
The Use of Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) - Drones

a comment from Pax Christi's British Section

How Pax Christi understands 'security'

The peace we seek cannot come from weaponry, but from a commitment to justice and nonviolent actions which recognise the dignity of every human person and all creation. We reject models of security that rely on fear, the demonisation of others or on the strength of arms - conventional and nuclear.

Pax Christi International Vision Statement, 1995

Even though recent wars have wrought physical and moral havoc on our world, the devastation of battle still goes on day by day in some part of the world. Indeed, now that every kind of weapon produced by modern science is used in war, the fierce character of warfare threatens to lead the combatants to a savagery far surpassing that of the past.

Vatican Council, #79 Gaudium et Spes, 1965

Today, the scale and the horror of modern warfare - whether nuclear or not - makes it totally unacceptable as a means of settling differences between nations. War should belong to the tragic past, to history; it should find no place on humanity's agenda for the future.

Pope John Paul II, May 1982, Coventry

Given the new weapons that make possible destruction that goes well beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a just war.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Zenit Radio, 2003
speaking about the war with Iraq

Pax Christi is deeply concerned about the rapid growth in the development and use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles. In theory these might possibly be used in a way that conforms to Just War teaching (such as in a war declared by legitimate authority, with discrimination between combatants and civilians). But that is not how they are currently being used. In Pax Christi's judgement now is the time to challenge their development - before drones become enshrined as a 'legitimate' weapons system and play a deeper role in the tragedy of warfare. We believe that they contravene existing moral and legal codes that govern war and the conduct of war.

Church leaders have consistently spoken out about the ways in which technology has greatly magnified the destructiveness of war. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council spoke under the threat of nuclear war. Pope John Paul II spoke in the middle of the Falklands War. Cardinal Ratzinger spoke during the early weeks of the Iraq War.

We are now in a new era with new technologies. Our Church should evolve a new moral teaching that reflects this and which challenges the development, production and use of armed-drone technology.

What are Drones?

They are unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), that are either controlled from the ground, often at a great distance from where they are ultimately used, or they are launched autonomously, pre-programmed for their mission.

Because they are unmanned, they can stay in the air for many hours - well beyond traditional air operations. There is no danger or risk to the operators. They are a cheap option for the military in terms of their production and running costs. They are a 'safe' option for Government too: with fewer military fatalities and casualties it is easier to hold on to public confidence during times of war and military intervention.

Some drones are used for reconnaissance or surveillance work; others are armed with missiles and bombs. Armed drones are the focus of this document.

The danger posed by armed UAVs cannot be separated from the asymmetric manner in which they are presently used. There is presently no international law relating to asymmetric war, one area where international law is lagging behind technological development...The armed forces of rich nations have an ever-increasing global reach.

Drones - the physical and psychological implications of a global theatre of war
MEDACT, October 2012

Why Drones are used

First, because they're available. They are just the latest product of the military-industrial driver of political decisions. They are being developed and used in the name of national security, part of the 'war on terror'. They are used in pre-programmed missions, often in what are known as targeted or 'signature' strikes against individuals suspected of being militants, terrorists or community leaders.

In some countries, such as Gaza, Pakistan and Afghanistan, drones are on constant patrol to watch the daily activities of communities - looking for suspicious activity or to identify potential militants.

The campaign [US use of armed drones in Pakistan] is 'damaging and counter-productive', and neither policy-makers nor the public can 'continue to ignore evidence of the civilian harm' it causes.

'Living Under Drones', Stanford University's International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, and New York University School of Law's Global Justice Clinic, September 2012

Who is using Drones?

The USA and UK use them in Afghanistan, the USA (CIA) in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Israel uses them in Gaza.

Since 2004 the USA has launched approximately 350 drone strikes in Pakistan - most of these authorised by President Obama - killing between 3,000 and 4,000 people. President Obama regularly hosts meetings to 'review' terror suspects and determine who is to be added to the list for that week. Drone strikes are carried out by both the US military and the CIA, an agency whose actions are covert, which sometimes seems to work outside national legal authority, and whose rules of engagement are less stringent than those of the military. Used in this way, drones act as both judge and executioner.

The lone survivor of the Obama administration's first strike in North Waziristan, Faheem Qureshi, stated that: 'usually when a drone strikes and people die, nobody comes near the bodies for half an hour because they fear another missile will strike'. He believes that he would likely not have survived if he had not managed to walk out of the smoking rubble of his hujra on his own, because his neighbours would have waited too long in coming to rescue him.

'Living Under Drones', Stanford University

As well as being directly targeted at individuals or communities, drones are used in 'Rescue' attacks. Some drones loiter in an area after an attack and strike again when people come to help the injured or collect the dead. This is a violation of the principles of proportionality and distinction between military and civilian targets.

Drones are operated remotely, and there appears to be little attempt or interest on the part of those who use them to follow up on the results, to monitor casualties or deaths caused by drones. This violates the Fourth Geneva Convention which places an obligation on members of official military forces involved in armed conflict to record details of those captured, wounded, or dead. Drones also terrorise communities, destroying homes and land.

UK involvement

The UK has been a close ally of the USA in its 'war on terror'. It is likely that the UK has shared military intelligence with the USA which has made possible targeted strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Since 2005 the UK has been involved in the development of its own UK-operated systems, and since 2007 the UK has spent £2 billion on drones. This includes investment in research and development by British universities and British companies such as BAE Systems and Rolls Royce. The UK currently buys drones from the US, Israel and Norway.

The UK has a contract with the Israeli company, Elbit Systems, and Thales UK, for the Watchkeeper unmanned aerial vehicle. This will be used by the RAF and will be operational from Spring 2013. (The UK is currently renting the Hermes drone from Israel until Watchkeeper is ready.)

In 2007 the UK began using Reaper armed drones in Afghanistan. According to the Ministry of Defence in November 2012, there have been 349 strikes in Afghanistan since June 2008. (Total US and UK drone strikes in Afghanistan amount to 1,500.) The Reaper is made by the US company General Atomics and operated via satellite from a Nevada air base. Additional Reaper drones have been purchased and will be operated from RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire.

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles has risen dramatically over the past few years and is widely forecast to grow even more rapidly over the coming decade. While 76 countries are known to possess UAVs, the UK is one of only three countries (with the US and Israel) currently using armed drones in its military operations in Afghanistan. Closer to home, the UK has also begun work to open up its civilian airspace to unmanned drones for a variety of activities.

Chris Cole, 'UN Spending on Drones', October 2012

Pax Christi believes that the use of armed drones is a new challenge to the morality of warfare and that they challenge our concept of security in the following ways:

- Their current use and deployment flouts both the rule of law in relation to war and human rights and traditional Church teaching on warfare. The use of Drones is eroding the internationally recognised laws of war. International humanitarian law covers two areas: the protection of those who are not, or who are no longer, taking part in fighting - and restrictions on the means of warfare, in particular weapons, and the methods of warfare, such as military tactics.
- Drones operate in a remote, autonomous way. This distances their use from human responsibility for, and the consequences of, actions. No public official record is kept of casualties or deaths caused. Drones dehumanise both the victims and the users of this remote technology.
- The current use of armed drones by the US government and the CIA in particular, in targeted killings and signature strikes, is beyond moral and legal frameworks and is unacceptable.
- Their low cost, ease of use and minimal military casualty rate make them attractive to politicians. They insulate Western public opinion from the true horrors of modern warfare. The danger attached to this is that decisions leading towards war and military intervention will be **more** not less likely.
- They cause panic and terror in civilian populations and sow the seeds of fear, resentment and perhaps revenge for the future. We believe that their use leads to greater injustice and discontent, so making the world a **less** secure place.
- They are a weapon of rich nations who use them to attack poor, defenceless nations. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Gaza are among the poorest nations with the most vulnerable people.
- Their development is shrouded in secrecy and lacks the transparency of public scrutiny necessary for the moral assessment of such dangerous and perverse technology. A potentially life-enhancing technology has almost completely been taken over for military purposes.

Interviewees described emotional breakdowns, running indoors or hiding when drones appear above, fainting, nightmares and other intrusive thoughts, hyper startled reactions to loud noises, outbursts of anger or irritability, and loss of appetite and other physical symptoms. Interviewees also reported suffering from insomnia and other sleep disturbances, which medical health professionals in Pakistan stated were prevalent.

'Living Under Drones', Stanford University

What we can do

- Urge our own Church leadership to study this issue and develop a new moral teaching that addresses the dangers and impact of drone warfare and drone technology.
- Work ecumenically to create a common Christian voice that challenges the UK's involvement in drone warfare.
- Create partnerships with others, in particular those in the fields of medical and health care, human rights, and monitoring of national and international laws of war.
- Support Drone Week of Action in October. Use this as a time for public meetings, articles, vigils at bases and factories that are linked with drone use and production.
- Share the experiences and stories of those in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Gaza, Yemen and Somalia whose lives are damaged by drone warfare. Use these stories and other resources to educate parishes, schools and institutions.
- Work to weaken the grip of the military-industrial complex. Emphasise other career choices for engineers. Look for alternatives. Move existing skills into peaceful production.
- Contact Members of Parliament. We must demand transparency and clarity from our Government on its development of and support for drone warfare, and make known our concerns regarding this development.
- Find ways of making public these concerns at RAF bases and arms companies which are linked to the use and development of drone warfare and technology. Organise vigils and services of prayer at these sites.

Resources

Drone Wars UK

<http://dronewarsuk.wordpress.com/>

Provides information on the growing use of armed drones. Focuses on the British use of drones, charting operations, up-to-date report on UK spending on drones, and Drone War Briefing

Repriev: www.repriev.org.uk/

Defends the human rights of prisoners - especially those accused of very serious crimes such as murder and terrorism. Currently working on legal cases for Pakistani citizens injured or killed by drones.

Drone Campaign Network

www.dronecampaignnetwork.org.uk

Living Under Drones, Stanford University, September 2012

<http://livingunderdrones.org/living-under-drones/>:

Drones - the physical and psychological implications of a global theatre of war
MEDACT, October 2012

www.medact.org/content/wmd_and_conflict/medact_drones_WEB.pdf

Shelling out: UK Government spending on unarmed drones
Chris Cole, Drone Wars UK, September 2012

<http://dronewarsuk.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/9/shelling-out-uk-spending-on-drones.pdf>



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