

Drone Strikes

In recent years, the United States has employed drone strikes against targets in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.¹¹ Individuals targeted by drone strikes are deemed to be terrorist threats and drone strikes have been put forth by the US government as a relatively efficient, cost-effective, and safe way to combat terrorism abroad.¹² However, drone strikes are also controversial for many reasons.

Supporters of drone strikes highlight the benefits of unmanned aircraft for US military personnel. The American soldiers employed by drone strikes are not deployed abroad while they work on these missions. Families can be spared excessive periods of separation and the constant fear of their family member being maimed or killed in active combat. Supporters also cite the benefits for people in the targeted areas who, while still in danger, are plausibly in less danger than they would be in a conventional war.

Others argue that because drone strikes distance soldiers geographically from their attacks, they oversimplify conflicts and provide too wide a psychological gap between the means and consequences of warfare. This could make military personnel too cavalier about taking life, because they do not have to see the consequences of their actions in person. It could also lead to mental health issues for drone pilots who conduct lethal attacks and witness the results on a screen, then leave the room to face an environment far removed from their actions.¹³ Meanwhile, civilians in areas targeted by drone strikes face the intense psychological trauma of the unpredictable possibility of bodily and property harm to themselves and their families and friends.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the most significant consequences of removing soldiers from conflict zones by employing drone strikes?
2. Is it morally better, worse, or the same to engage in violence remotely rather than in person? Why?
3. How should the possible consequences for an American soldier responsible for a drone strike be weighed against the possible consequences for non-Americans?

¹¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/everything-we-know-so-far-about-drone-strikes> and https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/drone-strike-statistics-answer-few-questions-and-raise-many.html?_r=0

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/21/opinion/sunday/drone-warfare-precise-effective-imperfect.html>

¹³ <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-untold-casualties-of-the-drone-war-20160218>

