

UAV Warfare “Brings Peace and Stability”: Drone Apologists - Where is your Evidence?

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

Over the past few weeks there has been increasing attention to the issues raised by the growing use of armed unmanned drones. As [protests at factories and bases](#) have taken place, newspapers have begun to [editorialize](#), politicians have formed [committees to investigate](#) and [legal action](#) is being undertaken.

Amidst these positive moves there are those of course who would dismiss concerns about drone strikes and remote warfare. Earlier this month [Reuters published an Op-Ed piece](#) in response to the Stanford & NYU Law Schools report [‘Living Under Drones](#), which investigated US drone strikes in Pakistan. The Op-Ed argued that the anti-drone campaign was “doing damage” and not taking seriously enough the violence of the Taliban. As we have already reported these criticisms are nonsense and have been [thoroughly critiqued](#).

Since then however, two further articles have appeared, both authored by those within what may be called the ‘security studies community’ which again accuse those of challenging the growing use of drones of doing damage.



Firstly Thomas Hauschildt has written a piece on the new Conflict and Security blog entitled [‘Drone warfare: Critics and their focus on the wrong issues’](#), while Jenny Holland has written a CiF piece for The Guardian arguing that [drone strikes are ‘just a sideshow’](#). The articles concede that the current use of drones may not be legal (Hauschildt) or effective (Holland) yet both maintain that anti-drone campaigners are simply wrong to focus their attention on drones.

Hauschildt argues that those who critique drones rather than the way they are used, “damage rational discussion about drone warfare.” He concedes that “drone attacks in non-war theatres (Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia) are not covered by international law...consequently, not only the killing of innocent civilians, but also of terror suspects without trial is illegal.” Nevertheless he maintains that arguments put forward by anti-drone campaigners against drone *per se* are “flawed”. He puts forward two - what he calls “flawed arguments” - that campaigners are using: firstly the idea that “flying a drone and killing people is just like playing a video game” and secondly the argument “that drones kill innocent civilians”.

With regard to the ‘video game’ argument (or to use Philip Alston’s phrase, the [‘Playstation Mentality’](#)) Hauschildt argues that this is “degrading drone pilots to human beings without any feelings and ideas about morals and ethics and the consequences of their actions.” He goes on to repeat the military’s line that there is nothing new about drones/remote warfare

and the drone operator is the same position in effect as “the soldier who presses the button to fire a cruise missile, a torpedo or an artillery shell or indeed the medieval archer who fired arrows and hit a person hundreds of meters away.” Except they are not. They are thousands of miles from any battlefield and are in no physical danger whatsoever.

More importantly there is evidence for the Playstation mentality as we [have written about before](#). A 2010/11 US military investigation into an airstrike involving drones found that the drone pilots at Creech has shown a “propensity/bias towards kinetic operations” and had “downplayed” and “ignored” indications that the target was not hostile in favour of undertaking a strike. In this particular incident an airstrike went ahead and 24 Afghan civilians lost their lives. We’re not suggesting this is conclusive proof of the ‘playstation mentality’ – one example can never be that – but it is the only detailed, public account of such a strike and must be taken into account. Again, as we have written many, many times before, there needs to be much more information about the day-to-day use of armed drones made publicly available in order for us to get a real understanding of these issues.

Hauschildt suggests a second “flawed argument” that anti-drone campaigners makes is that drones kill civilians. Hauschildt dismisses this as “not a problem which can only be attributed to drones in particular, but to warfare in general.” He goes on to say: “Drones are no less precise than jets, artillery, missiles or any other kind of distance weapons. Contrary to what critics claim, drones are even likely to be more precise as they enable pilots to obtain a clearer picture of the situation on the ground.”

He states this, (and he is not alone in doing so) without any proof whatsoever. Again the military needs to release more data on the use of drones in order that we may properly understand their impact. The fact that drones are causing civilian casualties is not in dispute and it should not be dismissed so lightly by drone advocates.

[Jenny Holland’s article](#) is an echo of the earlier Reuters Op-Ed piece and hardly need detain us too long. Holland quotes two US academics who both argue that local people in Pakistan and Yemen near to where drones strikes are taking place actually support drones as opposed to the people in “the cities and in educated circles...[who are] militantly opposed to drones.” No evidence or indeed quotes from these ‘local people’ are provided, nor does she refer to the many other studies, articles, reports etc. which show opposition to the strikes within Pakistan and Yemen. The piece also uses drone strike data from the New American Foundation which has been [comprehensively challenged](#). The fact that Holland use only the NAF data without even mentioning other sources such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism is telling.

Holland ends her piece admitting that drones are not “bringing peace and stability” but, like Hauschildt insisting that “drones per se” are not the problem.”

To paraphrase the authors then, drones enable illegal extra-judicial killing, are killing civilians and are also an ineffective tool for creating peace and security (but besides that, there’s no problem with drones *per se*...)

The reality is that drones are a serious problem. They are lowering the political cost of military intervention; eroding the laws of war – particularly in relation to sovereignty and targeted killing; and are turning the whole world into a war zone. Drone apologists really need to engage with this reality. In addition, those who argue that drones are precise tool or that those in the area where drones strikes are taking place want them to happen, need to

produce some evidence. Perhaps they should join our call for the military to release more information about their drone operations?

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