DRONES

Drones are promoted as a precise tool that save the lives of U.S. soldiers - that is not true. Drone strikes are authorized with faulty data widely discredited in the intelligence community, and they damage both our short and long-term security because they destroy reliable data in the field, and indiscriminately kill large numbers of civilians, fostering ill-will towards U.S. forces.

1. Drone Strikes Depend on Unreliable Intelligence and Hurt Intelligence Gathering

Strikes are authorized using Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), tracking metadata from cellphones and laptops. But, according to a whistleblower, they could spend months tracking a cellphone of a suspect, only to find out the cellphone belongs to his mother. And, when strikes do occur, there is no one on the ground to collect notes, laptops, or other reliable information – costing us good intelligence, and good will, in the area.

2. Identification of Targets is Vague and Routinely Catches Civilians in Our Crosshairs

Drone strikes are authorized against targets engaged in “suspicious behavior”, such as anyone associating with a “suspected militant” or a military-age man carrying a weapon. Any behavior the U.S. deems suspicious can justify a signature strike. Double tap strikes are a second strike occurring soon after a signature strike, in the same place. They target anyone who has rushed to the scene of the strike - to search for survivors, assist the injured, understand what has happened, sympathizers. As a matter of policy, any unintended deaths caused by drone strikes are assumed to be enemy combatants and are not reported as civilian deaths. Which is why, while the U.S. officially reports only 64-116 civilian deaths by drone strikes, organizations including the Long War Journal, the New America Foundation, and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (among others) estimate that at least 200 and as many as 1,000 civilians have been killed by American drone strikes in nations where the U.S. is not at war since Obama took office.

3. 90% of Drone Strike Victims are Civilians, and Terrorist Organizations Benefit from Strikes

Over one five month period of drone strikes in Afghanistan, nearly 90% of the people killed were not the intended targets. Awad Ahmed Mohsen from Majallah, a southern village hit by a drone strike that killed dozens in 2009, told Reuters that America had brought hatred with its drones. Asked if more people joined al Qaeda in the wake of attacks that killed civilians, Mohsen said: “Definitely. And even those who don’t join, now sympathize with al Qaeda because of these strikes, these violations. Any American they see, they exact revenge, even if it’s a civilian.”

4. Drone Pilots Experience Severe PTSD

New research shows that drone pilots are as likely as deployed personnel to experience PTSD. A remotely piloted aircraft pilot “could be sitting down to a meal with his or her family less than two hours after killing Islamic State or Taliban fighters on the other side of the world,” Senator McCaskill wrote in a letter to the U.S. Air Force. “They could be playing with their children shortly after witnessing up close and in graphic detail the effects of a 500-pound bomb or Hellfire missile on a soft target.”