

DISARMAMENT 2 SYNOPSIS

TOPIC 1: Creating international rules for the safe use of armed drones

Background

An armed drone is an unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) which usually carries missiles and which doesn't have any human pilot present onboard. The first idea to use drones as military equipment appeared in 1971 and two years later, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) built two prototypes. These were used by Israel in Yom Kippur War – their drones were flying over the Egyptian base which led the Egyptians into firing its whole arsenal of anti-aircraft missiles. The mission was accomplished without any injuries on the Israeli pilots. Since then, Israel has been working on new types of drones which could be used for surveillance, electronic warfare and as decoys.

In the 1980s Israel developed its first drone which carried six RPG-7 rounds which was then used in the Iran-Iraq war. This was the first time an armed aerial vehicle was used in war. Shortly after that, the U.S. realized the potential of such weapons and started to use them in wars as well. This decision resulted into the first death caused by an armed UAV which took place in Kandahar on October 7 2001.

The unmanned aspect of this weapon is what raises many moral concerns. First of all, the machines have varying level of autonomy, which means that they can attack, under certain circumstances, anytime anywhere without a direct approval from the drone operator. They can as well be hacked. Also, many psychologists say, that killing people via remote-controlled machine could lead to depersonalizing the decision to attack. Second of all, some pilots have been found suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) – thanks to high-definition camera which sends real-time video of the surveilled area, the pilots usually see the target before, during and after the attack. The pilots get to know the enemies' daily routine, their wives and children, they can also see the enemy right after the attack – usually suffering in pain and last but not least, the pilots can see reactions of people around the target. Family members gathering around, crying and panicking scared of another attack since the “double-tap” strike has become a trend while attacking via a drone.

Not only the operators suffer – people living in the area which is being monitored are living in constant fear of attack. They are suffering from deep psychological trauma caused by a constant buzzing sound of drones flying above of them. Kids are not allowed to play outside and usually don't even go to school – which leads to another problem world has to deal with, low literacy.

Since the first kill in 2001, there have been many other kills interposed by an armed drone. Some of these were intended, some were not. Among the not intended ones belong cases from all around the world – in 2009 48 civilians were killed by Israeli UAVs in the Gaza Strip (reports say including two small children), in 2009 the U.S. drones killed for each militant 10 civilians in Pakistan, and in 2013 U.S. UAVs killed the guests of a wedding in Yemen as they were considered members of

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terrorist group Al-Qaeda. According to Human Rights Watch, killing an unarmed person is a violation of international human rights law.

The use of armed drones has divided the U.S. A 2013 poll conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University asked, whether people “approve or disapprove of the U.S. Military using drones to carry out attacks on people and other targets deemed a threat to the U.S.”. 75% of voters approved, 13% disapproved. Another poll showed, that majority of Americans support targeted killing using drones. In 2015 a poll showed the division of the U.S. – those, who are supportive of the U.S. Military drone strikes were mostly men and Republicans, while all those less supportive were women, young people, minorities, Democrats and Independents.

The rest of the world, however, thinks differently. 39 out of 44 countries surveyed were against the U.S. drone strikes in countries like Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia; Venezuela and Jordan being the most anti-drone countries. Israel, on the other hand, was found to be the most pro-drone country with 65% of voters in favor and 27% against U.S. drone strikes.

UN Involvement

Using armed drones has raised many questions concerning moral and ethics, Christof Heyns, the UN Special Rapporteur, says, that “such mechanized systems, controlled by human from distance, can hardly do what police officers are supposed to do such as using the minimum force required by circumstances and assisting those who need help”¹.

During the 71st Session of the United Nations, the Delegate of Netherlands (Amb. Van der Kwast) stressed the need for a global norm deterring their use. A guest speaker from Columbia Law School, Mr. Moorehead proposed 4 measures which would help to increase transparency around the use of drones. Also, he pointed out that the Member States should be aware that current international norms are being pushed by States actively using drones and not through consensus.²

Although many dialogues concerning safe and legal way of using armed drones have been held, there are still no permanent or persistent rules that would govern the right to use drones.

Questions to consider

- 1) Is your country currently using any armed drones? Where? Why?

¹ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49148#.WDtdUNJ77IU>

²

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/update/the-drone-dialogues-new-challenges-for-states-on-armed-drones-use-and-proliferation/>

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- 2) Is your country among those who are more or less supportive of drone strikes?
- 3) Has any inhabitant of your country been killed by an armed drone? Sent by which country?
- 4) What would your country propose to be a part of a global agreement concerning the use of armed drones?

Sources and useful links

<http://internetofthingsagenda.techtarget.com/definition/drone>

<http://www.howstuffworks.com/reaper1.htm>

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