**DEATH FROM THE HEAVENS: THE POLITICS OF THE UNITED STATES’ DRONE CAMPAIGN IN PAKISTAN’S TRIBAL AREAS**

**By Hassan Masood**

**Abstract**

*Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, known as UAVs or commonly as drones, used in the War on Terror occupy a mysterious and underrepresented place in American foreign policy discourse. Due to their covert nature, the use of drones are never fully explained or contextualized by U.S. media outlets or the United States government and military. It was domestic and not foreign policy that brought the discussion of drone strikes to the forefront of American public discourse when Rand Paul, a Republican U.S. Senator from Kentucky, conducted a twelve-hour long Senate filibuster in protest of the Obama administration’s ambiguity and secrecy concerning its drone program. The filibuster was also in protest of John Brennan’s nomination as C.I.A. director. The debate within the United States has revolved around the concern regarding the unchecked executive power of the President to order drone strikes against American citizens on American soil. In stark contrast, the Pakistani public and media have been obsessed with the use of American drones in their tribal areas. In this research project I argue that the secrecy surrounding the drone program has significantly damaged its effectiveness and greatly increased anti-American sentiments among the Pakistani public. I argue that the expanded drone program under President Obama has been counterproductive when it comes to counter-insurgency strategy. My research demonstrates that the violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty is one of the most significant sources of anti-American sentiment among Pakistani public. By employing the constructivist framework I demonstrate that drones create a new discursive space that ostensibly dehumanizes its targets, but it also provides a powerful narrative to the communities victimized by the use of drones. My tentative conclusion is that counter-insurgency strategy that is meant to win ‘hearts and minds’ is significantly impeded by the use of drones because of the initial decision by the American government to not publically acknowledge the use of drone as a legitimate counter-insurgency tactic.*

**The Short and Violent History of Drone Warfare**

Drones first sprang onto the scene as another form of ‘unconventional warfare’ in 2002 under the Bush administration’s War against Terror. Its usage was expanded greatly under the Obama administration, starting in 2009. Though the first ever reported use of drones occurred in Yemen the Tribal Areas of Northern Pakistan was and still remains the primary target of drone strikes. According to research done by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the New America Foundation of every attack in the FATA area, their research demonstrates that the highest number of drone strikes occurred from 2008 to 2011.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to David Rohde: “Over the last three years the Obama administration has carried out at least 239 covert drone strikes, more than five times the 44 approved under George W. Bush. And after promising to make counterterrorism operations more transparent and rein in executive power, Obama has arguably done the opposite, maintaining secrecy and expanding presidential authority.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The question then becomes, why has FATA become ground zero when it comes to the use of UAVs as a key counter-insurgency strategy?

**Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA)**

The formation of the five agencies—South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Kurram, Khyber and Malakand (FATA) were created as administrative units by the British colonial government as an attempt to distinguish the ‘tribal’ highland communities from the settled agricultural regions. For the British this was a strategic necessity to contain Russia and to define British India’s frontier against Afghanistan. The image of the Northern Areas as the ‘wild west’ of British India was reinforced by the ability of local tribes to raise *lashkars* (troops) often led by the prominent religious authority of the *mullahs* (clerics). The *lashkars* were mobilized to enforce truces among fighting clans, collect fines, and punish perceived moral transgressions. The British authorities and many of the participants used the term *jihad* to describe these missions but the growing illegal arms trade, inter-clan rivalries, and the code of honor were often the motivations for raising the *lashkars*. In 1947, Pakistan stepped into the role played by the British. “The terms of the relationship between the Tribal Areas and the successor regimes to the British were as limited as the colonial relationship had always been with its north-western frontier.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The administrative relationship resembled the British model of paying allowances to the *maliks* (Political leaders) and using political agents as the emissary of the Pakistani state. The ‘semi-sovereign’ status of the FATA region became a haven for the Taliban fleeing Afghanistan after the U.S. invasion. During the first few years after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan the Pakistani state often argued that it could not do much regarding the cross-border attacks by the Taliban launched from FATA because it did not have complete administrative control and because the region was so vast and rugged. In December, 2007, under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud, several smaller Jihadi groups united to form the TTP (Pakistani Taliban) in FATA. The stated aim of TTP was to overthrow the Pakistani state and creat a truly Islamic system. After the emergence of the TTP as far as Pakistani government was concerned there were ‘good Taliban’ (Afghani) and ‘bad Taliban,’ the TTP. But as far as the United States was concerned there were only bad Taliban.

**The Three Musketeers: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States – All for One?**

There are certain strategic goals shared by the Karazi government in Afghanistan, the United States and Pakistan. All three governments want to root out terrorism from the region and create a stable Afghanistan. But the three countries also have different national interests that create tensions in their alliance. Pakistan’s primary concern is to be in the best possible position to ensure a friendly Afghanistan once the U.S. makes an exit out of Afghanistan. This has resulted in a dual policy on the part of the Pakistanis; some might argue a contradictory one. On the one hand, Pakistan desires a stable Afghanistan, but on the other hand, it desperately desires a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul. This may or may not come from Karzai’s government, we have yet to see, as the United States military has not left Afghanistan yet. If, regrettably, the U.S. leaves and Afghanistan devolves into chaos, with the Taliban taking control and the Karzai government ousted, then Pakistan’s ISI and Army will have been right in ensuring a pliant regime in Afghanistan in the shape of the Afghan Taliban.

There is an obvious schism, then, between the latent Pakistani ambition to ensure a client state in Afghanistan (Taliban or not) and the U.S.’s desire to ensure a free, progressive and democratic Afghanistan built on a solid infrastructure, economy, and government. There is also a very specific cultural and ethnic issue at hand here. The Pashtun majority in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s Pashtun minority (15% of Pakistan’s population[[4]](#footnote-4)) share common cultural, ethnic, and linguistic ties that are notably apart from the rest of Pakistan, especially it’s Punjabi majority. Both the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban are mostly Pashtun. Pashtuns have dominated Pakistani institutions that deal with Afghanistan, like the ISI. Civil servants responsible for administrating Pakistan’s northwest frontier have often been Pashtuns. “Just as the backbone of the Taleban and their allies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is to be found among the Pathans, so any settlement of the conflict with the Taleban in both countries will have to be one which brings a majority of the Pathan population on board.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Engaging the Enemy: The Afghan and Pakistani Taliban**

Pakistan wants to continue to keep good relations with the Afghan Taliban in order to ensure that they will have a friendly regime once the United States leaves the area. But the rise of *Tehrik-e-Taliban-Pakistan* (Pakistani Taliban) have posed serious challenge to the very integrity of the Pakistani state. The complex network of tribal relationships and cultural differences between Pashtuns, Punjabis and other ethnic groups in Pakistan has made it difficult for Pakistan to successfully adjudicate it’s own ‘Wild West,’ not only in terms of defeating the Pakistani Taliban but also maintaining warm relations with Kabul. Islamabad’s ambition to ensure Afghanistan as a client state post-U.S. invasion means keeping the Afghan Taliban as allies an option. No Afghan government has ever officially recognized the Durand Line separating Afghanistan and Pakistan as an international border,[[6]](#footnote-6) an obvious example that relations between the two countries’ governments are strained more often than not. Since most of the drone strikes have targeted TTP, Islamabad is willing to covertly support the drone strikes.

The issue of drone attacks in FATA is yet another illustration of the ways in which Pakistani domestic politics and U.S. public denial of drone attacks has led to an effective counter insurgency tactic becoming a symbol of U.S. imperialism in Pakistan. It is clear that the Pakistani government and the army had been cooperating with the U.S. in drone operations. According to one survey of the population living in the FATA region, “the victim population does not seem too unhappy about the drones taking out the Taliban leadership, especially if the state is perceived as being unable to do so.”[[7]](#footnote-7) With increasing tensions between the United States and Pakistan discussed above and the increased unpopularity of drone attacks among the Pakistani public, this has led the Army and Pakistani government to pretend that they are against drone attacks. In April 2012 the Pakistani Parliament passed a resolution asking an end to drone attacks. As Teresita Schaffer points out "There is not any precedent in Pakistan for parliamentary determination of this kind of a foreign policy issue…and the reason that the parliament was asked to take this action was basically that both the government and, perhaps more importantly, the army, wanted cover. Whatever they decided, they wanted to have as much political cover as they wanted. And I think that neither one was averse to parliament taking a pretty hard line."[[8]](#footnote-8) The use of drones in the FATA region is a good example of covert cooperation between the United States and Pakistan while at the same time publicly denying such cooperation. It is also important to keep in mind that there are many areas in which the U.S. and Pakistani government cooperates. Stephen Kramer points out that: “Pakistan has generally allowed NATO to transport supplies through its territory to Afghanistan. It has helped capture some senior al Qaeda officials, including Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the 9/11 mastermind. It has permitted the United States to launch drone strikes from bases in Baluchistan.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

**Drones as a Counter-Insurgency Tactic?**

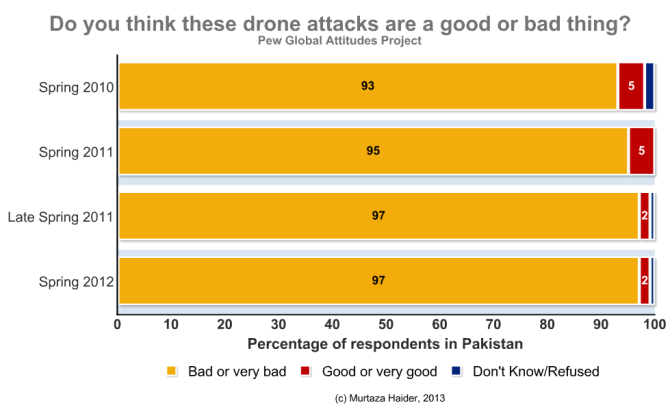
For those who support drones as a counter insurgency weapon argue that a grounds operation to root out terrorist networks in the Tribal areas of Pakistan would be too costly both in terms of U.S. ‘blood and treasure’ and the lives of civilians living in the area. The civilian casualty rate as a result of UAV attacks is much lower, and roughly comparable to regular Pakistani Army ground operations. Not only that, but the death rate of the enemy combatants was much higher than that of the ground operations, and no friendly soldiers (Pakistani or American) were killed in the process. Research suggests that the exaggeration of civilian casualties was a tool used by the Pakistani government to gain political capital, and the real statistics show, according to various sources, that it is wrong to assert that UAV strikes have done disproportionate damage to innocents.[[10]](#footnote-10) (Matthew Fricker and Avery Plaw, 2010) Bryn Glyn Williams argues that: “The list of high value Al Qaeda targets assassinated in Pakistan is nothing short of impressive and is clear evidence of the precision of the deadly robotic drones. It also testifies to the fact the CIA or its Pakistani allies have infiltrated spies into the tribal region.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

In “Drone Warfare: Blowback from the New American Way of War” by Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, Matt Flannes, (Fall 2011) the authors argue that drone warfare in South Asia, in its current form, is counterproductive to the stated strategic goals of the United States. It’s increased violence and made the American’s mission in Afghanistan unnecessarily complicated. New adversaries are created in the ‘accidental guerilla’ phenomenon, wherein non-militants who are victimized by the drone strikes personally or tangentially and are motivated to become militants to oppose the United States’ campaign by force instead of just rhetorically. The confusion that is created by a program that does not communicate effectively with other U.S. military and intelligence elements in the area makes the accomplishment of the U.S.’s goals in the region even more unlikely. The various sectors of the U.S. government who are working with the Karzai government on how best to convert Afghan’s ‘hearts and minds’ are undermined by the other sectors of the government who are unintentionally fanning the flames of militancy in the region by killing thousands of people who were civilians but alleged to be militants after the fact.

Those who support the use of drones as an important counter-insurgency tactic nonetheless point out that the current campaign is not always conducted in the most effective manner. The authors of “Sudden Justice” for example, argue that the campaign should be focused on ‘high value targets’ and not be used frequently to take down the lower level operatives. The more you can destroy and disrupt the activities of personnel in the Taliban and al-Qaeda from the top-down instead of the bottom-up, the more of an impact it will have. The leadership qualities, organizational skills, and strategic awareness of various high-level commanders in both the Taliban and al-Qaeda cannot be easily replaced after their deaths at the hands of U.S. drones. Fricker and Plaw use the example of Baitullah Mehsud, a Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) leader who was killed by a drone strike on the roof of his uncle’s house on August 5, 2009. His death provoked an internal struggle in his organization that ultimately led to enough confusion and tension within the TTP that the Pakistan Army was able to launch the South Waziristan Offensive, putting the TTP on the defensive. But the lower level Taliban and al-Qaeda members have skills and abilities that are more common and more easily replaced. The amount of time and energy, the article asserts, that the U.S. is spending killing lower-level members (and increasing civilian casualties in the process, as the majority of the time these strikes happen during funeral processions or wedding parties) could instead be used to seriously disrupt the activities of the entire organization by targeting its leaders, much like the death of Osama bin Laden did to al-Qaeda in South/Central Asia in 2011. David Rohde agrees that the drones should be used, as they are an effective and efficient way of disrupting and destroying the extremist power base there, but their usage should be both selective and surgical.[[12]](#footnote-12) There is no consensus among scholars when it comes to evaluating the effectiveness of the use of drones as a counter-insurgency tactic. As Hassan Abbas points out “the truth is we don’t know whether U.S. drone strikes have killed more terrorists or produced more terrorists.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

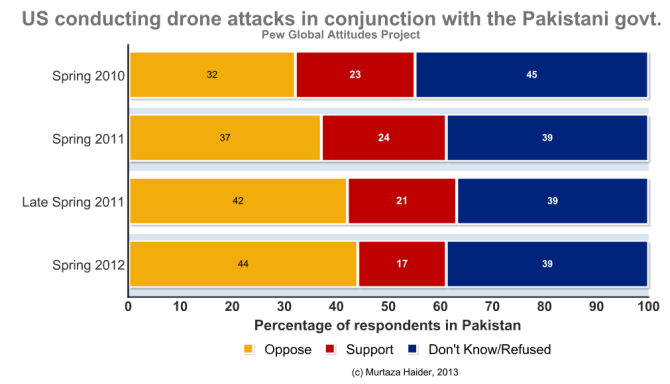
**Drone Strikes and Pakistani Public Opinion**

According to the Pew Global Attitude Survey: “Pakistanis give the U.S. its lowest ratings among the 22 nations included in the Spring 2010 Pew Global Attitudes survey – in all three countries, only 17% have a favorable view of the U.S. Roughly six-in-ten (59%) of Pakistanis describe the U.S. as an enemy, while just 11% say it is a partner. And President Barack Obama is unpopular – only 8% of Pakistanis express confidence that he will do the right thing in world affairs, his lowest rating among the 22 nations.”[[14]](#footnote-14)



Refusal to publicly acknowledge the use of drones by the United States government played a significant role in shaping negative public opinion in Pakistan. What is truly sinister in the minds of many Pakistanis, however, is the outright denial on the part of the Obama administration of the very existence of drone strikes in Pakistan. The former White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said the following: "When I went through the process of becoming press secretary, one of the first things they told me was, 'You're not even to acknowledge the drone program. You're not even to discuss that it exists’…here's what's inherently crazy about that proposition: You're being asked a question based on reporting of a program that exists. So you're the official government spokesperson acting as if the entire program doesn’t exist – pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." This is clear evidence, from the perspective of the average Pakistani citizen and indeed any global observer, that the United States government did not deem the program ‘safe’ enough to be discussed publicly, and undermines any confidence Pakistanis may have had on the ‘good intentions’ of those in Washington concerning drone strikes. As drone strikes and their complicated legal and moral implications have slowly crept onto the landscape of American political discourse with the vetting of John Brennan as the next director of the C.I.A., debates have started on a court to vet drone strikes. According to a New York Times article dated February 6 2013 by Scott Shane, a court similar to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court could potentially be used to justify the net gain and worth of a drone strike against the potential for further destabilization the strike may cause: “...it is time to consider how to forge a new, trustworthy, and transparent system to govern lethal counterterrorism operations.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Pakistani ruling elite, particularly the military, is one of the beneficiaries of U.S. government’s public denial of the use of drones. The Pakistani Army has benefited by the use of American drones in its fight against the TTP but by not acknowledging its cooperation with the U.S. in the drone operations the Pakistani Army has shifted all the blame to the U.S. As the following graph shows there is a possibility that greater transparency and publicly acknowledged cooperation by American and Pakistani government can shift, to some degree, the public opinion on the use of drones. But it is also noteworthy that the public is less supportive in 2013 of such cooperation than they were in 2010.



The fact that the Pakistani government has a tacit, informal understanding with the United States government concerning the use of drones in Pakistan has created greater confusion around the use of drones. As Peter Bergen and Katherine Tideman put it somewhat sarcastically:

For Pakistani politicians, the drone program is a dream come true. They get to posture to their constituents about the perfidious Americans even as they reap the benefits from the U.S. strikes. They are well-aware that neither the Pakistani Army’s ineffective military operations nor the various peace agreements with the militants have done anything to halt the steady Talibanization of their country, while the U.S. drones are the one surefire way to put significant pressure on the leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This is called getting to have your *chapati* and eat it too.[[16]](#footnote-16)

It was not until 12 February 2009 when Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said “‘as I understand it, these (drones) are flown out of a Pakistani base,’ that there was the first public acknowledgement that Pakistani government cooperates with the United States.”[[17]](#footnote-17) But that revelation did not go very far when it comes to Pakistani government’s acknowledgement of its role in the drone strikes. Other than some discussion in the English language newspapers, the story faded. But as Senator Carl Levine, chair of the Senate Armed Forces Committee rightly pointed out: “For them (the Pakistani government) to look the other way, or to give us the green light privately, and then to attack us publicly leaves us, it seems to me, at a very severe disadvantage and loss with the Pakistani people.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Both the Bush and the Obama administration went along with the policy of not publicly acknowledging the drone program or the fact that they were operating with the approval and active cooperation of the Pakistani government. But in the long run such secrecy resulted in heightened anti-U.S. sentiments and a lost opportunity to more actively shift public opinion towards the U.S. strategic goals in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 2009 as the Pakistani Taliban became bolder and took over the valley of Swat the Pakistani public became weary of their goals and tactics. As Williams point out:

They closed girls schools, executed local policemen and those they deemed to be spies or informers, enforced strict sharia law and filmed themselves whipping local females for daring to go outside without male escorts. As a result, a poll carried out in March 2009 by the International Republican Institute found that 74 percent of Pakistanis saw terrorism as a serious problem in Pakistan. The same survey found 69 percent found Taliban and Al Qaeda operating in Pakistan to be a problem.[[19]](#footnote-19)

But rather than publicly acknowledging the drone campaign against the Taliban, the American and Pakistani governments stayed silent. After several incidents where women and children died as a result of the predator strikes anti-American public opinion in Pakistan was hardened. Since the program is shrouded in secrecy the public understanding regarding how the program works is hazy. For example, some of the Pakistanis I interviewed assumed that drones are used indiscriminately to kill people in FATA. It is not clear to the Pakistani public the extent to which any attempt is made to gather evidence to ensure that only those who are clearly identified as ‘militants’ are targeted.

Fricker and Plaw draw attention to the fact that the increasing frequency of drone strikes against mid-to-lower level Pakistani Taliban, by virtue of them being Pakistani, and many of them relatively unknown, increases public resentment because the public views it as the United States arbitrarily murdering Pakistani civilians. In the Pakistani local media at this time, there was a tendency to fail to distinguish between who is Taliban and who is actually innocent, as exemplified by the condemnation Pakistani Senator Hameedullah Jan Afridi expressed by calling the thirty deaths in an attack on a *madrassa* in Bajaur agency the deaths of ‘students,’ when the rough translation from Urdu to English of ‘student’ is ‘*talib*’ which is the name the Taliban have appropriated.

There is much less anger when drone strikes kill well-known militant leaders such as Baitullah Mehsud who notably claimed responsibility for the assassination of one of Pakistan’s beloved leaders, Benazir Bhutto. As Bryn Glyn Williams points out: “Tellingly, when a CIA drone killed Baitullah Mehsud, the notorious head of the Pakistani Taliban who had sent numerous suicide bombers into Pakistani cities, there was no outcry in Pakistan. On the contrary, many Pakistanis celebrated.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The fact that the use of drones violates Pakistan’s sovereignty and international law further adds fuel to the fire of anti-American public opinion in Pakistan. The Pakistani ruling elite understands this well and often takes a public stance that denies the fact that they do cooperate with the United States in drone operations. The recent report by Ben Emmerson, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights is a good example of such duplicity on the part of Pakistani government. After a three-day fact finding mission from the 11th to the 13th of March, 2013, Emmerson concluded that these strikes are being conducted without the approval or consent of the government in Pakistan. According to the report the Pakistani government does not consider its military involvement in FATA and Waziristan to combat militancy as an international or even national military engagement. The Pakistani military, according to Emmerson’s report, sees itself as engaging in law enforcement efforts against radical militants who are attempting to undermine the government in Islamabad. The Pakistani Taliban are in direct opposition to the democratically elected Pakistani government, so from the Pakistani perspective, this is a strictly Pakistani issue. Secondly, these strikes have undermined the safety and wellbeing of the communities they are conducted in. The *Maliks* or Pashtun tribal elders Emmerson met with discussed with him the fear and uncertainty in these communities when young Pashtun men who are indistinguishable from a member of the Taliban in terms of appearance are being killed while engaged in everyday activities. The death of a close family member or friend through violent means motivates young Pashtun males to take up arms in revenge. The extent to which the Pashtun community in Pakistan has suffered as a result of these drone strikes cannot be overstated, according to Emmerson. He concluded the report by pointing out that:

*As a matter of international law the U.S. drone campaign in Pakistan is therefore being conducted without the consent of the elected representatives of the people, or the legitimate Government of the State. It involves the use of force on the territory of another State without its consent and is therefore a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. Pakistan has also been quite clear that it considers the drone campaign to be counterproductive and to be radicalising a whole new generation, and thereby perpetuating the problem of terrorism in the region. Pakistan has called on the U.S. to cease its campaign immediately. In a direct challenge to the suggested legal justification for these strikes, the Government of Pakistan has also made it quite clear during these discussions that any suggestion that it is ‘unwilling or unable’ to combat terrorism on its own territory is not only wrong, but is an affront to the many Pakistani victims of terrorism who have lost their lives.[[21]](#footnote-21)*

Fricker and Plaw point out that increasing frequency of drone strikes has deepened public resentment against the already unpopular democratically elected government of Asif Ali Zardari. He is viewed by the public as either unable or perhaps unwilling to protect Pakistan’s sovereignty. Consequently, the Pakistani government is deprived of the political capital, will, resources, and authority to be the U.S.’s other end of the ‘pincer’ in trapping the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The deep resentment against drones is supported by my interviews of Pakistani journalists and students in January of 2013. In my interview with a Pakistani Pashtun student studying political science at the Lahore University for Management Sciences, he stated, "The Pashtun community in all parts of South Asia consider themselves one. They like to call Afghanistan the 'graveyard of empires.'" So in some sense, it would be an intelligent and strategically sound decision to use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, in areas where the U.S. military is not allowed, like Northern Pakistan - to reduce the potential for unacceptable military and (presumably) civilian casualties. But at what cost to the people who live in these areas? At what cost to the already very tenuous diplomatic relationship between the United States and Pakistan? In my interview with Brigadier Fazal Khan (Retired), a former Infantry Brigadier in the Pakistan Army, he states: “The disadvantages of drone strikes are manifold but the first criticisms Pakistanis have of them is that they are violations of Pakistan’s sovereignty. The Pakistan Army is also having a very difficult time in clearing these objectives on-the-ground. The Pakistan Army has laid down a maximum number of their lives. They have sacrificed hundreds and hundreds of soldiers and their officers fighting this war. So, it is a very difficult ballgame. But what the Pakistan Army has done well [in FATA and Waziristan] is get the popular support of the masses. They have been very careful to minimize collateral damage in the area – and wherever they have gone they have been successful in eliminating terrorists, avoided killing innocents and re-establishing normal life by maintaining civil society and keeping schools open, as just two examples.”

Rohde contends that the public opinion of the strikes in the country in which they are used, Pakistan, is both incredibly important, and when negative, very damaging to U.S. geopolitical goals there. “Under Obama, drone strikes have become too frequent, too unilateral, and much too associated with the heavy-handed use of American power.”[[22]](#footnote-22) I agree with Rohde’s point that if the Obama administration continues these unilateral covert operations in Pakistan, public resentment will boil over, and the administration will have passed the point of no return. These strikes do nothing to ‘help local leaders marginalize militants,’ either, which is a vital process that allows fundamentalism to be stopped in its tracks by the people most directly affected by it.

The U.S. population are themselves ambivalent, ignorant of or indifferent towards the sufferings of the average Pakistani drone strike victim, and the political gain that this ambivalence facilitates is not worth the further destabilization of the region. This gives a pass to the Obama administration in terms of its accounting for its drone program in FATA to the American public. Despite claims made by other drone warfare experts, “Drone Warfare” contends that through ‘purposeful retaliation,’ in the example of the aftermath of the killing of Beitullah Mehsud, drones motivate terrorists to retaliate against attacks despite having their organization ‘decapitated.’ The ‘accidental guerilla’ thesis, mentioned earlier, posits that without any active political or infrastructural engagement on the part of the U.S. in FATA and Waziristan, while at the same time carrying out drone attacks, the United States is making it easier for those local populations to retaliate against what they perceive as extrajudicial murder. Since the U.S. isn’t militarily engaged in Pakistan, most of these ‘accidental guerillas’ will cross the porous border into Afghanistan to engage the U.S. in retaliation.

The counterinsurgency doctrine, used first in Iraq, is to “diminish the political, social, and economic conditions that create and bolster the armed resistance seen as insurgency. The rules governing the use of force in U.S. counterinsurgency theory have been designed to reduce deaths generally and thus prevent creating new insurgents”[[23]](#footnote-23) (127). In doing so, the plan is, the U.S. will ensure Afghanistan a stable, transparent democracy where people can air their grievances legitimately and without fear for the consequences. The goal of drone strikes, that of disrupting the workings of terrorist organizations and their members in Pakistan undermines the goals in Afghanistan to reduce deaths, as the two Pashtun populations (Pakistani and Afghan) share a common ethnic, linguistic and geographical heritage. The lack of accountability that the covert nature of drone strikes affords the U.S. government makes it impossible to assuage the fear and anger that these attacks have produced, as the U.S. doesn’t claim responsibility of “regularly, but unpredictably, unleashing violence from the skies. However, if and when a high-value target is killed, the death is celebrated in Western media”[[24]](#footnote-24) (127). The already tenuous diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and the United States is debilitated only partly because of the U.S.’s drone program. This can be exemplified by the arrest and subsequent release of C.I.A. agent Raymond Davis, who shot two Pakistanis in Lahore while gathering information on the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a *jihadi* group that operates in Pakistan. This, along with the U.S. Navy SEALs raid on Osama bin Laden’s ‘compound’ in Abbottabad, Pakistan, exemplifies the contradictory and complex nature of U.S. foreign policy in the region. On the one hand, the U.S. government and media ignored or underplayed the significance of the Davis negotiations, portraying it instead as a human-interest story, according to “Drone Warfare.” This further incensed the Pakistani public, because to them, the U.S. showed no regard for the significance of a clandestine American agent extra judicially murdering two citizens in Pakistan. On the other hand, when compared to the use of Special Forces troops in the bin Laden raid, the Obama administration and U.S. military at least recognize that precision airstrikes cannot always get the job done. The ensuing media frenzy after the raid and the political capital Obama gained during his re-election campaign are indications that the American people supported Obama in his endeavor to employ on the ground judgment in helping to determine the success or failure of the raid, instead of just using a Predator missile and hoping for the best. Human discretion and on the ground judgment, can be the difference between a foreign policy triumph and disaster. Despite all this, drone strikes and have not been a significant media story in the United States since the campaign began eleven years ago. This is a major problem for the future of U.S.-Pakistani diplomatic relations – not only that, but the usage of strikes against American civilians in Yemen, regardless of their ideological affiliation is an affront to American civil liberties and sets a very dangerous precedent – that American civilians can be killed by their own government without any sort of judicial process. Rohdes’s article quotes Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union: “‘The administration has claimed the power to carry out extrajudicial executions of Americans on the basis of evidence that is secret and never seen by anyone. It’s hard to see how that is consistent with the Constitution.’”[[25]](#footnote-25) The article closes by pointing out the problematic way these strikes have been justified by the Obama administration. The administration has outright refused to release details of its strikes, and in doing so has made it impossible to allow the courts to review the strikes’ constitutionality, and if this were to be a tactic used by a Republican presidential administration, ‘the outcry on the left would be deafening,’[[26]](#footnote-26) says Jaffer.

**The dehumanizing danger of drone’s discursive space**

“Surveillance and violence from afar: The politics of drones and liminal securityscapes” by Tyler Wall and Torin Monahan offers an interesting framework with which to view the way drones affect the way human beings relate to each other in the contexts of space, place, and identity - or “corporeal politics.”[[27]](#footnote-27) When technological systems gain the ability to physically remove a lethal missile-launching drone pilot thousands of miles away from the proximity of his target by remote operation, the dehumanization process of those targets begins in full force. The drone operational systems make up a vast and complex array of surveillance assets that “amass data about risk probabilities and then manage populations or eliminate network nodes considered to exceed acceptable risk thresholds.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The very description of what a drone *does* –killing human beings - is awash in a sea of technical, esoteric and impersonal language. The argument that western society’s obsession with the mobility and speed of its various technological innovations, from the car to the airplane to modern mobile forms of communication and the Internet, is linked to its militaristic culture and “secondarily to the political desire to control people and their movements” (241) according to “Surveillance and Violence.” The mastery of all modes of potential combat, on the sea, in the air and on land has been an obsession of many U.S. military and political leaders since the Second World War, through the Cold War and America’s rivalry with the Soviet Union, and to present-day post 9/11 U.S. political discourses about terrorism and globalization. The discussion takes a violent and abrupt turn after the events of September 11 2001, when governments are forced to modulate their policy and military strategy to accommodate an enemy that is transnational, by its nature guerilla and a camouflaged, unpredictable mobile network of organizations with fundamentalist motivations.

Under the Obama administration, the range of ‘acceptable targets’ has increased, according to “Surveillance and Violence” by a quite wide margin to now include *suspected* terrorists whose identities as terrorists may not necessarily have been confirmed, when previously it had been only strikes on *known* terrorists whose identities had been confirmed by intelligence sources. In terms of the nature of the War on Terror, former C.I.A. Director Leon Panetta has enthusiastically endorsed the use of drones, calling them “the only game in town in terms of confronting or trying to disrupt the al Qaeda leadership.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This shows that politicians and military leaders in Washington have a lot of work to do in bridging the gap between governmental and media-related portrayals of and perceptions toward drone strikes to the public. This will help to moderate the potential for the de-humanization of targets, a radical shift not just in the War on Terror but in war fighting as a whole. According to “The Origins of C.I.A.’s Not-So-Secret Drone War in Pakistan,” by Mark Mazzetti for the New York Times,

The ground had shifted, and counterterrorism officials began to rethink the strategy for the secret war. Armed drones, and targeted killings in general, offered a new direction. Killing by remote control was the antithesis of the dirty, intimate work of interrogation. Targeted killings were cheered by Republicans and Democrats alike, and using drones flown by pilots who were stationed thousands of miles away made the whole strategy seem risk-free.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The drone program has fundamentally changed the role of the C.I.A. in American foreign policy. As a former Deputy Director of the C.I.A., John E. McLaughlin stated in his testimony to the 9/11 commission, “You can’t underestimate the cultural change that comes with gaining lethal authority. ‘When people say to me, “It’s not a big deal,” he said, ‘I say to them, “Have you ever killed anyone?” It is a big deal. You start thinking about things differently,’ he added.”[[31]](#footnote-31) As stated earlier however, drones have crept upon the American political landscape in a way that will hopefully facilitate the necessary discussion on when, how, how often, and where to use these lethal weapons.

In terms of their usage in Waziristan and other tribal areas, drone strikes have remained outside the discourse of American media and politics. They have however occupied a very different place in the American public imagination. Drones used for surveillance purposes on American citizens is a divisive civil liberties issue gaining some traction in contemporary political debates. Rand Paul, a Republican U.S. Senator from Kentucky, notably conducted a twelve-hour long Senate filibuster in protest of the Obama administration’s secrecy concerning its drone program. Rand Paul filibustered, because in a letter to Paul, Attorney General Eric Holder stated that only if an attack to a degree similar to the events of September 11th 2001 were to be threatened would the United States government be authorized to use military force on its own soil, including but not limited to drone strikes. In Constitutional terms, Attorney General Eric Holder’s response to the 12-hour filibuster was that if an American citizen is not engaged in combat on American soil then a weaponized drone cannot be used against him or her. The Attorney General left out a response on whether or not it is constitutional to use drones for surveillance purposes on U.S. citizens.

**Conclusion**

In terms of their current usage, drone strikes that cause civilian deaths as a result of targeting ‘suspected’ terrorists are the most counterproductive to the U.S.’s strategic goals in the region. The next most destructive aspect of this policy is the Obama administration’s previously stated initial directive to not even *acknowledge* the existence of the program, enraging Pakistanis to a further degree and lending more legitimacy to militancy. The third aspect of this program and how it has been administrated is the ‘accidental guerilla’ phenomenon. This phenomenon is directly related to the tribal custom of *Pashtunwali,* which translates to “revenge for the death of a close relative or fellow tribesman.” When the Obama administration carries out drone strikes that kill civilians and later maintains that those civilians were in fact militants, this disingenuous method actually produces more militants. How does this happen? By motivating regular civilians living in that area to take up arms against the United States in revenge for those killed. An emphasis must then be placed on publicly acknowledging the drone strikes in order to keep Pakistani public opinion from boiling over. Keeping negative Pakistani public opinion relatively low will also mitigate the complex relationship between the U.S. and Pakistani governments, and help to smooth over the United States’ military’s withdrawal from neighboring Afghanistan. The program should finally re-focus the strikes themselves on High-Value Targets (HVTs) so that the attacks can be justified. Striking surgically and minimizing collateral damage will also lend some legitimacy to these strikes in the eyes of the Pakistani people.

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