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History of the Future Term II

<center>Drone Warfare</center>

It is recognizably unlikely that the use of drones in warfare will cease any time in the foreseeable future, and if it were to, it would most likely be because technological advances will have rendered drones unnecessary- much like how wars haven't been fought with swords since the Civil War due to their inferiority to guns - rather than due to moral contradictions. Never the less, it is worth questioning whether the increasingly established presence of drones in modern warfare is largely a positive or negative occurrence both in the present and for the future.

To answer this question as accurately as possible, and to understand the implications of that answer, it is necessary to note a few premises for the purpose of clarity. The word "drone" is used to denote unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which are remotely controlled aircrafts that have a wide variety of uses. "Civilian" is used to mean any noncombatant- including people involved in the military but in noncombatant roles, such as medical or administrative staff. Drones can be used by civilians, by conservationists, and for other noncombatant purposes, but this essay will focus on their military uses: surveillance (primarily in enemy territories, and often in conjunction with ground troops), and on attack missions through armament with bombs and missiles. Drones are common in warfare, with more than 87 countries owning some type of attack or surveillance drone. The United States of America, specifically, has used drones in the War on Terror in many countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

There is immense discord surrounding the topic of drone warfare. The largest arguments against it are that it results in large civilian casualties, that it is unpopular in the affected countries- resulting in more terrorists, and that it dehumanizes its victims.

To begin with the first contention- that drone strikes result in a large amount of collateral damage, namely civilian casualties- it must be understood that war, by nature, has collateral damage. While it is (ideally) no one's goal to maximize that damage, it is inevitable and the best one can reasonably hope for is to minimize that damage. That being said, statistically speaking drones result in far fewer casualties than other methods of warfare. In Iraq, the weapon with the highest body count per incident was suicide bombings, followed by aerial bombings. Missile strikes killed less than half as many as those, and drone strikes even less. Because of the inherent secrecy surrounding drone strikes, statistics vary widely, but anywhere from 7-35%[1] of casualties from drone strikes are civilian. Even if you take the highest estimate, it is still indisputably better than the other methods mentioned. Considering that the goal is to minimize collateral damage, the effects of any weapon cannot be properly understood except relative to other weapons. Through this lens, drones are in fact ideal and will continue to be until further technological advances are made.

Next is the contention that drone strikes give potential terrorists the motivation to join terrorist organizations, and that the strikes are unpopular in the affected nations. In regards to the second part, war in general is unpopular. That fact is not specific to drones. The unpopularity of it hasn't prevented us from bombing or sending ground troops to the same places we are now sending drones, so that precedence must be considered when making that argument. While it is true that drones may be perceived as worse because there is no human visible to the enemy, and in that the enemy has no living being to strike out against, those negatives must be weighed

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[1] "Summary of Information Regarding U.S. Counterterrorism Strikes Outside Areas of Active Hostilities." Reports & Publications 2017 (2017): n. pag. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 19 Jan. 2017. Web. 20 July 2017.

against the positives and viewed in the context of an entire war. In reference to the first part of the contention- of course a singular drone strike could be the last straw in a potential terrorist's mind, and yes it is impossible to prove that any given terrorist would still have joined the given terrorist organization in the absence of drone strikes. But likewise, it is equally impossible to prove that that terrorist wouldn't have joined the organization with out the drone strikes. Terrorist organizations existed before drones, and they would exist in spite of them. While terrorist numbers have grown in recent years, correlation is not causation: meaning that that can't positively be attributed to the drone strikes. Terrorists have plenty of other propaganda (true or otherwise) to encourage anti-western sentiments, and while drone strikes don't help our case, they also aren't essential components of that propaganda. The United States has done many unrelated things that could potentially motivate terrorists to act against us. While they don't by any means prevent it, drone strikes are not necessary for terrorist organizations to grow.

The last major contention I will address is the idea that drone strikes dehumanize its targets, however this is irrelevant in the debate. Whether the distance drones provide its pilots from the situation dehumanize the targets (creating a video game like environment) or whether the up close experiences pilots see from following the targets around for months actually have the opposite effect should not matter in the ethical evaluation of drone warfare. Has anyone ever made the argument not to use planes in warfare because the pilots might become marginally more detached from the gravity of what they're doing? No, because in the end they're still doing it. The same must be applied to drone pilots. The pilots are following orders, not acting at their own discretion, which means they won't kill more or less people than they would otherwise have due to the use of drones. War, by nature, dehumanizes the "other side" in the mere fact that it requires killing them.

Likewise, the mental effects or lack thereof on drone pilots and the "fairness" of strikes are equally irrelevant in the discussion. War in general is a traumatizing thing, but even though drone pilots have to see the effects of their actions up close, pilots only have a 4% risk of PTSD, with deployed soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have a 12-17% risk of PTSD[2]. The fairness of the strikes, as perceived by the affected countries, shouldn't matter considering how often, or rather rarely, we consider the "feelings" of another nation in matters of war. If you make that argument against drones, then you must hold the same idea for all intrusive acts of war.

There is no precedence for shying away from the use of a weapon simply because the other side doesn't have it. The unbalanced nature of war is the reason conflicts end when they do. The effects would be far more severe if we avoided advancement in weaponry to make a "fair" fight, as the conflicts would be prolonged and end in far more death. It is not a concern about what will happen when every country has drones. If this were to happen then new weapons would be developed or old ones improved upon to tip the scales again in favor of the more advanced societies. Likewise, we will most likely never have a "machine against machine" war, as when everyone has mechanical soldiers the targets will become the ones controlling the machines, or making them. The "other sides" will always find new targets. And even if there were to be something akin to a "machines against machine" war, that wouldn't inherently be something bad. If that were to happen, it would mean very few human lives were risked and that the battle was a battle of innovation, intelligence, and resources- who could build the most superior machines and the most of them. In the end innovations like drones are like any other

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[2] Wayne Chappelle and Kent McDonald, "Occupational Health Stress Screening for Remotely Piloted Aircraft & Intelligence (Distributed Common Ground System) Operators," US Air Force PowerPoint presentation at the Brookings Institution, Nov. 3, 2011

weapon and previously observed cycles will continue to occur. Drones might change the players, but not the game.

Why, then, are we, as the American public, so uneasy about drones? It can't be fear for the "other side" in terms of civilian casualties or perceived unfairness. Even ignoring that it isn't human nature to be altruistic, to protect the enemy over our own success and survival, those still aren't valid reasons as shown above. It can't be that we fear for advancements in drones or their potential widespread use to result, as either option would be meaningless in the big picture.

Where, then, does this uneasiness stem from? Is it truly any of these factors? Or is it a fear of the element of "unknown" surrounding them. Does the confidentiality of the missions, the uncertainly about collateral damage and accuracy, and the in general novelty of drones create a mirrored feeling of uncertainty and uneasiness in the American public?

That would not be unnatural. There has always been a fear of and resistance towards new technology, a fear of the unknown in general. Even little kids being scared of the dark shows this aspect of human nature. But it is essential that we come to terms with and overcome this illogical fear, because progress doesn't halt. The risk of mutually assured destruction is a strong deterrent (at least for rational players) against nuclear and chemical warfare, but if we resist advancement and the technological gap between the US and other countries closes or flips, that risk could become small enough to be worth an attack against us. If we fail to utilize drones and the multitude of benefits they carry, we will only continue risking our people while other nations surpass us.

In terms of the benefits of drones, they allow for precise strikes with minimal civilian casualties, they are relatively inexpensive, and, perhaps most importantly, they protect our soldiers. It is not unreasonable by any means to want to avoid endangering American troops

wherever possible, even at the expense of others. That want goes beyond nationalism to a basic desire for safety and survival. Any task accomplished by drones is something American soldiers don't have to endanger themselves doing. More and more soldiers are able to work remotely, minimizing those who have to be deployed. Even for those who are deployed, drones can do surveillance and gain information that would be risky or even impossible for a soldier to try to get. When working together, drones can be an additional eye to guard ground troops, and can be a last line of defense.

As previously mentioned, drone strikes have minimal civilian (meaning all noncombatant) casualties, and are very precise in their attacks. Meaning they kill as few people as possible, and of those the majority of the fatalities are intended targets. Despite terrorist organizations growing, more and more high profile terrorist leaders are being killed. Lone wolf attacks are of course devastating, and need to be prevented wherever possible, but they are not as severe or as deadly as organized attacks like 9/11[3]. All of this is done less expensively than with traditional methods.

When you think of drones as any other weapon rather than a novel, mystical, and intimidating innovation- getting rid of our inherent aversion to change and the unknown- it is clear that drones will have an overall positive effect both now and in the future. Drones mean more effective and efficient attacks that involve fewer of our soldiers as well as fewer civilians. And, as they are at the foundation just another weapon, they will be improved upon and eventually discarded in the cycle every other weapon has gone through. From a purely utilitarian perspective, drones save considerably more people than they kill, and even taking into account

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[3] Phillips, Brian J. "Deadlier in the U.S.? On Lone Wolves, Terrorist Groups, and Attack Lethality." Taylor & Francis. N.p., 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 24 July 2017.

other factors, the benefits of drones far outweigh any of the down sides, and, to avoid impeding progress and advancement, it is in the best interest of our nation to continue and even expand their use.