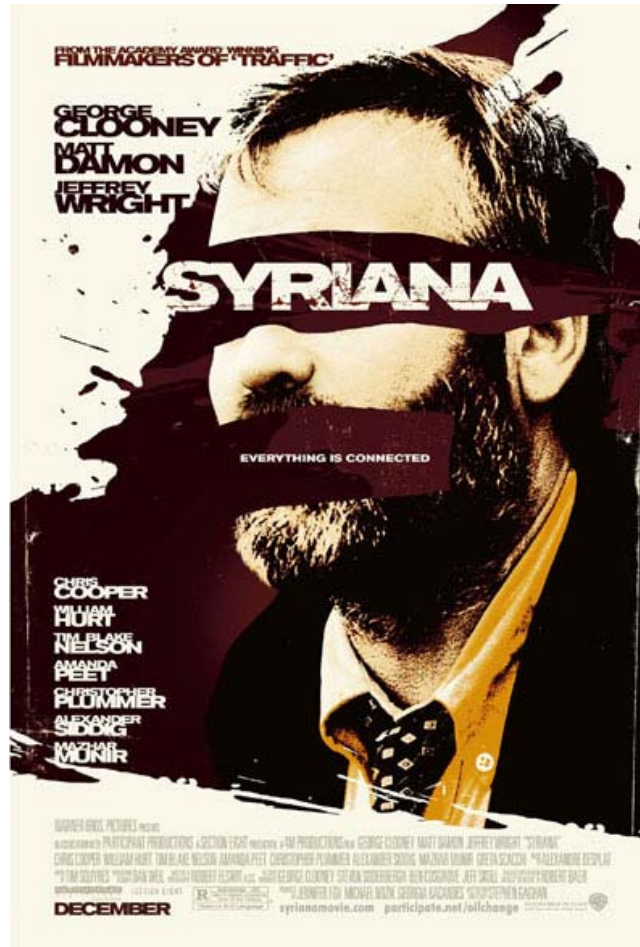


Syriana Film Review/Commentary:

[In America it's]...*"Innocent until investigated"*...

Everything Is Connected...



“From writer/director Stephen Gaghan, winner of the Best Screenplay Academy Award for Traffic, comes Syriana, a political thriller that unfolds against the intrigue of the global oil industry. From the players brokering back-room deals in Washington to the men toiling in the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, the film's multiple storylines weave together to illuminate the human consequences of the fierce pursuit of wealth and power. As a career CIA operative (George Clooney) begins to uncover the disturbing truth about the work he has devoted his life to, an up-and-coming oil broker (Matt Damon) faces an unimaginable family tragedy and finds redemption in his partnership with an idealistic Gulf prince (Alexander Siddig). A corporate lawyer (Jeffrey Wright) faces a moral dilemma as he finesses the questionable merger of two powerful U.S. oil companies, while across the globe, a disenfranchised Pakistani teenager (Mazhar Munir) falls prey to the recruiting efforts of a charismatic cleric. Each plays their small part in the vast and complex system that powers the industry, unaware of the explosive impact their lives will have upon the world”...Anonymous, IMDB.com



Syriana is a powerful indictment on the United States blatant attempts to influence Arab oil rich nations—or any nation that has a natural resource or labor force we need—“By any means necessary”. People, conservatives mainly and red state voters, may say that Hollywood has too much power in the media and is spreading liberal values and non-patriotic ideas. But these critics of Hollywood do not have the collective creative brainpower among them that could make a film as smart, sophisticated and as true as *Syriana*. It is not whether the United States has an interest in controlling the Middle East—it is an inevitable fact. We need oil and we especially need pro-U.S., pro-capitalism puppet governments in oil producing countries. The truth about the United States and its long-term interests and goals in the Middle East can be probably summed up all in one film--*Syriana*. All one has to do is watch a flick that tells it like it is—the U.S. will do whatever it takes to make sure our oil companies get whatever they want.

What I liked the most about *Syriana* was that it was a real film with a real story. Far too many times you get a political or conscious movie like *Crash* that has a good multi-faceted story of intersecting characters, the dialogue is forced or reduced to contrived situations to spout the latest social, racial or economic statistics. No, *Syriana* just tells a compelling tale of greedy men of many colors and races and what ends those men will do to maintain power, wealth and respect. We are at times during *Syriana* following Bob Barnes, George Clooney, a veteran and somewhat jaded CIA operative. Bob is constantly being tested and encouraged to be a “team player” when all the Intel around him tells him that things are not going right in the Middle East. In *Syriana* one can easily sympathize when Bob is told to configure his overseas mission reports to fit the ideology of the present administration-Republican or Democrat is not identified—that this is a real life parallel to the U.S.’s own Middle East policies that were shaped by vice president sweating the CIA to declare Iraq a nuclear threat to the U.S. What we see in *Syriana* makes us reflect on our own lives in real time. We rarely concern ourselves with isolated and random news stories about our military missile attacks that miss their intended terrorist targets and kill innocent civilians. But what we don’t ask is that maybe the US government wanted those civilians killed and the so-called terrorists to escape. Watching *Syriana* will make anyone rethink America’s true goals in Iraq because—“Everything is connected”. I give *Syriana* five cheesecakes out of five and it definitely needs to be seen.

Sincerely,

David L Watts a.k.a. Money Train

www.Hiphopbattle.com • P.O. Box 6313 • Lancaster, CA 93539-6313 • futurx5@yahoo.com • host&hiphopbattle.com





www.Hiphopbattle.com • P.O. Box 6313 • Lancaster, CA 93539-6313 • futurx5@yahoo.com • host&hiphopbattle.com



THE NATION

CIA Expands Use of Drones in Terror War

'Targeted killing' with missile-firing Predators is a way to hit Al Qaeda in remote areas, officials say. Host nations are not always given notice.

By Josh Meyer
Times Staff Writer

January 29, 2006

WASHINGTON — Despite protests from other countries, the United States is expanding a top-secret effort to kill suspected terrorists with drone-fired missiles as it pursues an increasingly decentralized Al Qaeda, U.S. officials say.

The CIA's failed Jan. 13 attempt to assassinate Al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman Zawahiri in Pakistan was the latest strike in the "targeted killing" program, a highly classified initiative that officials say has broadened as the network splintered and fled Afghanistan.

The strike against Zawahiri reportedly killed as many as 18 civilians, many of them women and children, and triggered protests in Pakistan. Similar U.S. attacks using unmanned Predator aircraft equipped with Hellfire missiles have angered citizens and political leaders in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen.

Little is known about the targeted-killing program. The Bush administration has refused to discuss how many strikes it has made, how many people have died, or how it chooses targets. No U.S. officials were willing to speak about it on the record because the program is classified.

Several U.S. officials confirmed at least 19 occasions since Sept. 11 on which Predators successfully fired Hellfire missiles on terrorist suspects overseas, including 10 in Iraq in one month last year. The Predator strikes have killed at least four senior Al Qaeda leaders, but also many civilians, and it is not known how many times they missed their targets. Critics of the program dispute its legality under U.S. and international law, and say it is administered by the CIA with little oversight. U.S. intelligence officials insist it is one of their most tightly regulated, carefully vetted programs.

Lee Strickland, a former CIA counsel who retired in 2004 from the agency's Senior Intelligence Service, confirmed that the Predator program had grown to keep pace with the spread of Al Qaeda commanders. The CIA believes they are branching out to gain recruits, financing and influence.

Many groups of Islamic militants are believed to be operating in lawless pockets of the Middle East, Asia and Africa where it is perilous for U.S. troops to try to capture them, and difficult to discern the leaders.

"Paradoxically, as a result of our success the target has become even more decentralized, even more diffused and presents a more difficult target — no question about that," said Strickland, now director of the Center for Information Policy at the University of Maryland.

"It's clear that the U.S. is prepared to use and deploy these weapons in a fairly wide theater," he said.

Current and former intelligence officials said they could not disclose which countries could be subject to Predator strikes. But the presence of Al Qaeda or its affiliates has been documented in dozens of nations, including Somalia, Morocco and Indonesia.

High-ranking U.S. and allied counter-terrorism officials said the program's expansion was not merely geographic. They said it had grown from targeting a small number of senior Al Qaeda commanders after the Sept. 11 attacks to a more loosely defined effort to kill possibly scores of suspected terrorists, depending on where they were found and what they were doing.

"We have the plans in place to do them globally," said a former counter-terrorism official who worked at the CIA and State Department, which coordinates such efforts with other governments.

"In most cases, we need the approval of the host country to do them. However, there are a few countries where the president has decided that we can whack someone without the approval or knowledge of the host government."

The CIA and the Pentagon have deployed at least several dozen of the Predator drones throughout Iraq, Afghanistan and along the borders of Pakistan, U.S. officials confirmed. The CIA also has sent the remote-controlled aircraft into the skies over Yemen and some other countries believed to be Al Qaeda havens, particularly those without a strong government or military with which the United States can work in tandem, a current U.S. counter-terrorism official told The Times.

Such incursions are highly sensitive because they could violate the sovereignty of those nations and anger U.S. allies, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Predator, built by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. of San Diego, is a slender craft, 27 feet long with a 49-foot wingspan. It makes a clearly audible buzzing sound, and can hover above a target for many hours and fly as low as 15,000 feet to get good reconnaissance footage. They are often operated by CIA or Pentagon officials at computer consoles in the United States.

The drones were designed for surveillance and have been used for that purpose since at least the mid-1990s, beginning with the conflict in the Balkans. After the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush ordered a rapid escalation of a project to arm the Predators with missiles, an effort that had been mired in bureaucratic squabbles and technical glitches.

Now the Predator is an integral part of the military's counter-insurgency effort, especially in Iraq. But the CIA also runs a more secretive — and more controversial — Predator program that targets suspected terrorists outside combat zones.

The CIA does not even acknowledge that such a targeted-killing program exists, and some attacks have been explained away as car bombings or other incidents. It is not known how many militants or bystanders have been killed by Predator strikes, but anecdotal evidence suggests the number is significant.

In some cases, the destruction was so complete that it was impossible to establish who was killed, or even how many people.

Among the senior Al Qaeda leaders killed in Predator strikes were military commander Mohammed Atef in Afghanistan in November 2001 and Qaed Sinan Harithi, a suspected mastermind of the bombing of the U.S. destroyer Cole in Yemen, in 2002. Last year, Predators took out two Al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan: Haitham Yemeni in May and Abu Hamza Rabia in December, one month after another missile strike missed him.

The attack on Rabia in North Waziristan also killed his Syrian bodyguards and the 17-year-old son and the 8-year-old nephew of the owner of the house that was struck, according to a U.S. official and Amnesty International, which has lodged complaints with the Bush administration following each suspected Predator strike.

Another apparent Predator missile strike killed a former Taliban commander, Nek Mohammed, in South Waziristan in June 2004, along with five others. A local observer said the strike was so precise that it didn't damage any of the buildings around the lawn where Mohammed was seated. At the time, the Pakistani army said Mohammed had been killed in clashes with its soldiers.

Michael Scheuer, the former chief of the CIA's special unit hunting Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, said he was aware of at least four successful targeted-killing strikes in Afghanistan alone by November 2004, when he left the agency.

In the attack on Zawahiri, word spread quickly that a U.S. plane had been buzzing above the target beforehand. Afterward, villagers reportedly found evidence of U.S. involvement.

The missiles intended for Bin Laden's chief deputy incinerated several houses in Damadola, a village near Pakistan's northwestern border with Afghanistan. But Zawahiri was not there, U.S. officials now believe. Pakistan said it was investigating whether the strikes killed other high-ranking militants.

There were some well-publicized failures before the Zawahiri strike. In February 2002, a Predator tracked and killed a tall man in flowing robes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The CIA believed it was firing at Bin Laden, but the victim turned out to be someone else.

Before the Sept. 11 attacks, the U.S. government had targeted Bin Laden in at least one Cruise missile strike. But the CIA was reluctant to engage in targeted killings because it said the laws regarding assassinations were too vague and the agency could face criminal charges.

Even today, documents and interviews suggest that the U.S. policy on targeted killings is still evolving.

Some critics, including a U.N. human rights watchdog group and Amnesty International, have urged the Bush administration to be more open about how it decides whom to kill and under what circumstances.

A U.N. report in the wake of the 2002 strike in Yemen called it "an alarming precedent [and] a clear case of extrajudicial killing" in violation of international laws and treaties. The Bush administration, which did not return calls seeking comment for this story, has said it does not recognize the mandate of the U.N. special body in connection with its military actions against Al Qaeda, according to Amnesty International.

"Zawahiri is an easy case. No one is going to question us going after him," said Juliette N. Kayyem, a former U.S. government counter-terrorism consultant and Justice Department lawyer. "But where can you do it and who can you do it against? Who authorizes it? All of these are totally unregulated areas of presidential authority."

"Paris, it's easy to say we won't do it there," said Kayyem, now a Harvard University law professor specializing in terrorism-related legal issues. "But what about Lebanon?"

Paul Pillar, a former CIA deputy counter-terrorism chief, said the authority claimed by the Bush administration was murky.

"I don't think anyone is dealing with solid footing here. There is legal as well as operational doctrine that is being developed as we go along," Pillar said. "We are pretty much in uncharted territory here."

Pillar, who was also the CIA's National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia before retiring in mid-2005, said there had long been disagreement within the intelligence community over whether targeted killings were legally permissible, or even a good idea.

Before Sept. 11, Pillar said, CIA officers were issued vaguely worded guidelines that seemed to give them authority to kill Bin Laden, but only during an attempt to capture him.

The 9/11 commission investigating the attacks in New York and Washington concluded that such vaguely worded laws and policies gave little reassurance to those who might be pulling the trigger that they would not face disciplinary action — or even criminal charges.

Although presidents Ford and Reagan issued executive orders in 1976 and 1981 prohibiting U.S. intelligence agents from engaging in assassinations, the Bush administration claimed the right to kill suspected terrorists under war powers given to the president by Congress after the Sept. 11 attacks.

It is the same justification Bush has used for a recently disclosed domestic spying program that has the National Security Agency eavesdropping on American citizens without warrants, and a CIA "extraordinary rendition" program to seize suspected terrorists overseas and transport them to other countries with reputations for torture.

Strickland, like some other officials, said the Predator program served as a deterrent to foreign governments, militias and other groups that might be harboring Al Qaeda cells.

"You give shelter to Al Qaeda figures, you may well get your village blown up," Strickland said. "Conversely, you have to note that this can also create local animosity and instability."

The CIA's lawyers play a central role in deciding when a strike is justified, current and former U.S. officials said. The lawyers analyze the credibility of the evidence, how many bystanders might be killed, and whether the target is enough of a threat to warrant the strike. Other agencies, including the Justice Department, are sometimes consulted, Strickland said. "The legal input is broad and extensive," he said.

Scheuer said he believed the process was too cumbersome, and that the agency had lost precious opportunities to slay terrorists because it was afraid of killing civilians.

But others said they had urged the Bush administration to adopt a multi-agency system of checks and balances similar to that used by Israel, which for decades has convened informal tribunals to assess each proposed targeted killing before carrying it out.

Amos N. Guiora, a senior Israeli military judge advocate who participated in such tribunals, said that although the failed Zawahiri strike itself appeared to be justifiable, the result suggested a lack of adequate deliberations on the quality of the intelligence.

"I think [the] attack was a major screw-up, because so many kids died. It raises questions about the entire process," said Guiora, who now a professor at Case Western Law School and director of its Institute for Global Security Law and Policy.

"It shows the absolute need to have a well-thought-through and developed process that examines the action from a legal perspective, an intelligence perspective and an operational perspective. Because the price you pay here is that you are going to have to be hesitant the next time you pull the trigger."