

DRONES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



About the Paper

This paper aims to advance MPAC's commitment to represent and advocate on behalf of the Muslim American community in order to establish policy positions on the international use of drones. As drones have been used exclusively in Muslim-majority countries and even used to target Americans, there is an urgent need to analyze the use of drones and advocate for changes in how they are being used by the U.S. government.

The use of armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), or drones, as a tool to eliminate suspected militants abroad has gradually increased since 2001. The use of drones has primarily been driven by the Executive Branch in order to target alleged terrorists in a number of countries around the world. To date, no clear framework has been adopted, spelling out when drones can or should be used, and what process should oversee how and when drone strikes are conducted.

Key Findings

This paper focuses specifically on the U.S government's drone program post-9/11 by analyzing the history, public perception, and international law considerations around the use of drones.

1. The use of drones has increased during President Obama's tenure without congressional or judicial oversight.
2. Proponents of drones argue that they target specific individuals, eliminate the need for ground troops, and minimize civilian casualties.
3. Critics of drone strikes argue that strikes lead to high civilian casualties, there is minimal oversight in the targeting process, and they inflame anti-American sentiment abroad.
4. The current drone program provides little transparency over who is targeted or why, with too much reliance on Executive level decision-making.
5. The targeted killings overseas of individuals — especially American citizens — appears to violate both domestic and international law.

Our Recommendations

Based on these findings, MPAC recommends five policy prescriptions to address the international use of drones.

1. Judicial oversight

A Drone Court should be established to oversee the targeting process.

2. Congressional oversight

Regular briefings about drone targets should be made along with congressional authorization to conduct strikes.

3. Greater transparency and selective use of drones

Drone strikes should only be used in extraordinary circumstances.

4. International agreement on drones

An international convention should be held to regulate drone usage.

5. Congressional commission on drones

A Congressional Commission should be established to systematically evaluate the efficacy of drones and provide additional policy recommendations.

The regulation of this technology as a tool in warfare is imperative, especially as its use is increasing both domestically and abroad. This technology will continue to proliferate and be used by both state and non-state actors. It is of critical importance that the U.S. government takes the lead in regulating this new technology in order to reign in its potential abuse, now and into the future.

About the Author

Nausherwan Hafeez is a doctoral student in Political Science at the University of Florida. After earning a bachelor's degree in History and International Studies from New College of Florida, he taught in rural Malaysia for a year as a Fullbright Scholar. He also taught for two years in inner-city Baltimore as part of his commitment to Teach for America. He has received Master's degrees from both the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins University. His current research at UF focuses on US foreign policy, Pakistan, and the War on Terror.

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