# Legal, Legitimate, and Effective Drone Warfare: Grand Illusion or Future Reality?

Posted on Tuesday 4th December 2012

On 14 November, 2012, an **Israeli drone strike killed Ahmed Jabari (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/9685598/How-Israel-killed-Ahmed-Jabari-its-toughest-enemy-in-Gaza.html)**, the head of the military wing of Hamas in Gaza. The sharply escalating violence in the aftermath of this so-called **targeted killing (http://www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/targeted-killings/p9627)**, while particularly costly in human life, is part of a seemingly unending violent confrontation in the region: according to a **timeline of the conflict (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202_162-57552203/timeline-of-recent-israel-gaza-violence/)**, over the past almost four years (since the conclusion of Israel's ground offensive in Gaza) more than 300 Palestinians and 20 Israelis have been killed, while in the past two years, some 800 missiles have been launched from Gaza into southern Israel.

Nontheless, the assassination of Jabari was the starting point of the recent escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas. As such, it raises a broader point beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - about the legality, legitimacy, and effectiveness of targeted killings, and the use of armed drones for that purpose in particular.

Recent analysis carried out by the **Long War Journal (http://www.longwarjournal.org/)**, the **Bureau of Investigative Journalism (http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/)**, and **Drone Wars UK (http://dronewarsuk.wordpress.com/)** indicates that the use of armed and unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs/drones) by the United States and the United Kingdom has dramatically increased over the past decade. Aggregate data compiled from these open-access sources suggests more than 1,300 strikes have been carried out to date against enemy targets, killing almost 3,000 insurgents and nearly 500 civilians.

From the vantage point of the intervening states, these statistics are defended as markers of military success against enemy forces. However, from the perspective of the targets of these strikes - far from the use of drones reducing the risks of insurgency and terrorism - each strike justifies substantially increasing the level of violence against US/UK forces. For the intervening side, drones represent the latest manifestation of a trend towards the progressive reduction of risk to Western forces; yet for the populations affected by drone strikes, they represent the unacceptable combination of Western arrogance, technological hubris, invulnerability, and exclusivist beliefs and values. Thus, different values, belief systems, narratives, and historical experiences lead to radically different interpretations of whether drone strikes are increasing or decreasing security.

The United States and its allies are not alone in the view that drone technology increases security against insurgent and terrorist groups and offers an economical yet effective alternative to the deployment of expeditionary forces. This is evidenced by the fact that drone technology is rapidly and dangerously proliferating. **Drone Wars UK (http://dronewarsuk.wordpress.com/)** estimates that currently 31 countries are making efforts in this area, with non-state actors, like **Hezbollah (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19914441)**, **Hamas and Islamic Jihad (http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/idf-attacks-gaza-workshops-disrupts-hamas-drone-production.premium-1.478415)** also recognising the potential of drone warfare to further their objectives. Among those countries engaged in developing drones, the United Kingdom has already made a significant financial investment. According to the **Bureau of Investigative Journalism (http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/)**, it has spent £2bn in total, with £500m going on armed drones. The increasing role of drones in UK security and defence thinking has led the **House of Commons Select Committee on Defence (http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-archive/defence-committee/)** to announce this week that it will conduct a two-year **inquiry into the UK's policy on drones (http://www.globalresearch.ca/uk-defence-select-committee-to-investigate-use-of-armed-drones/5312482)**.

There are growing calls from NGOs like **Drone Wars UK (http://dronewarsuk.wordpress.com/)** and organisations like the **International Committee on Robot Arms Control (http://icrac.net/)** for new regulatory mechanisms to control the use of armed drones. These efforts are vitally important but will undoubtedly be complicated by the issue of whether the dones are being used for civilian or military purposes. This dual-use issue will pose as stringent a challenge for regulation as any weapon system hitherto developed.

The overwhelming majority of US drone strikes have been carried out in Afghanistan (67%, including **drones used by UK forces (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/22/uk-double-drones-afghanistan)**), followed by Pakistan (26%), Yemen (3%), and Somalia (1%). As this data suggests, the use of drones has evolved into a core component of a US-driven global counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategy. Underlying the increased use of drones is an assumption among the United States, the United Kingdom, and key allies that this advance in technology renders the large deployment of ground forces redundant.

As evidenced by **existing data (http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/aug/02/us-drone-strikes-data)**, drones as a means of contemporary warfare are primarily deployed in situations of insurgency and civil war that are considered as international security threats, specifically as threats to US and allied interests, because international terrorist networks have become embedded in the countries concerned: al-Qaeda and its local (Taliban) supporters in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, and al-Shabab in Somalia. The ever-growing reliance on drones (for both reconnaissance and combat) to target opponents, their supporters, and supply networks over large geographical areas at low economic cost and very low risk to the lives of combatant forces is considered a highly effective strategy for winning both counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism campaigns.

The use of drones from **Gaza (http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/rights/israel-drones-gaza-killer-robots)** to **Waziristan (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-19714959)**, from **Helmand (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/18/british-drones-afghanistan-taliban)** to **Abyan (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19132096)** and to **Gedo (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15052484)**, thus, has important implications for international security in two dimensions: the possibilities of managing intrastate conflict and the relationship between the intervening and the target state. We urgently need a better understanding of those security objectives drone warfare can achieve and those which it not only cannot deliver, but is in danger of undermining. The evidence from Gaza at this moment clearly demonstrates that there is still massive gap between the aspirations and reality of using armed drones. Even if a legal, legitimate and effective national and international drone policy was possible, we are still far from formulating and implementing it.

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