**Drone Warfare:**

A cost benefit analysis of the United States’ use of unmanned aerial assault vehicles.

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**Abstract:**

As the global war on terror evolves so do the strategies used in fighting it. One of the more prolific tactics is the United States’ use of unmanned aerial assault vehicles. Although these unconventional tactics have come under scrutiny, there are instances where they have been effective. The ensuing pages will present a cost benefit analysis of the United States’ drone program. The intent of this analysis is to compare the monetary costs of the program to the success rate, and to also highlight the costs that these missions incurred by the United States in the form of public perceptions and attitudes. I argue the drone program, that the United States is currently using to combat suspects in the Global War on Terror, is less beneficial than traditional operations to the United States, its citizens, and nations in which these strikes are being carried out. The analysis presented with this data is important because as terror evolves it is essential the methods used to efficiently contest it do as well.

**Introduction: The Beginning of the United States Drone Program.**

After the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, high ranking officials in the United States military and leaders of the Central Intelligence Agency realized they needed to adapt a policy and strategy to combat the non-traditional terror organizations posing a major threat to the security of the country. One key adaptation to previous policy was the introduction of two separate unmanned aerial assault vehicle, or drone programs. These programs were created to carry out unmanned missile strikes on determined targets. One program run by the military carries out missions in active theaters of war. The other program, which is administered by the CIA, completes strikes against terror suspects in countries which the United States has not formally declared war on[[1]](#footnote-1). Although both programs are equally important the program that is administered by the CIA will be the main focus of the following analysis.

Just two months before September 11, the United States’ official stance on the use drone strikes was that they were not to be used outside the theater of war, because they denied those targeted, due process. After the terror attacks in New York, that stance began to shift, and the Bush administration defined terrorism as an act of war. After reworking this definition, Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military force bill, allowing the CIA to carry out targeted assassinations.[[2]](#footnote-2) The CIA’s first confirmed drone strike against a terror suspect occurred when a Predator surveillance drone equipped with a hellfire anti-tank missile killed Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi in November of 2002 in Yemen.[[3]](#footnote-3) al-Harethi was wanted for the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole, but five other unknown people who were in the vehicle with him also perished because of the strike.[[4]](#footnote-4) As soon as the first strike was carried out, the entire CIA program became controversial for three reasons. The first of these reasons being that unknown targets were killed, next the strike was carried out in a country in which no declaration of war had been levied, finally the strike was carried out not by members of the United States military, but instead civilian members of a government agency. The program has gone on to carry out strikes in non-warring countries other than Yemen as well, most notably Pakistan and Somalia; these countries account for a majority of total strike deaths with more than three-thousand total which is why they will be focused on.[[5]](#footnote-5) One thing that we can be sure of is that the program is expanding. In the last decade the United States has increased its number of drones from fifty to seven thousand five-hundred, around four-hundred of which can be armed.[[6]](#footnote-6) The number of drones that the U.S. operates, and the number of strikes carried out continues to climb as the War on Terror continues, and in the last ten years the drone has become a pivotal tool in America’s arsenal against terrorism.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Review and Analysis of Previous Work Pertaining to the Costs and Benefits of Drone Use:**

As the global War on Terror continues, questions about some of the more nontraditional polices that the United States has elected to use in order to remain in the fight have arisen. These questions are whether or not the strikes are legal in non-theaters of war, do strikes bring forth unintended consequences such as: civilian deaths, the falling out of public opinion of the United States both domestic and abroad, and the creation of propaganda capable of recruiting for the very people that the War on Terror is fighting. This paper analyzes whether drone strikes are a cost effective tool in combatting terrorism for the United States. The drone program has a clear monetary cost, and a less clear moral and legal cost, which I will address. The financial cost benefit analysis is important for evaluating the efficiency of future counter terror polices of the United States. The more challenging of the two questions is that of the strategic cost benefit analysis. It may seem obvious that the United States wants to do everything possible to limit both civilian and soldier casualties, while effectively carrying out missions, and at first glance the drone program may seem like a good choice to achieve these goals. As data collected from the past decade shows this assumption may be too hasty. The unmanned missions have far from a perfect success rate, as defined as the completion of a mission through the destruction of militant targets with no civilian or friendly casualties. It is true that UAVs allow for the casualty rates of friendly troops to be zero, but they certainly do not guarantee to limit the unintentional loss of civilian life, or the problems associated with it.

Research on the topic of American drone strikes is quite extensive, and covers a wide range of topics and issues, including the questions I intend to address in my paper. Most of the sources I cite observe a particular situation related to the topic, and then offer expert analysis and insight into said topic. For a cost benefit analysis, this type of observational research coupled with studies, experiments, and polling data fits best into my research plan. The citations I use draw their own inferences on the benefit of the United States drone program, examining factual evidence from drone strikes that relates to the financial and strategic costs of this untraditional type of warfare. These inferences allow me to draw my own conclusion and answer whether the costs of the United States’ current policy involving the calculated use of weaponized drones to assassinate militant individuals in countries without a formal declaration of war outweigh the benefits for the continuation of the program.

**Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part I: Foreign Public Perception.**

To begin to analyze the question of strategic costs of drone strikes it helps to define what is meant by strategic costs. The term strategic costs refers to a multitude of different things in this paper, the first being the cost of the public’s perception of drone strikes. Because this policy affects the image of Americans, as well as the livelihood of those living in countries which are being targeted, both group’s feelings and perceptions are important to this portion of research. One of the simplest and most straight forward ways to gather information from a large group of people like the a population of country is through a poll, so I turned to polls to answer the question how do people living in drone affected areas feel about drones. PEW research center provides several different polls accounting for the feelings of people especially in Pakistan. This is a good sample to study seeing how eighty-six percent of drone strikes carried out outside of a theater of war are within the country of Pakistan.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The study reflected here found its results by conducting 1,203 face to face interviews between the time period of April 15 to May, 7 2014. These samples were all of people over the age of 18 years, and were representative of roughly 82 percent of the total population.[[9]](#footnote-9)According to PEW Research center, the overall opinion of the United States, while still dismal, has improved in Pakistan over the last three years, but the Pakistani people are overwhelmingly against drone strikes with only three percent of citizens claiming that they approve of strikes targeting extremist organizations within their country.[[10]](#footnote-10) Many of these people believe that these strikes are being carried out without the permission or knowledge of the Pakistani government; therefore, violating the country’s sovereignty. An even higher rate of citizens believe that these strikes are killing innocent people.[[11]](#footnote-11) The negative opinions of America that people from other countries have formed due to drone strikes are not the only cost associated with the perception that the strikes are killing innocent people. A costly situation that has arose from people’s concern about deaths of innocents is the idea drone strikes can now be used as recruitment tools to build up the number of militants in terror organizations. Essentially, every time a drone strike is carried out, even if it’s successful, terror leaders can spin the results saying that innocent people were killed by the United States and replace the people who were killed, exponentially, who were in reality, not innocent but members of a terror organizations. This idea is illustrated in several different documents, but can best be seen when a senior Obama administration official is quoted saying that: “Casualties were often in single digits and those reporting hundreds of civilians dead were foolishly using enemy propaganda.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

The inflation of civilian death toll numbers is in fact a propaganda tool used by terror organizations, but the numbers that have been collected seem to show that the civilian deaths do reach well over the single digits. Data collected by the New America Foundation shows that between 2004 and 2012 there were 334 strikes in Pakistan, 40-50 in Yemen, and three to nine in Somalia. All of these strikes combined for upwards of 3,191 deaths, eighty-five percent of which being militants. This means that fifteen percent of drone related deaths or 479 people were civilian.[[13]](#footnote-13) Some speculation for reasons to why the United States’ official count is so much lower than others is that the Government defines any male of military age in the area as a militant.[[14]](#footnote-14) The problem with the cost of perception in this case is that whichever number is actually true really doesn’t matter. What truly matters is what the people of the country believe. The Polling data, as well as information and quotes collected, paint a picture that the people living in afflicted areas believe that innocent people are dying, and some have begun to retaliate.

The thought of blowback, or retaliation especially on home soil, from drone strikes killing innocents came to a reality in June of 2010 when Pakistani American Faisal Shahzad said before a judge that he placed a bomb in Times Square as payback for the use of drone strikes: “Well, the drone hits in Afghanistan and Iraq, they don’t see children, they don’t see anybody. They kill women, children, they kill everybody. It’s a war and in war, they kill people. They’re killing all Muslims.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The data presented here is an example that the mind set of retaliation and the use of drone strikes as propaganda and recruitment tools have become a very real and present cost, stemming from the public’s perception, to the benefit of the drone program eliminating select targets.

**Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part II: Domestic Public Perception.**

The other portion of the world’s population whose opinion has a monumental effect on the strategic costs of the drone program is that of the American citizens. The research gathered by PEW about the feelings of Americans about unmanned aerial assaults, as expected is quite different than that of people living within struck areas, when looking at the issue from a cost benefit analysis perspective. To attain information for this study, PEW called 1,008 people 18 years or older living in the continental United States between February 7 and February, 10 2013. The sample population was asked a number of questions pertaining to politics and the use of drones in foreign countries.[[16]](#footnote-16) When Americans are asked, fifty-eight percent of them claim that they approve of the use of drones to target extremist groups.[[17]](#footnote-17) The same poll shows that the people of America are also extremely worried about the fact that drones are possibly killing innocent human beings. Eighty percent of the people surveyed said that they were at least somewhat concerned about the endangerment of innocent people, with forty-two percent saying that they were very concerned.[[18]](#footnote-18) Obviously the American public’s perception of the drone program does not have the same tangible results as that of Pakistani’s. The chances of terror groups using propaganda to recruit an American citizen to join forces are slim, but a negative perception from the American people could have an even more dangerous effect of the drone program in the way of shutting it down.

Currently in this country there is still more than enough support for the program to continue with its normal operations, but if the trend of concerned voters continues to climb toward worry, if not dislike of the program it could spell certain disaster for drone strikes. The final problem with negative domestic perception again comes in the way of propaganda. The terror groups that are being targeted by the CIA’s drone program have the agenda to bring the United States down from its position of a world super power. Being able to show that the citizens of a country don’t support decisions made by their own government allows for the leaders to discredit American policies and government. Furthermore the fact that people living in America are worried about innocent people dying in other countries validates the recruitment tool terror organizations are using by making claims that the government is killing civilians.

**Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part III: The Costs of Signature Strikes.**

Although strikes have declined in the area, Pakistan’s federally administered tribal areas, or what has become known as FATA, is one place of the world that has been keenly targeted by drone strikes.[[19]](#footnote-19) While this area is controlled by the Pakistani government, it is comprised mostly of seven autonomous tribes who have become the target of the CIA’s newest strategy known as signature strikes. This strategy involves the CIA using a drone to first conduct surveillance of an area. If the surveillance leads to intel that there are militants in the area then a strike is conducted to eliminate perceived militant targets.[[20]](#footnote-20) The strategy is effective in the sense that the CIA is capable of carrying out strikes in real time without allowing enemies a chance for escape or defense. The first problem with this specific strategy comes in the definition of militants. Not only are all males over the age of 18 years in a strike zone considered targets as previously mentioned, the CIA classifies people in groups, or people acting suspiciously as possible targets for signature strikes. The definition of suspicious actions is a problem because it allows for people only believed, not proven to be militants, to be struck.[[21]](#footnote-21) There is no certainty that these people have done anything wrong, but instead they are struck for what could possibly be every day actions such as loading things into a truck, standing in groups, or in some cases more than two people working out.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Michael Boyle said it best when he exclaimed: “No man- not even a hardened terrorist is an island, as the Bin Laden raid illustrated.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Because of the cultural structure of the Muslim world, especially in the FATA where many people, including extended families of women, children, and elders who live in very close proximity to one another, if not together, as well as merchants and farmers making delivers to houses and shops daily, it makes it very hard for a signature strike type mission not to incur innocent deaths.[[24]](#footnote-24) Using a signature strike may provide the benefit of eliminating a target deeply embedded in areas where conventional operations can’t reach, but this method, and its assumption of guilt by association has the potential of violating non-combatant immunity set forth by international law.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Another cost that can be associated with signature strikes is a moral one. Because part of the signature criteria involves assessing the patterns of people, large groups of people are often targeted under the pretenses that they are militant training camps. This is sometimes the case, but it has also led to the targeting of large funeral processions and mosques.[[26]](#footnote-26) Obviously the previous pages have discussed the cost of further recruitment and retaliation as a cost to the program, but signature strikes have led to the new cost of political unrest. Some of the political leaders in countries where these strikes are taking place have begun to openly advocate against the United States.[[27]](#footnote-27) After several funerals were targeted by CIA drones, a Pakistani opposition leader promised if elected he would shoot down all drones flown over the borders of his county.[[28]](#footnote-28) Political opposition could be a costly end to the drone program. The benefit of taking out certain militants could be quickly overturned if the governments of the countries in which they reside no longer allow the United States to conduct strikes. The use of drones is good at eliminating enemies, but also good at creating them.

**Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part IV: Effectiveness of Drone Strikes.**

Obviously, a single drone strike that eliminates a target is less expensive than furnishing a traditional military operation to eliminate the same target; but, strikes do not always eliminate said target, and there is often times collateral damage involved with drone strikes. These two factors have presented the drone program a new cost aspect. This being that the program is not as effective as the United States would have one believe. If drone strikes are not operating as efficiently as program leaders are leading on then their costs are in danger of quickly outweighing their benefits. For the purposes of this paper operating efficiently can be defined as, a drone effectively eliminates a high value target, high value targets being those who are directly related to leadership of terror organization, or pose a direct threat to the security of America or the nations in which they are living.

Only around two percent of the insurgents killed by drone strikes are what are known as high value targets.[[29]](#footnote-29) This means that most of the people who are targeted and killed are people who do not have the means, knowledge, or following to do any actual harm to the United States, or any of its interests. One could argue that because these strikes targeting people who present no real threat are an unneeded waste of money, and at times unethical. Because there are so many of these assassinations targeting people who would most likely not hurt the United States in the first place, the cost both monetarily and morally does not outweigh the benefit of removing some small sections of radicals.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Although a vast majority of insurgents killed by drone strikes are low value and most likely would pose no threat if left unchecked, there is a benefit to the effectiveness of drone strikes. This benefit is that the actions of drone strikes act as a couple of different deterrents to terror organizations. The first deterrent that comes from drone strikes’ ability to appear seemingly from thin air and effectively kill targets with no chance of immediate defense is that terror groups have begun to find it difficult to establish permanent base camps or training facilities in remote areas of the world. The need to be constantly on the move has weakened what were previously known as terror strong holds. All of this can be illustrated through writings that were collected after Osama bin Laden’s death that recommended that Al-Qaeda leaders flee the FATA for safer terrain to avoid drone strikes.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Breaking the large terror camps of old up into small nomadic groups certainly has a benefit because there are no longer camps of hundreds of people training against the United States under the command of highly qualified leaders, but this benefit, like all benefits comes at a cost. Large groups splitting and fracturing has allowed for smaller nonaffiliated groups to become prevalent in areas where there was once no original threat. Groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) pose a much more dangerous threat to local governments than the Taliban ever did. In effect the splitting of these groups has replaced bad people in the area with evil ones. The final cost to the benefit of making the terror groups nomadic is that the world has now seen a large surge of members of terror organizations going to fight on the front lines of conflicts in places like Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia.[[32]](#footnote-32) Much like the mujahedeen scattering to Algeria and Bosnia the addition of these trained soldiers with large amounts of weapons often time turns these conflicts into a large scale war.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The problem with effectiveness does not stop in Pakistan. There is a lot of data that suggests the United States is targeting people in Yemen who have little to no interest in the United States. By October 19, 2012 the United States had conducted 35 drone strikes in Yemen.[[34]](#footnote-34) Many of these strikes were directed at Islamic extremist factions that were hostile toward the Yemen government.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The second deterrent that the drone program poses is simple intimidation. The idea behind a strategy as bold and pervasive as drone strikes is that they would quietly set terror organizations into compliance by forcing them to realize that they were out gunned and outmanned at all times; militants were safe nowhere, not even in their homes. Because of this the surge of people willing to plot against the United States would level off and ultimately decline. According to Jason Lyall’s research this simply was not the case. Lyall used quantitative analysis of a large amount of data on drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and military activity in these areas between 2006 and 2011.

Lyall found that over a seven day period there was an estimated diﬀerence of .371 more insurgent attacks in the 2km2 around the targeted village. This difference rose to 2.14 attacks with a 100 km2 radius around the bombed village for the same seven day period.[[36]](#footnote-36) If the number of days after the strike is increased to 120 then there is a 3.08 increase in insurgent attacks for the area 2km2 around the village.[[37]](#footnote-37) Similarly, if the distance of the observed area is widened to 100km2 around the village there is an increase of 16.81 militant attacks.[[38]](#footnote-38) Not only did it not have a deterrent effect on the terror actors, it actually had the opposite than hoped for effect. Lyall found that when a place was subjected to drone strikes there was a positive association with an increased amount of insurgent attacks, exactly opposite the relationship expected by supporters of the drone program.

There is a final cost that is associated with the ease and effectiveness in which drones potentially offer a country to combat individuals. The United States has inadvertently created an arms race of types. Nations both friend and foe to America are rushing to catch up their own unmanned combat technology. Although the United States is currently the only nation who possesses the capability to weaponize a long range unmanned aerial assault vehicle there are 76 other nations who have begun to build a weapons drone program.[[39]](#footnote-39) As of 2013 there are 680 drone programs in the world which is an increase of 400 since 2005.[[40]](#footnote-40) This would obviously not be a problem if the research was only limited to our allies, but this is not the case, and America’s very use of drones has left them open to the possibility that they could one day be attacked by a drone.

**Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part V: Costs of the Legality of the Drone Program.**

The legality of the CIA’s drone program is something that has been debated since the first recorded strike. When examining the current state of international law, the issue of legality is the drone program’s most lucrative benefit compared to its cost. Most of the strikes that the United States have carried out have been in countries whose governments are willing to allow the strikes to be carried out. When America obtained permission from the countries of Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, they carried out drone strikes that did not violate the sovereignty of these countries; therefore, no international law was broken.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Even in the rare instances where there was no permission the United States was legally protected in carrying out strikes within countries in which war had not been declared. The law states that strikes can be carried out if the state in which the strike occurs is not actively attempting to stop extra state forces from engaging in hostile acts toward other states. The current law only has statute for a states right to self-defense if the United States used a traditional boots on the ground approach of eliminating extra state actors.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Because there have been no laws written in the current international realm against the way in which America uses drones in foreign countries, the program has technically not violated any laws. This means that the cost of the programs operations, at least speaking from a strategic legal standpoint, is zero. This means that if the program has eliminated even one militant then the legal benefits will outweigh the costs. Much like the idea that domestic public opinion is changing; international law could also be changing. As mentioned in previous pages there have been concerns that the killing of innocent people associated with guilty ones has become a violation of immunity laws set up by international laws. Like public opinion, legality could become a cost that does not outweigh its benefits if innocent people continue to die, and international charges are brought against the program.

**Financial and Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part I: Comparing Financial and Strategic Costs of Drone Strikes and Boots on the Ground Military Operations.**

When strictly looking at the financial aspects of military operations, there is no question that the United States drone program is cheaper than a traditional boots on the ground approach, whether it be normal or special operations. There are no soldiers to transport, feed, or house with drone combat. The piloting of these drones can be done from the United States, and once the mission is complete the soldier is able to go home. On average a drone costs the United States 2,500 to 3,500 dollars an hour to operate.[[43]](#footnote-43) In the 2016 fiscal year the budget allotted for 62 billion dollars for drone research, development, and procurement.[[44]](#footnote-44) This number pales in comparison to the United States ground forces budget when it was at its height in 2008 which was 186.9 billion dollars.

This comparison over simplifies the fact of the matter. There is not a doubt that traditional boots on the ground operations cost the United States more money, as well as more lives of service men and women than drone strikes, but these missions provide something that a drone strike cannot. When the United States puts highly trained, specialized soldiers into a situation the mission quickly becomes multi-facetted. By this I mean that the objective can be neutralizing a target much the same as a drone, as well as collecting information, taking prisoners, or surveilling inside of buildings. This may mean that traditional operation costs outweigh their benefits when financially compared to the drone program, but when the strategic advantages are calculated the benefits begin to shine through. As previously mentioned drone strikes are responsible for only two percent of high value targets killed. Quite possibly the two most wanted men in the War on Terror, Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, were both captured or killed via boots on the ground efforts.

These missions could no doubt have been completed by a drone strike once the United States gained intelligence on where the individuals were. What the boots on the ground approach to the completion of these missions offered that a drone could not was assuredness. A drone strike could have blown up the building in which the leaders of the military were quite sure bin Laden or Hussein were in, and those same leaders could be quite sure that those targets were dead. What a boots on the ground approach did was positively identify the targets, and then positively eliminate the targets. All of this was done while limiting collateral damage of innocent people, which could have been huge especially in the case of bin Laden who was in a compound with many women and children.[[45]](#footnote-45) These missions were also able to capture counter intelligence which would have been lost if the building would have been leveled by a missile.

**Financial and Strategic Cost Benefit Analysis Part II: The Financial and Strategic Costs of Doing Nothing to Combat Foreign Terrorism.**

It seems ridiculous to even contemplate being completely apathetic toward terrorism in the world. Most would argue that it would be wrong for the United States to stand idly by and watch obvious acts of terror be completed in the world, especially when these acts are being completed within America’s borders. The fact that the United States would do nothing to stop an attack where there was a chance of American citizens perishing would be immoral to say the least, and the costs of the American people, as well as global citizens losing trust in the Government’s ability to stop terrorism would be well outweighed by the moral benefits of not attacking militants, and the possibly of saving the lives of the bravest of our citizens who courageously yet willingly sign up to fight for our freedom.

The financial cost benefit analysis of doing nothing to combat terrorism is a more simple argument. According to Robert Shapiro terrorism would affect the United States GDP much less than what people would expect. This is because the American economy is so robust and multidimensional it is capable of withstanding shocks like terrorism.[[46]](#footnote-46) This can be illustrated when looking at the September, 11th attacks, when Manhattan was attacked the economy didn’t suffer in Chicago, or Boston, or really even in other portions of New York. Certain pieces of the economy suffered like airlines and hotels, but they recovered over a short period of time.[[47]](#footnote-47) This all means that as long as the economy of the United States remains strong and diverse terrorism left unchecked would most likely cost the United States less money by allowing them to stop spending on defense.

The previous argument only works if the terrorism that is brought to the United States continues to be of the small local variety. I understand that flying airplanes into the twin towers does not seem small or local, but it only had an immediate effect on a select population of people living or working in Manhattan. The term small scale terror is one that is referring to an act immediately affecting under 10-15 million people.[[48]](#footnote-48) If a terror organization was able to detonate a nuclear device in a major American city that could affect more than said one million people then the economy would begin to feel the effect of terrorism.[[49]](#footnote-49) Obviously this the moral consequences would far outweigh these fiscal benefits of this type of course of action, and it is not a plausible idea.

**Conclusions:**

The Drone will need to continue to be a tool in the arsenal of the United States in order for America to be able to continue to adequately fight terror in the global theater. This tool is still quite new in the terms of the tools that are used in combat. In order for the United States to use its drone program to maximum efficiency it must be honed, and polished into something that is nearly perfect. As time continues the drone program will continue to improve, and the costs and benefits that have been displayed in the previous pages will have changed.

The drone has legally eliminated terror threats who thought they could hide within a country in which war had not been declared. Some of these missions could not have been accomplished by a traditional ground force, either because of legal or logistical challenges. This is where the drone becomes an invaluable tool for the United States. The best case scenario is that these unmanned tactics are refined and drones are able to complete a mission with a perfect success rate while protecting the lives of innocent bystanders and American soldiers, as well as collecting data, and preserving culture in an area. Of course the thought of a completely perfect weapons system or tactic is obscure and impossible, but with the proper changes, as well as the working in concert between drones and highly trained soldiers, I believe that the drone program’s benefits could well outweigh its costs, instead of the conclusions that this paper presents being that the benefits are currently outweighed by its costs.

One of the easiest things that could be changed about the drone program could also have one of the greatest impacts. If the signature strike program was cancelled or greatly refined a large number of problems could be taken care of. People are angry because innocent civilians are being targeted for doing tasks associated with everyday life. If the CIA would quit targeting these people, or large gatherings of people such as the people gathered for a funeral or school then the opinion would have to improve. When the opinion of these people approved it would become harder for terror leaders to use strikes as recruitment tools. These costs would lessen and the benefits of eliminating targets in the area would improve. At the same time, if the signature strike program which is responsible for a large number of civilian deaths was cancelled then the domestic mood on drones would also improve. From poll results we can see that the number one concern about drone strikes of people living in this country is that they are killing innocent lives. One could safely assume that when the civilian death toll goes down, so will the domestic worry about collateral damage.

Finally, the end of signature strikes could possibly allow for one of the most beneficial turning points of the War on Terror. Limiting signature strikes could very likely limit the idea of domestic blow back. As quotes and data collected for this paper have illustrated, much of the blow back or at least resentment that leads to it comes from the death of innocent women and children. The very idea of signature strikes allows for the government to target people for the sole reason that they looked like they could be an enemy. This logic allows for people to justify acts of terror such as putting bombs in times square, by saying, like the CIA they are only targeting people who appear to be hostile toward their country, faith, or culture.

Because so many low value targets are eliminated, the effectiveness of drone strikes comes into question when looking at their costs and benefits. If the program could be refined to work alongside highly trained soldiers who could search for, find, and positively identify a high value target which would then be eliminated by a drone strike then the costs of effectiveness too would also be lowered to be able to be outweighed by benefits. The idea that soldiers on the ground helping identify targets for drone strikes would not only improve the effectiveness by allowing for high value targets to be eliminated, but the inverse is also true. If people running the drone program can know for certain that someone is not a target of value then a strike would not need to be wasted. This would again go back to bolstering public opinion of the program raising benefits even more.

The fact that drone strikes elevate militant activity in an area is a cost that will never be outweighed. This cost is an expensive, but most likely a necessary one. Lyall’s research shows that there is a correlation to drone strikes and militant activity, but it also shows that a correlation exists between militant activity and air strikes. The fact of the matter is any sort of aggression toward a militant group short of removing the entire group will bring about violent actions of some sort. For these costs to decrees the United States would need to take an action of doing nothing to combat terror, and as already discussed that is not a viable option. The drone program is currently operating under perfect pretenses for the benefits to outweigh the costs in terms of legality. Until International law changes or someone brings case against the drone program for the unintentional death of civilians there is no legal need to change the current way the drone program operates.

In sum, I do not believe that the correct answer is for the United States to scrap the drone program. The weapons and tactics that terror organizations across the world use are constantly changing, and to keep a competitive edge on its enemies, America’s must too. It is my belief that if these changes, along with the constant continuation to strive for perfection of the program both the CIA and United States Military could turn the drone into a weapon system that is more beneficial to utilize than not.

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