

By Ayca Bahce

From [The Bergen Record](#) | Original Article

WITH "PRO-life" Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, proudly looking on, White House counterterrorism adviser and [North Bergen](#) native John Brennan gave the Fordham commencement address and received an honorary degree on May 19. The hypocrisy of honoring the man who has come to be known as "assassination czar" was too much for some soon-to-be Fordham grads.

As a Muslim-American who knows the horrors that Brennan's draconian policies of spying, drone attacks and torture have caused my Muslim brothers and sisters worldwide, I, along with Fordham's Progressive Students for Justice, were determined to protest his speaking at our graduation

On the day of graduation, I readied a 24-by-36-inch poster for my protest and mounted a photo of Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki, a 16-year-old boy killed by a drone missile two weeks after his father, Anwar Al-Awlaki, also was killed by a missile from a U.S. drone. My poster read, "16 Y/O U.S. CITIZEN KILLED BY U.S. DRONE." Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki's photo has become an iconic symbol representing the uncounted numbers of Muslims who have been killed by U.S. drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Father and son were both American citizens. The elder Al-Awlaki had not been charged with a crime and received no due process before his extrajudicial execution. With regard to Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki, U.S. officials have refused to answer questions on the record about how or why he was killed on Oct. 14, 2011, in a remote part of Yemen, along with eight other people. Some unidentified U.S. officials have told reporters that he was not targeted but was killed as "collateral damage" in a strike allegedly aimed at a co-traveler, Ibrahim al-Banna, an Egyptian said to be a senior operative in Yemen's al-Qaeda affiliate.

Whether Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki was targeted and killed because he was Anwar Al-Awlaki's son, or his killing is listed under the classic euphemistic rubric "collateral damage," the boy is

dead. And it is repugnant whichever way he died.

Moreover, the United States has no business raining down missiles on what it labels "militants" or "suspected terrorists" in countries like Yemen, with which the United States is not at war. Such violence serves only to ensure an endless reservoir of hatred for the United States and the governments it props up, an endless chain of business orders for the profiteering military-industrial complex and an endless stream of dollars from the complex to members of the House and Senate.

Brennan has had a central role in planning and approving such strikes. According to a report from The Associated Press, Brennan has seized the lead in choosing who will be targeted for drone attacks. Essentially, with a nod from Brennan — and approval by a shadowy selection process — a CIA functionary sitting at a console simply pushes a button to release a missile from a drone buzzing in the skies thousands of miles away.

Although I missed the bulk of Brennan's speech because I was escorted off campus by Brennan's security for marching in front of the audience with my sign, I read a brief segment on Fordham's Web page. Significant portions were condescending, disingenuous — and, at times, farcical.

Referring to the protesters, Brennan resorted to this timeworn chestnut:

"But that's what makes our country great: our individual ability to openly and freely express our views, whether or not they are popular, whether or not they are in the minority, or whether they are even based on misimpressions ... That's why I still do my job, because the values that this country was founded on, to include freedom of speech and freedom from harm, are worth fighting for."

Brennan's actions belie his claim that he believes in protecting free speech. For example, Brennan was among the first to advocate and brag about eavesdropping on American citizens without the court warrant required under the original Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Worse still, many Muslim-Americans have been convicted on trumped-up, terror-related charges because their ideology and speech were antithetical to the war policies of the U.S. government toward Muslim-majority countries. Several of those prosecuted were victims of entrapment.

I was pleased that in the midst of the opposition to the protest among Fordham's administration, trustees, and students, there were 10 to 15 classmates who stood up for justice during the commencement and turned their backs on Brennan in symbolic opposition to what he stands for. It is often those who take the road less traveled who are on the correct path. If you follow the beaten path, it will often lead you astray.

*Ayce Bahce is a [Ramsey](#) resident.*