

IF WE'RE ELIMINATING SYMBOLS USED FOR RECRUITMENT, WHY NOT DRONES?

Here's what Obama said in response to a question of whether and why he was going to close Gitmo.

Q But it makes me wonder where you are, sir, at about the two-year mark on Guantanamo, when closing it was one of your initial priorities, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Obviously, we haven't gotten it closed. **And let me just step back and explain that the reason for wanting to close Guantanamo was because my number one priority is keeping the American people safe.** One of the most powerful tools we have to keep the American people safe is not providing al Qaeda and jihadists recruiting tools for fledgling terrorist.

And Guantanamo is probably the number one recruitment tool that is used by these jihadist organizations. And we see it in the websites that they put up. We see it in the messages that they're delivering.

And so my belief is that we can keep the American people safe, go after those who would engage in terrorism. And my administration has been as aggressive in going after al Qaeda as any administration out there. And we've seen progress, as I noted during the Afghan review.

Every intelligence report that we're seeing shows that al Qaeda is more hunkered down than they have been since the original invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, that they have reduced financing

capacity, reduced operational capacity. It is much more difficult for their top folks to communicate, and a lot of those top folks can't communicate because they're underground now.

But it is important for us, even as we're going aggressively after the bad guys, to make sure that we're also living up to our values and our ideals and our principles. **And that's what closing Guantanamo is about – not because I think that the people who are running Guantanamo are doing a bad job, but rather because it's become a symbol.**
[my emphasis]

Now, I actually think this is not a bad answer. I'd love to see Obama go out and repeatedly talk about how important it is for our national security to close Gitmo. I'd love for Obama to criticize those who are preventing the closure of Gitmo for making our country less safe. And I don't doubt that Gitmo is still a dangerous symbol.

But I wonder whether it is **the** symbol anymore. I question whether Gitmo is the most potent recruiting story for al Qaeda.

After all, almost everyone of the people who have recently attacked us—people like Faisal Shahzad—have cited not Gitmo, but our drone strikes in Pakistan, our attacks that have killed so many civilians, as the reason they've attacked the United States.

Now maybe it's the case that the US claims to oppose torture, but doesn't claim to oppose collateral damage in its pursuit of empire. Maybe dropping drones in Pakistan and elsewhere doesn't—as Gitmo does—violate "our values and our ideals and our principles."

And maybe the whole question is moot, since Obama's not going to close Gitmo anytime soon anyway.

But if Obama thinks it important to eliminate the symbols al Qaeda uses to recruit people to attack America, shouldn't he be considering ending drone strikes, too?