

Suit Challenges Reach of U.S. 'Targeted Killings'

BY EVAN PEREZ

Civil-liberties groups filed a lawsuit Monday challenging the legality of the Obama administration's expansion of the U.S. fight against al Qaeda terrorists beyond Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights are taking aim at what the government calls its "targeted killing" program, which mostly uses Central Intelligence Agency-operated drones against suspected terrorists.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court for the District of Columbia on behalf of the father of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born Islamic cleric of Yemeni descent, who is believed to be targeted for extra-judicial killing for his alleged involvement in terror plots against the U.S.

The administration hasn't publicly described its deliberations about Mr. Awlaki's fate, nor how it uses the secret drone program against suspected terrorists.

Mr. Awlaki is believed to be hiding in Yemen, which is far from the battlefield in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where al Qaeda launched the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks. In recent months, U.S. officials have been weighing expanded attacks on the al Qaeda-

affiliated groups Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Somalia's al Shabaab, The Wall Street Journal reported recently. The U.S. military previously has launched operations in that region.

The expansion would exceed the legal limits of the program, the civil-liberties groups say. Jameel Jaffer, director of the ACLU's National Security Project, said "Yemen is not Afghanistan or Iraq. The legal limits on the authority they claim hasn't been specified."

Vincent Warren, executive director of the CCR said: "The government chose Awlaki and put him on the targeted killing list. The government has to show he is an imminent threat to the U.S. in order to justify him being killed like this."

Matthew Miller, a Justice Department spokesman, said the department wouldn't comment on the specifics of the lawsuit, but cited domestic and international law as supporting the administration's effort to defend the U.S. from terrorists.

"Congress has authorized the use of all necessary and appropriate force against al Qaeda and associated forces. The U.S. is careful to ensure that all its operations used to prosecute the armed conflict against those

forces, including lethal operations, comply with all applicable laws, including the laws of war," Mr. Miller said.

CIA spokesman George Little said the agency "acts in strict accord with American law."

U.S. authorities have alleged links between Mr. Awlaki and multiple recent plots against the U.S., including his counsel to Army Maj. Nidal Hasan, who is charged with killing 13 people in a shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, last year, and Christmas Day airline bombing suspect Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.

The Treasury Department in July designated Mr. Awlaki a "global terrorist."

The ACLU and CCR filed a separate lawsuit a month ago because they said the Treasury Department's designation of Mr. Awlaki threatened to end their attempts to work with Mr. Awlaki's father, Nasser al-Awlaki, to file a lawsuit on his son's behalf.

The Treasury Department, which in some cases requires lawyers to seek a special license granting permission to do legal work on behalf of designated terrorists, granted such permission soon after that suit was filed.

