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Drones: The Eye in the Sky Preserving America’s Core

Imagine a drone flying over a region prone to terrorists, gathering intelligence and sending the data back to its commanders who sit in a room thousands of miles away and discuss what to do with the intel. They assess the intelligence they received and confirm that they have obtained the location of the insurgents they were looking for. The next step is “droning” the terrorists. Not quite. There are a variety of consequences that result from the implementations of drones in foreign policy, different uses of them, and a wide range of aspects they influence. America’s use of military drones as a part of foreign policy are a controversial topic in the media. In an extremely polarizing and dangerous world, certain steps should be taken in order to ensure the security of Americans domestic and abroad and also the citizens of the numerous countries that suffer from unethical and cruel leadership towards humanity. Both sides of the debate, one side wanting to abolish the use of drones and the other promoting their usage, have strong points. In this paper I will present why carrying out a job while reducing the risks is ideal. In addition, simultaneously eliminating the presence of American soldiers present at the point of conflict is the most ideal scenario during engagements. Through reasoning, drones protect and preserve America’s interests by giving its military the capability to adapt to rapid changes, the opportunity to aid its allies in times of need, and reduce the costs associated with ground or manned combat.

As an introduction to this topic I will briefly summarize some of the factors that hold favor to the United States that influence how drones are used. In this essay, I will introduce the opposing schools of thought and reveal their flaws and the miscalculations used to bolster them entitled Intelligence Gathering, Execution of Tasks, and The Issue of Casualties. These schools of thought suggest that the use of drones leads to chaotic and out-of-control scenarios during intel gathering missions without active human involvement and imply that tasks at hand cannot be handled to the same effect as that of a human operative, resulting in a massive amount of civilian deaths. After the refutation, I will lastly segue into the paper’s main arguments that reinforce the claim that drones preserve and protect America’s interests with a brief refutation of the counterarguments that follow. The discussion will aim to illustrate that some of the opposing arguments focus on points that are not applicable in real situations or neglect important distinctions.

With the use of drones, America has a leadership presence in the world for attacking terror, solving crises, and attempting to remove chaos and bring stability into developing and third-world countries. Some opposing scholars might state that heavy involvement overseas poses various moral hazards such as American troop casualties, our interest in natural resources, and our commitment to building democracies and replacing authoritarian leadership. Although there isn’t an unanimous agreement, it can be argued that all of the former reasons for intervening are in America’s interests and generally help others despite our motives or intentions. The benefits of reducing American casualties require no explanation. On the other hand, obtaining resources while simultaneously building up other countries is controversial. To put it simply, advancing America’s interests is not detrimental and helps improve living conditions in those areas. The drone program makes the conflict interference, terror intervention and democracy building actions more quantitative at a spending level, with some ethical arguments that are less emotional for Americans than it would be otherwise. The United States has a unique form of mandate from the public. The public elects officials to represent their views, and these officials vote on foreign issues such as deploying American soldiers overseas to fight. If public disapproval is at a low, the public can vote their representative out of public office and elect another representative that will make their voices heard. “The foreign policy of republics are more peaceful, [than that of monarchs] at least in part because the public can play a constructive role in constraining policy makers; accountability to the public can restrain any war-making proclivities of leaders”.[[1]](#footnote-1) American soldier casualties are one of these issues and is a sensitive topic nation-wide, so the less emotional the American public is, the less opposition there will be to carrying out actions deemed to be necessary.

**Opposing School of Thought: Intelligence Gathering**

Much like many policy-related statements, there are competing views arguing against the use of drones; one of those pertains to the gathering of intelligence. Opposing scholars contend that forming connections and relationships with citizens on the ground to gain intel works better than using technology. David Kilcullen writes on the importance of this in *Counter-insurgency Redux*, “Feedback on the effect of counter-insurgent operations on public perception may be critical. Human intelligence and tactical signals intelligence are clearly crucial, and additional effort in these areas would be valuable”.[[2]](#footnote-2) Kilcullen argues here that we can gain more accurate intelligence by direct communication because human knowledge is irreplaceable. In addition, civilians might be more open to share information if they don’t feel secluded, left out, and unaware of the situation. This lack of compliance is supported by the protests from civilians in the areas who oppose the use of drones in their home. In Pakistan, around 10,000 protestors showed their opposition to U.S. drone strikes stating that peace would never come as long as drones continued being implemented.[[3]](#footnote-3) From this, the conclusion is drawn that civilians would rather have soldiers on the ground gathering the information they need, than a drone towering over them as they go about their daily lives.

Furthermore, soldiers do a satisfactory job when acquiring information during dismounted patrols – patrolling without vehicles and engaging in face to face contact without projecting a large presence.[[4]](#footnote-4) A Major of the 101st stated that when fewer soldiers are sent to survey the environment, less information was extracted, so contrarily sending more soldiers result in better intel gathering. The Major also stated that soldiers knew locations of IED, sniper positions, short cuts, abandoned buildings and knew storeowners, chiefs, schools, ethnic backgrounds of neighborhoods, and electricity and water statuses.[[5]](#footnote-5) From the types of information gathered, the conclusion was made that no technology can serve as an adequate or equivalent substitute.

***Refuting School of Thought that Soldiers are better at Intel Gathering***

While this argument may apply in some situations, civilians have often been hostile toward soldiers during their deployment which can be life-threatening and create higher risk.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, the opposing school of thought fails to recognize that drones can pick up on many more minuscule details that provide a larger strategic and big data viewpoint where human communication may not suffice. An example of an application that illustrates the precision of these drones is in forest monitoring. These drones used by timber companies and forestry agencies are being used increasingly more for applications “such as tree crown/gap mapping, forest stand mapping, volume estimation, wind blow assessment, pest monitoring, and harvest planning”.[[7]](#footnote-7) If drones are able to pick up on minuscule changes in an environment, they can accurately and discreetly provide intelligence that many operatives or agents may have had to risk their lives to obtain. In cases where a mission’s goal is to gather information on computers or capture an informant, drones can scope the area and provide intelligence on whether it would be safe and appropriate to send in soldiers to carry out the task. Although less applicable to military operations due to the nature of military drones and hacking drones, some drones have the ability to hack into computers. Some of Britain’s most secure computers are vulnerable to information being stolen from them at a rate of a page per every five seconds.[[8]](#footnote-8) This technology could be modified, enhanced, and applied to military drones to achieve a similar effect in the future. However, in a more militaristic sense, the more recent drones “can take off and land on their own, and carry smart sensors that can detect a disruption in the dirt a mile below the plane and trace footprints back to an enemy hide-out”.[[9]](#footnote-9) To put it simply, until there is a need for taking consequential risks and jeopardizing operatives’ lives, there isn’t a need to place others in unnecessary risky circumstances.

As obvious as it is that drones are used for intelligence gathering, there are many who inaccurately believe that using drones solely consist of “droning” – the bombing of areas and injuring and/or killing innocent civilians. This image of drones comes from their ability to be remotely controlled from miles away. An application where intelligence is valued pertains to the United Nations (UN). Drones allow peacekeepers such as the UN to monitor and track suspicious behavior during the day and night such as smuggling of firearms and other hostile acts.

Although some very public incidents have occurred over the years where civilians have been afflicted or killed and had their lives impacted by accidents, human rights groups previously known to be strong opponents against the use of drones have shifted to appreciate their precision. Some now want surveillance drones on peacekeeping operations due to their ability to monitor abuse of human rights and humanitarian law violations.[[10]](#footnote-10) In 2011, President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were able to utilize the intelligence obtained by a drone, and assess it to determine the location of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In her memoir, *Hard Choices*, Clinton wrote "one of the most effective and controversial elements of the Obama Administration's strategy against al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists...bin Laden himself worried about the heavy losses that drones were inflicting”.[[11]](#footnote-11) This shows that from the words of terrorists themselves, drones are among their biggest concerns and threats to their operations. In this particular case, the United States may not have been able to bring the terrorist responsible for the 9/11 attacks without drone technology.[[12]](#footnote-12) Under the same administration, drones successfully killed 3300 al Qaeda, Taliban, and other jihadist members including a handful of senior leaders of these organizations. Terrorists also have a harder time communicating, collaborating, and training new recruits due to the drones’ capability of detecting electronic devices or large gatherings of people. In other words, “drones have turned al Qaeda’s command and training structures into a liability, forcing the group to choose between having no leaders and risking dead leaders”.[[13]](#footnote-13) The intelligence that drones have provided the United States have led to these successful outcomes and many would not have been possible without their utilization.

**Opposing School of Thought: Execution of Tasks**

Intelligence not only distinguishes humans and drones apart in combat, but the control of their actions also sets them apart. Due to this, there is a critique that drones can’t replace human soldiers in the sense that they cannot fulfill the same duties to a similar extent and are therefore at a disadvantage. Humans have the ability to rely on instincts and prior experience on battlefields to help them make decisions and reach conclusions. On the other hand, drones send data back to drone commanders to do the same. The argument is that drones don’t work independently and therefore can’t hold the task of soldiers because they still require an input of commands.[[14]](#footnote-14) Furthermore, critics suggest that drone commanders remain susceptible to emotions, which effects have a direct connection to how they use the machines to achieve their ends.[[15]](#footnote-15)

***Refuting School of Thought that Drones are Disadvantaged at Executing Tasks***

This is a valid statement and while emotions do have some effect, the effect on human commanders controlling the drone is much less than that of a soldier in the scene who has his or her life at risk. In the same manner, drones allow tasks to be completed more efficiently and effectively because they aren’t human, and because of that, don’t have emotions that put limitations on the required task. The issue of soldiers having psychological dispositions is well-known and thus, soldiers can commit war crimes, unethical and immoral acts, and suffer from PTSD later in their lives. It was found that 20% of United Kingdom forces deployed in Iraq for 9-12 months reported severe alcohol problems and an increase in alcohol consumption for over 3 years.[[16]](#footnote-16) In comparison, 4% of drone pilots screened for a high risk of PTSD according to a study conducted by Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine.[[17]](#footnote-17) Like soldiers, drone commanders are human, have emotions, and can be affected by them. But unlike soldiers, they are not threatened by the environment around them and have no need to act out of fear or anger.[[18]](#footnote-18) Because drone commanders are not as susceptible to certain conditions or floods of emotion, means that drones’ actions aren’t altered by those conditions therefore drones are able to carry out tasks without hesitation. In addition, behind the control, commanding officers have other human resources that can help them quickly make decisions. This is analogous to a student writing an essay by hand, taking hours with a hand-ache versus a student typing out the essay on a computer in half the amount of time; it’s more efficient, less time-consuming, easier to rectify or edit errors, and less physically straining.

**Opposing School of Thought: The Issue of Casualties**

Perhaps the most well-known opposition argument to the use of drones is the number of casualties produced. In regards to this viewpoint, O’Connell writes, “They estimated that at that time the U.S was killing 50 unintended targets for each intended target. Moreover, killing leaders has typically had only a short-term impact on repressing terrorist violence, while every civilian killed ―represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge, and more recruits for a militant movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased”.[[19]](#footnote-19) Moreover, because drones are efficient at killing, there is a concern that they may cause more civilian casualties than prevent terrorism.[[20]](#footnote-20) In the same regard, when America kills terrorists, the civilian casualties and/or lasting effects that follow cause resentment, making a portion of people in that population hostile and unsatisfied.[[21]](#footnote-21) In 2013, a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan killed Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud as the Pakistani government was preparing to negotiate peace talks with the Taliban. In response, the country’s interior minister, Imran Khan, challenged Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, vowing to put pressure on the United States until the strikes ended. Khan contended that the killing jeopardized peace in the country.[[22]](#footnote-22)

***Refuting the School of Thought that Drones Cause More Casualties***

However, this argument fails to include the amount of civilians killed from ground troop operations and more importantly does not describe the level of awareness of the civilians. In Pakistan, as the number of drone strikes increased, the number of civilian deaths plummeted from 16% to 10%.[[23]](#footnote-23) The civilians in these areas know that there has been a drone strike but not the source of the strike since the United States is not the only country that uses drones in combat. In fact, the Pakistani government regularly assaults tribal zones and the local media have reported that the civilians in those areas fear the Pakistani army more than the United States. [[24]](#footnote-24) Therefore, if they assume a strike is perpetrated by the United States, and if there is a mistake, resulting in civilian casualties, there tends to be less blame on the United States’ strikes because, ours are perceived “smaller and more precise”.[[25]](#footnote-25) To put some statistics behind the assessment, in Pakistan in 2013, out of 27 U.S. air strikes, 109-195 people were reported killed, with 0-5 of those being civilians which is a 0%-2.5% civilian death rate.[[26]](#footnote-26) Expanding on the previous viewpoint, it is a common known sentiment that drones can cause avoidable and a tremendous number of casualties. In 2010, a strike killed 23 Afghan civilians, suspected as insurgents and wounded 12 others.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Any number of civilian deaths is tragic but the reality is that many of these deaths would have happened nonetheless. If soldiers were sent, there would likely be civilian casualties on top of American soldier casualties, and if soldiers weren’t sent without any other actions, the civilian causalities may have been the highest of all possible scenarios, an example being mass genocide, depending on the threat and scenario. Therefore, the use of drones enormously decreases the number of casualties in the United States military. With the presence of more drones, there hasn’t been a need for as many soldiers and that number has continued to decline over the years. In fact, 1,354,054 Americans, equivalent to, “less than 0.5 percent of Americans over 18 serve in the active-duty military. We do not declare war anymore; the last time Congress actually did so was in 1942 — against Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania”.[[28]](#footnote-28) In comparison to the current number in 1980, that percentage was nearly 1% with 2,050,627 Americans in active-duty. Prior to that in 1970, 3,066,294 Americans were in active-duty, making up 1.5% of Americans over the age of 18.[[29]](#footnote-29) [[30]](#footnote-30)

***Summary of the Refutation of Opposing Schools of Thoughts***

The benefits drones bring to American foreign policy clearly outweigh opposing viewpoints, on issues relating to public perception, overall casualties, and level of effectiveness. While these are valid concerns, the use of military drones allows America to gather more useful intelligence, complete tasks more effectively with less risk of life, and reduce the number of casualties hence keeping public disapproval at a minimal. If our use of drones continues, like anything else, the technology will likely improve, minimizing the amount of civilian causalities while also reducing the number of Americans serving overseas. Also simultaneously disrupting the process of terrorism and deaths of innocents in world conflict areas that the US and others intervene for humanitarian reasons.

**Introduction to Main Arguments**

The many known benefits of drones in this policing type action, are reducing American soldier deaths, killing terrorists before they can plan attacks, and gathering intelligence from afar will continue. However, there is controversy over the number of civilian casualties caused as well as the moral, legal, and ethical means behind strikes. Due to these criticisms, protocols have shifted in order to address the negative aspects of drones. Their implementation into our foreign policy has so far only brought progress in helping America maintain its ideals.

This section of the paper will explore the reasons why America’s foreign policy benefits from drone usage. First, their technological nature gives America the advantage of adapting to quick changes, followed by the ability to lead instable governments to stability, and lastly allows America to minimize their military spending costs. This discussion will make it clear why the strongest counterarguments against the evidence supporting my thesis are flawed.

**Argument: Adaptability**

The use of drones in foreign policy provide the United States with opportunities to complete tasks that require quick action. In other words, some situations and opportunities only present themselves for a set amount of time, and when that time has past, it is too late to implement any action. There is no guarantee when the opportunity will arise again, if it ever does. For example, if there was an hour-long in-person meeting between three heads of ISIS, a drone strike would immediately neutralize and take care of the situation without an opportunity for the leaders to recognize the plot and escape. If drones were not available, ground and air troops would have to be called, briefed on the situation, would have to strategize, and be prepared to carry out the operation. During that time, there is a risk that the targets may have already accomplished what they intended to do, exchanged information, weapons and in route of plotting an attack. In the worst-case scenario for a drone, it is seen and gets shot down and that money used to manufacture and equip the drone was wasted. The worst case scenario for a manned operation has much higher risks and takes a toll on more than just quantitative expenses. In this scenario, the aerial vehicle is seen, shot down, and the pilot either is (1) killed in the crash, captured and killed by enemy combatants such as ISIS fighters, or (2) held hostage by ISIS.[[31]](#footnote-31) In either scenario, the aerial vehicle is destroyed and the cost associated with it is gone, and there is either a dead soldier or a soldier being tortured or used as bait by ISIS to draw global attention to themselves and more military operations to try to rescue the captured pilot. The comparison between the two possible outcomes in this likely scenario, shows that the utilization of drones is much better and is the less risky option in the United States’ interests.

***Counterargument: Drones’ Adaptability is a Falsehood***

The main counterargument against drones being applicable to situations that require agility and flexibility is that there is not enough time for its commanders to make the best decisions, and mistakes that can be made are only realized after the fact. One of Israel’s most experienced drone commanders, Major Yair, expressed his frustrations, “You have to make life and death calls in seconds… You spot it - what is it? Shall we take it out or not? You have to develop the mental skills”.[[32]](#footnote-32) Yair also stated that his job is made harder when insurgents hide behind innocent civilians in open public locations which prevents him from doing his job. Critics against the use of drones would use this as evidence and apply it to American drones in a similar scenario and state that commanders make frequent mistakes resulting in unnecessary deaths. In a period of 3-years, there were 4 cases where Air Force pilots were investigated for making grievous errors.[[33]](#footnote-33) Quick changes in the environment such as weather conditions also have an effect on accuracy and overall function. The cameras and sensors on drones aren’t replacements for a pilot in the cockpit and can’t be guaranteed to avoid collisions or other complications.[[34]](#footnote-34) In summary, critics argue that drone commanders can make bad decisions under volatile situations.

In refutation, another sentiment is also shared among drone commanders. Drone pilots have stated that by not being physically at risk, they feel more comfortable and that safety net helps them make better calls under less stress than a manned operative would.[[35]](#footnote-35) On the topic of making mistakes while under duress, a former drone pilot wrote:

“Certainly, war is chaos, and mistakes do happen. But in my 11 years flying the Predator, I was satisfied to see how few actually did. While the ‘drone papers’ [leak of national security documents] would have you believe otherwise, drone pilots are subject to the exact same rigorous checks and balances used for all military operations—and then some. (After all, is there a difference between bombs dropped off a drone or a fighter?)”.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The pressure that drone commanders face to make the best decisions is high because they receive punishments for making errors like any ground soldier in the military. The fact is mistakes do happen but they would occur whether or not the military uses drones or other normally manned personnel such as planes; drones simply drive down the level of risk.

**Argument: Stability**

Other countries’ governments that are less stable often have insurgencies against their leadership. By carrying out strikes, drones reduce the level of impact insurgents have on instable countries’ citizens’ lives. The strikes are supported by these governments and their leadership. Yemen’s president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, was in full support of the America’s drones’ actions according to a statement in 2012. “The United States ‘helped with their drones because the Yemeni Air Force cannot carry out missions at night,’ he said. ‘The electronic brain’s precision is unmatched by the human brain’”.[[37]](#footnote-37) The Yemeni government valued the capability to be precise during low-light situations that drones contain. This is not an isolated incident and many other parts of the world hold this same position. As further evidence, in a cable released by WikiLeaks, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson wrote about U.S. operations “various U.S. operations in the country’s northern and tribal regions were ‘almost certainly [conducted] with the personal consent of… General Kayani [Chief of Army Staff]’”.[[38]](#footnote-38) These governments depend on and are in need of drone strikes in order to keep their government steady. Furthermore, Pakistan prone to having more drones strikes than other countries, has seen a decrease in suicide attacks in a span of 3 years. In 2009, there were 81 suicide attacks, 49 attacks in 2010, and 41 attacks in 2011. The drop from 81 to 49 suicide attacks in Pakistan coincided with 118 drone strikes that were carried out. To put it simply, an increased amount of drones decreased the amount of suicide attacks by 39.5% in the span of a year, making Pakistan safer and its government more stable.[[39]](#footnote-39) These numbers are important because they provide measurable outcomes that suggest that drone use (1) keeps Pakistan’s citizens safer (2) keeps foreigners traveling to Pakistan safer, decreasing tensions between two governments, and (3) keeps the government more efficient and stable.

In Yemen, the terrorist group called al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) frequently challenged the government and carried out terrorist attacks in the United States. In 2011, drones aided in the death of the terrorist leader, Anwar al Awlaki, who was proven to be the mastermind behind the unsuccessful Christmas bomber plot which could have killed as many as 280 people aboard a Detroit passenger jet.[[40]](#footnote-40) This plot, if carried out successfully, would have comprised the security of our country, possibly leading to chaos and hence instability in our government. Moreover, a domestic terrorist attack in the United States inflicting civilians would cause fear, hatred of foreigners, and thus violence and unreasonable and fear-driven movements towards government policies.[[41]](#footnote-41) Furthermore, in 2012, drones supported the Yemeni government against AQAP, which had gained control over a number of southern Yemeni cities. The Yemeni government also takes full responsibility for the strikes that it approves U.S. execution of only if they serve Yemeni interests.[[42]](#footnote-42) Because maintaining democratic functioning governments is part of America’s interests, drones used with the support of other countries’ governments prevent insurgents from gaining power, thereby helping make the world a more stable, more humane, and safer place.

***Counterargument: Isolation***

The main counterargument against drone usage aid to foreign governments promotes the idea that America should be isolated from the horrors of war, therefore making the United States less humane and less cautious. The argument is that America is not only physically removed from periods of conflict, but psychologically as well, which creates fewer limitations and discourages commanders from cautiously acting simply because they can take actions with no visible consequences. These actions can lead to extended conflicts and constant warfare.[[43]](#footnote-43) These commanders are behind a monitor and are, in a way, detached from the situation at hand, only seeing live images on a screen and having the capability to impact others’ lives literally in their hands. Some officials in the government, such as Representative Lynn Woosley (D-CA), have made this concern clear, stating, “It's such a trend to dehumanize warfare. It's machines and computers doing the job… This is not video games, these are real people and it's real death”.[[44]](#footnote-44)

What lawmakers who share the same view as Woosley neglect is that like guns, drones are weapons. A drone being controlled by a drone pilot or commander is just as comparable to a soldier controlling a firearm or a pilot controlling an aircraft or a tank. The humans behind the machines are in control and are the only ones that have power of these machines. Essentially, unless these drones are acting on their own using artificial intelligence and taking actions based on inputs from their environment, humans are still doing the job. Furthermore, the commanders aren’t exempt from punishments and recognize the power they wield. A former drone commander T. Mark McCurley wrote, “Drone operators are licensed pilots. We are not terminators rampaging across the countryside like war’s a video game. We are not heartless; we are not brainless. And we do not like to make mistakes”.[[45]](#footnote-45) In addition he cited that in his 11 years of flying drones and commanding a drone squadron, he witnessed one illegal and unjust shot attempt, which he prevented.[[46]](#footnote-46) While being more emotionally disconnected from horrors of the war may be a downside to the use of drones, drone commanders are aware of their separation and do the best job they can to reduce the killings of innocents.

**Argument: Reducing Costs**

Everything that involves the military adds to its spending. The amount of money the United States spends on military is large and has remained the highest in the world for a long time, making up 36% of the world’s share in 2015, at $596 billion.[[47]](#footnote-47) Drones are on the newer side of technology and while they may appear to be fairly expensive to manufacture, they are not. According to a 2016 fiscal budget report, $2.9 billion was allotted for development, research, and procurement presumably including missiles, bombs and other weapons. There is also a cost per flight hour that must be accounted for, which is $2500-$3500 hourly for most drones. This only totals up to approximately 0.49% of the budget of the Department of Defense budget. In comparison, military manned operations can range from 6 to 42 times more costly than droned operations ranging from $17,000-$169,000 an hour for flight.[[48]](#footnote-48) These costs would be better spent on internal national priorities to serve the public and other underfunded initiatives. Some of these include education, healthcare, housing, food and agriculture, and energy & environment which would all help improve the United States for the future and insure stability, strength, influence, and respect which are in our interests. These funds could also be used to improve drone technology which could improve our effectiveness in terror prevention and global disasters that cause a decline the stability of the world.

***Counterargument: The Cost of War is Bankrupting***

The counterargument against the amount on money spent on drones is that the costs are too much and combined with the cost of war, is bankrupting. In the past decade, the number of drones has increased from around 200 to 7500, increasing the amount of money spent on drones by 1400 percent. As an inverse effect, the $500 million decrease in funds in the drone budget, would only decrease the amount of surveillance drones while increasing the amount of Predator drones used for attacks.[[49]](#footnote-49) This expanding program, and the overall military’s budget over the past decade has contributed to a budgetary increase of $295 billion since 2000.[[50]](#footnote-50) Those who oppose drone production entirely cite that all of the $2.9 billion spent could be better used to fund health related sectors of spending.[[51]](#footnote-51) The entire NIH’s (National Institutes of Health) National Cancer Institute budget is $4.78 billion which ranges from clinical research to long term research regarding understanding cancer.[[52]](#footnote-52) According to the CDC, cancer ranked #2 in the leading causes of death in the United States at 591,666 in 2014.[[53]](#footnote-53) This makes it appear as if military drones are just as important to the United States as a cure for cancer or other lethal diseases.

What this argument fails to consider is the amount of money being saved by not engaging in major ground conflicts or air wars. Those who are primarily being targeted by the drone strikes have the goal of bankrupting the United State by prolonging conflict. Osama bin Laden, terrorist and leader of al Qaeda, said in a speech in 2004:

“We are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy… All that we have to do is to send two mujahedeen [jihadists] to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al Qaeda, [sic] in order to make generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses without their achieving anything of note other than some benefits for their private corporations.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

If our enemies want us to be actively engaged in combat with them to help improve their goals, there is not a reason for us to play into their hands. The New York Times estimated that al Qaeda spent $500 million to launch the 9/11 attacks, and in retaliation, the United States spent $3.3 trillion dollars, $7 million to each dollar they spent, totaling up to about 1/5 of the 2011 national debt.[[55]](#footnote-55) In summary, America would be more monetarily efficient in addressing these non-conventional threats with drones that in the past have required great intervention and covert operations while simultaneously increasing efforts on other issues.

**Conclusion**

The question that this essay intended to answer was along the lines of whether America’s use of military drones is good for the United States’ interests. In summary, this discussion began with refuting three of the strongest counterarguments against the use of drones in America foreign policy, addressed as Intelligence Gathering, Execution of Tasks, and The Issue of Casualties. After these were refuted, the main arguments entitled Adaptability, Stability, and Reducing Costs, supported the thesis that drones play a grand role in preserving America’s core and were introduced along with counterarguments that were later refuted as well. The opportunities the use of drones provides America result in beneficial outcomes that are both political and economic. The United States can strengthen relations with allies and other countries, thereby improving global stability and reduce military spending while directing it to other sectors. As the world and its issues become more complicated, the ways that the U.S. must address them should change accordingly. Otherwise, risks arise of the U.S. falling behind and losing the influence to preserve its ideals, interests, and values. Drones allow the United States to be impactful in promoting a more stable global agenda by using generally acceptable methods, while keeping its citizens focused more on developing an internal domestic agenda versus being overwhelmed with the war on terror and state sponsored crimes against humanity.

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