to an anonymous whistleblower’s exposure of the inner workings of America’s drone war, we now know that nearly 90 percent of people killed in recent strikes in Afghanistan were not the intended targets.

Thursday’s publication by The Intercept of a **groundbreaking new collection of documents** leaked by the whistleblower provides details of the grisly process of how and whom the U.S. government chooses to kill, from the use of so-called “baseball cards” of profile information created for individual targets to the chain of authorization that leads directly to the president.

For strikes in Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia, "The Drone Papers" reveals an alarming number of defects, including strikes resulting in large part from electronic communications data, or "signals intelligence," that officials acknowledge to be unreliable. The documents "also highlight the futility of the war in Afghanistan by showing how the U.S. has poured vast resources into killing local insurgents, in the process exacerbating the very threat the U.S. is seeking to confront," **according to** The Intercept's Jeremy Scahill.

Above all, the leak reveals "the normalization of assassination as a central component of U.S. counterterrorism policy." Since 9/11, this policy has resulted in the deaths of more than 4,000 individuals in the course of 500 drone strikes. While Obama may have inherited the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he has made the drone war his own. "From his first days as commander in chief, the drone has been President Barack Obama's weapon of choice," Scahill reminds us, "used by the military and the CIA to hunt down and kill the people his administration has deemed—through secretive processes, without indictment or trial—worthy of execution."

While "the first drone strike outside of a declared war zone was conducted more than **12 years ago**," Scahill continues, "it was not until May 2013 that the White House released **aset of standards and procedures** for conducting such strikes. Those guidelines offered little specificity, asserting that the U.S. would only conduct a lethal strike outside of an 'area of active hostilities' if a target represents a 'continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons,' without providing any sense of the **internal process** used to determine whether a suspect should be killed without being indicted or tried. The implicit message on drone strikes from the Obama administration has been one of '*trust, but don't verify.*' "

The Intercept report confirms this brutal message. The leak differs from the information brought to us by whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning in that the newly revealed classified government documents are accompanied by statements about the source's motivation in his or her own words.

According to the whistleblower, the decision to provide the documents to The Intercept sprang from a belief that the public has a right to understand how and why people are put on kill lists and ultimately assassinated on orders from the highest ranks of the American government. "This outrageous explosion of watchlisting—of monitoring people and racking and stacking them on lists, assigning them numbers, assigning them 'baseball cards,' assigning them death sentences without notice, on a worldwide battlefield—it was, from the very first instance, wrong," the source said.

"We're allowing this to happen. And by 'we,' I mean every American citizen who has access to this information now, but continues to do nothing about it," the source explains. "The military is easily capable of adapting to change, but they don't like to stop anything they feel is making their lives easier, or is to their benefit. And this certainly is, in their eyes, a very quick, clean way of doing things. It's a very slick, efficient way to conduct the war, without having to have the massive ground invasion mistakes of Iraq and Afghanistan," the source said. "But at this point, they have become so addicted to this machine, to this way of doing business, that it seems like it's going to become harder and harder to pull them away from it the longer they're allowed to continue operating in this way."

Micah Zenko, a senior fellow at the **Council on Foreign Relations**, says: "In some ways it reconfirms and illuminates much of what we knew, or thought we knew, about a lot of these programs, like that the administration firmly prefers kill over capture despite claiming the opposite, and that there's not 'a bunch of folks in the room,' as Obama calls it—that there's a clear, bureaucratic process for this." During the course of Obama's presidency, it has become harder for journalists to obtain information from the government on the results of particular strikes. There is no transparency or accountability in the U.S. drone program, and Obama's Justice Department has fought in court for years to keep secret the legal opinions justifying strikes.

But in light of this new information, Obama can no longer hide under an ambiguous "fog of war" pretense, and neither can our nation.

Laid bare in these documents is a program of state-sponsored terrorism, plain and simple. For exposing the truth about the Obama administration's high-tech policy of assassination, The Intercept's anonymous whistleblower is our Truthdigger of the Week.