



Recently, we discussed the pro side of the Nationals Public Forum topic,

Resolved: The benefits of American drone strikes against foreign targets outweigh the harms,

Those arguments generally revolved around a single premise: Drones are the best available means for combatting terrorism because alternatives all have significant downsides. As the con, you will need to win that drones are worse than many alternatives due to unique disadvantages that only apply to them. Today, we're going to outline the arguments against the use of drones against foreign targets and explain why the impacts outweigh a marginal risk of increased terrorism or greater U.S. entanglement.

The first, perhaps most basic, argument is that **drones are counterproductive in fighting terrorism because they aid terrorist recruitment.** Charlie Savage argues,

Savage, 2013 ["Drone Strikes Turn Allies Into Enemies, Yemeni Says," Charlie, Contributor at New York Times, April 23.]

WASHINGTON — **A Yemeni man** who studied at an American high school **told Congress** on Tuesday **that a drone strike on his village** in Yemen last week **terrified his neighbors, turning them against the United States in a way that terrorist propaganda had failed to do.** The man, Farea al-Muslimi, said **his friends** and neighbors **used to know of the United States primarily through "my stories of the wonderful experiences I had"** here. "Now, however, **when they think of America, they think of the fear they feel at the drones** over their heads. **What the violent militants had failed to achieve, one drone strike accomplished in an instant.**" **A man killed** in the strike **was well known locally**, Mr. Muslimi also asserted, **and could easily have been arrested by Yemeni forces.** His testimony, before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, was part of a rare public hearing on the use of drones. **The Obama administration did not send anyone to testify at the hearing,** convened by Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois. But witnesses included legal specialists, a retired Air Force colonel who formerly worked with drones, and retired Gen. James E. Cartwright, the former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This evidence makes two of the basic arguments:

1. Drone strikes are perceived as usurping local authority, which makes locals resentful. A better alternative would be to partner with local governments for counter-terrorism missions. This is an alternative to drone strikes that you can advocate.
2. Drone strikes **are comparatively more effective** at recruiting terrorists who want revenge on the U.S. than other forms of propaganda. You can use this evidence to answer the pro's "Anti-Americanism inevitable" arguments.

Micah Zenko continues,

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

Some former and current **U.S. officials maintain** that **the United States relies too much on drone strikes at the expense of longer-term strategies to prevent conditions that foster international terrorism.**²² At best, **targeted killings appear to be a stalemate.** By some accounts, however, **drone strikes may be indirectly increasing the number of militants.** In Yemen, for example, **in 2010 the Obama**



administration described al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as encompassing “several hundred al-Qaeda members”; two years later, it increased to “more than a thousand” members.” By July 2012, AQAP had “a few thousand members.”²³ **The evidence that U.S. drone strikes create “blowback” — whereby killing suspected militants or civilians leads to the marked radicalization of local populations that join or sympathize with al-Qaeda or affiliated organizations—varies widely** within the affected states, and it is difficult to determine motivations for joining domestic insurgencies and groups dedicated primarily to international terrorism like AQAP, which has made several attempts to attack the United States. Nevertheless, **there appears to be a strong correlation in Yemen between increased targeted killings since December 2009 and heightened anger toward the United States and sympathy with or allegiance to AQAP.**²⁴

Zenko’s argument is a good card for later speeches because it gives data that, even controlling for other factors, increased drone strikes appear to account for the greatest increase in terrorist recruitment. That is, other factors like poverty have remained relatively constant while drone strikes have been increasing. In this time, terrorism has been increasing as well. The potential conclusion is that drone strikes are responsible for the increase in terrorism. In addition, even if you don’t win that drone strikes make terrorism worse, this evidence indicates that at best, the effects cancel out. You can extend this evidence as defense if you decide not to go for the turn.

Mothana continues:

Mothana, 2012 [“More Diplomacy, Fewer Drones,” Ibrahim, activist, is a co-founder of the Watan Party and Yemen Enlightenment Debate, NY Times.] **Drone-striking militants to eradicate terrorism is like machine-gunning mosquitoes to cure malaria. Rather than tackling the real drivers of extremism, drone strikes create an ideal environment for Al Qaeda to grow and propagate. Winning the hearts and minds of people is key in such unconventional warfare, yet the U.S. alienates Yemeni civilians, many of whom have lost relatives or friends in drone strikes. Strikes in areas where government barely exists and no services are provided to citizens simply spells disaster. There is also devastating damage to an already fragile economy.** Forty percent of Yemen's 23 million people live on less than \$2 a day and 10 million people don't have enough food to eat. **Unemployed youth living in desperate economic conditions in conflict areas often join militants. They have reached a point where seeking death becomes easier than struggling for life. There could be short-term military gains from killing militant leaders in these strikes, but they are minuscule** compared with the long-term damage caused by drones. The notion of **targeting Al Qaeda’s leaders** to demolish its organizational structure **has been proven ineffective; new leaders spontaneously emerge** in furious retaliation to the attacks. **This is why Al Qaeda in Yemen today is much stronger than it was** a few years ago. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had just a few hundred members in 2009, and controlled no territory. Today it has, along with Ansar al-Sharia, at least a thousand members and substantial operational spaces in Abyan and Shabwa, in addition to a presence in Mareb, Rada, Hadramout and other regions of Yemen. **Overlooking the real drivers of extremism and focusing solely on tackling security symptoms with brutal force is as ineffective as curing blood cancer with invasive surgery: not only ineffective but also counterproductive. The repercussions of drone attacks in Yemen could spill across borders, inspiring homegrown terrorism in other countries. Only a long-term approach based on building relations with local communities, dealing with the economic and social drivers of extremism, and cooperating with tribes and Yemen’s army will eradicate the threat of Al Qaeda. The drone program is by nature a Sisyphean struggle, no matter how many terrorists are eliminated. In Yemen, every time a drone kills civilians, young Yemenis like me who have always admired America start to see it as part of the problem,** not the solution.



Mothana adds a few important points, in addition to reiterating Zenko:

1. **Economics.** The pro will likely argue that young people join terrorist groups because they are poor, not because of drone strikes. Mothana argues that poverty in rural areas is made worse by drone strikes. This is important because drones are used primarily in regions that receive little government assistance, so-called “lawless areas.” Drone strikes are particularly devastating there because government assistance to rebuild is nonexistent and locals are too poor to do the job themselves. This causes an unending cycle of poverty that makes extremism an attractive option. **Essentially, poverty may be the root cause of extremism but, in many cases, drones are the root cause of poverty.**
2. **Trade-off.** He also argues that all resources, time, energy, and focus directed towards drones directly trade off with efforts that address the real causes of terrorism. You can use this evidence to answer the pro argument that drones are only a small part of a larger strategy against terror which will be successful. This evidence indicates that **drones actually make other anti-terrorism efforts less successful.**
3. **Antiquated strategy.** Finally, Mothana argues that attempts to assassinate terrorist group leaders are based on an old and ultimately failed strategy. In fact, he argues, now that militant groups are more dispersed, getting rid of a leader is a meaningless gesture because homegrown terrorists and other leaders will rise quickly to take their places.

Shachtman continues:

Shachtman, 2010 [“Washington Finally Feeling Drone War Backlash,” Noah, contributing editor at Wired magazine, a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, May 10.]

Back in early 2009, **when** guys like David **Kilcullen and** Andrew **Exum warned that the American drone war** in Pakistan **could create more terrorists than they kill, they were pilloried by the national security establishment** for their views. **Since the failed Times Square bombing — a terror attack allegedly in response to the drone strikes — Kilcullen and Exum’s take is quickly becoming conventional wisdom in Washington.** “Have the stepped-up attacks in Pakistan — notably the Predator drone strikes — actually made Americans less safe?” asks David Sanger in the New York Times. “Are they inspiring more attacks on America than they prevent?” **“If you go into Pakistan and talk to college kids, which is what we did, these drone attacks are feeding this narrative: this is what we [Americans] are aiming to do. We’re aiming to kill Muslims,” Leslie Stahl said today** on MSNBC’s Morning Joe. **“Let’s say China was launching drone attacks on Idaho, we would be pretty angry too. We are launching attacking against a people were not at war with, officially,” Joe Scarborough responded. “I would rather us go after the terrorists — individual terrorists — drag ‘em out, interrogate ‘em, get information — instead of dropping bombs that kill four year-old little girls.** That dismember grandmoms that happen to be in the family compound. That seems immoral.” The decision to dramatically escalate the drone war was done behind closed doors, with no public debate about whether the strikes were the best way to smash the jihadist networks based in Pakistan’s tribal wildlands. Perhaps now, we’ll have that discussion. **By the way, there was another reported drone strike in Pakistan over the weekend. 10 people were killed.**

This evidence provides one final piece of context: drones are used often without an official declaration of war. It’s a useful rhetorical strategy to ask your audience the same question Joe Scarborough does in the above evidence: what would we do if China started using drones on U.S. soil without a declaration of war? This puts the drone war into context and highlights the arguable absurdity of such a strategy. In addition, we’ll address this further down, but the potential for civilian casualties is a huge magnifier for



this argument. If you win that there will be civilian casualties (which the pro will likely refer to as “collateral damage”) then you will have a greater chance of winning this argument.

As a potential tie-breaker, Jeffrey argues:

Jeffrey, 2012 [“The View From the Wreckage,” James, a journalist, served with the British army for nine years, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo, NY Times, September 26.]

No matter how advanced military technology is, it has produced a bloody outcome throughout history. Imagine living each day knowing bombs and missiles could appear out of nowhere. Increasing numbers of Afghans, Yemenis and Somalis live like this. But we don’t think about them, or if we do, we justify their inconvenience or worse for the sake of our national security. It’s an utterly myopic attitude to adopt. During a recent trip through the United States, I passed through a state border checkpoint and had the trunk of my car searched. It was an unpleasant experience. I drove away rattled and appalled at myself, remembering how in Iraq we conducted daily vehicle checkpoints, thinking little of them or those we stopped. **America needs to readdress its approach to national security. Innocent people are dying as a result of a self-interested point of view that’s simply not working, undermining the very thing it’s trying to achieve. Each al Qaeda leader taken out will be replaced, but you can’t replace the loss of sympathetic public opinion or reputation, which in turn spurs on those who would harm America, enabling them to recruit and sustain themselves.** It’s sad witnessing how far the United States has strayed from the vision of President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural speech and President Obama’s promise of positive and reconciliatory change. We should be ashamed of what has been visited on Iraq and Afghanistan. I wonder what else will be added to that collective shame in the name of hallowed national security.

This evidence makes an important distinction: killed leaders can be replaced by other militants who sympathize with their cause but it’s impossible to change the mind of someone who has been radicalized by the death of a friend or relative that can never be replaced. You can use this evidence to make a weighing argument against the pro’s terrorism claims –civilian casualties are permanent whereas disruption to militant groups is not. If you make a big deal of this in the rebuttals, you can sway some judges simply because it’s an excellent comparative claim.

If you’re looking to diversify your backlash impacts, you can read the following Zenko card:

Zenko, 2013 [“Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies,” Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

In countries where drone strikes have occurred, some State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials strongly believe that the broadly unpopular attacks overshadow and diminish the effectiveness of civilian assistance programs. One former senior military official closely involved in U.S. targeted killings **argued that “drone strikes are just a signal of arrogance that will boomerang against America,” while former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan Cameron Munter explained, “The problem is the political fallout. . . . Do you want to win a few battles and lose the war?”**²⁹ **In Pakistan, the continuation of drone strikes has exposed fault lines between the army and the democratically elected parliament,** which in April 2012 demanded “an immediate cessation of drone attacks inside the territorial borders of Pakistan.”³⁰ However, the central governments of Yemen and Somalia (as represented by the Transitional Federal Government) have provided either public or private consent for U.S. drone strikes within their territories.

In case you’d prefer to have an external impact to your backlash argument, you can read this card and say that drone backlash guts foreign aid effectiveness. You can then read a number of cards about why



aid programs in drone territories are good. We didn't go that in-depth on that research because that could be an article onto itself but it's an area that may be worth exploring. That way, even if the terrorism debate is becoming a wash, you can read a bunch of aid good/development good arguments and leverage those as independent harms of drones.

Another significant disadvantage of drone strikes is **the potential for civilian casualties, which are both immoral and counter-productive**. Sharkey explains:

Sharkey, 2012 [Drone race will ultimately lead to a sanitised factory of slaughter," Noel, professor of artificial intelligence and robots at the University of Sheffield, The Guardian, August 3.]

The CIA has killed more than 200 children in drone strikes outside of legitimate war zones since 2004, it is alleged. In Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia an estimated total of between 451 and 1,035 civilians were killed in at least 373 strikes according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the most accurate source of "kill statistics". Who in their right mind would give a powerful unmanned air force to a covert organisation with such a track record for unaccountable and illegal killing? The number of strikes in Pakistan has dramatically increased from 52 under George W Bush during his five years of conflict to 282 during Obama's three and a half-year watch. **Obama is establishing a dangerous precedent that is, at best, legally questionable in a world where more than 50 countries are acquiring the technology.**

Sharkey's claim is basic: drones kill many innocent civilians. He also makes a source quality claim which can be useful in evidence comparison. While many pro authors will indict local reports, which are the source of much data about classified strikes, Sharkey argues that journalistic groups compile data in a non-partisan and fact-checked way and should be trusted with their conclusion that drone strikes kill civilians.

Zenko continues:

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

Whereas previously President George W. **Bush** had only permitted the targeted killing of specific individuals, in 2008 he **authorized** the practice of **so-called signature drone strikes against suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Pakistan. Also termed "crowd killing" or terrorist attack disruption strikes** by CIA officials, **signature strikes target anonymous suspected militants "that bear the characteristics of Qaeda or Taliban leaders on the run."**³¹ President **Obama** **extended and expanded this practice** into Yemen, **which "in effect counts all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants . . . unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent."**³² Human rights advocates, international legal experts, and current and former U.S. **officials dispute whether this post hoc methodology meets the principle of distinction for the use of lethal force. In addition to targeting individuals on "kill lists" vetted by an opaque interagency process and nearby military-age males, U.S. drone strikes have also killed innocent civilians. In a few instances, civilians were knowingly killed when a senior member of al-Qaeda was the intended target,** although the vast majority of collateral deaths were unintentional. **The U.S. military has a collateral damage estimate methodology— known as the "bug splat"—which the CIA also employs, according to former senior intelligence officials. Despite what Air Force and intelligence officials describe as rigorous methodology, various U.S. government estimates of cumulative civilian casualties range from zero to sixty.**³³ It is unclear if JSOC maintains a similar or different method for compiling civilian casualties,



but according to a Pentagon spokesperson, "We're very confident that the number is very low."³⁴ Estimates of civilian casualties from drone strikes by research organizations are presented in Table 1. **These estimates—based on publicly available news reports—are between two and ten times higher than those provided by U.S. government officials, and are further complicated by the fact that some groups targeted by drones purposefully operate out of civilian facilities in an effort to avoid being killed; by the lack of reliable direct access for journalists due to threats from governments or nonstate actors; and by the Islamic practice of washing, wrapping, and burying an individual on the date of death.**

Zenko reiterates Sharkey's point that, for a variety of reasons, the actual civilian death toll from drones could be much higher than official government estimates. He also adds an interesting wrinkle: the addition of **signature strikes**. We discussed these a bit in the pro analysis, but a signature strike basically allows the U.S. government to target an individual because they display certain characteristics or behaviors without making a positive identification that they are a known terrorist. In this case, the chance of civilian casualties is high because the government is only "reasonably certain" that the target is a threat. Their guilt or innocence can only be truly investigated after they are dead, when it's much more difficult and far less useful to make that determination.

Allowing signature strikes dramatically expands the scope of the administration's jurisdiction on drone issues and blurs the lines of international and domestic law on these questions. The ensuing confusion ushers in a whole host of complications resulting from the **lack of oversight and norms** governing drone use. In fact, many con authors argue that **this ambiguity is a reason unto itself why drone use is dangerous**. Friersdorf explains:

Friersdorf, 2013 [In a Secret Drone War, Immoral Kill Deals Will Always Tempt Us," Conor, Staff Writer at The Atlantic, April 9.]

Put another way, **the drone program** in Pakistan **succumbed right from the beginning to a temptation critics warned about. Killing wasn't restricted to targets that posed an imminent threat** to the United States; **rather, the CIA killed people who wouldn't have even been targets but for the fact that the ruling regime in another country wanted them dead, a criterion that poses problems** **moral and strategic.** **What better way to invite blowback than killing,** on behalf of Pakistan's rulers, **people who the United States judged to be no threat to the American homeland?** Did the CIA make similar arrangements in other countries? Has this sort of quid pro quo continued into the Obama Administration, with Pakistan putting targets on a kill list in return for continuing to tolerate American drone strikes? * **Congress ought to demand answers** to those questions. **Congress should also assert its authority to ensure that going forward, the CIA is forbidden from killing people who pose no direct threat to America. So long as the executive branch is permitted to do what it will in secret, there will be an incentive for Obama and his successors to kill on behalf of foreign regimes so that they give us permission to kill whoever we want. Even if the Obama Administration has totally avoided that temptation, which I doubt, it would still be irresponsible of them to fight for executive-branch autonomy, knowing that their predecessors violated the standards they've articulated** for what constitutes a just drone strike, and that one of their successors, whether four or eight or 16 years from now, is likely to do the same. **In a secret drone war, immoral kill deals will always tempt us.**

Friersdorf makes a very straightforward argument: if no one is overseeing drone strikes, then there is no incentive for the administration to use them responsibly. In fact, there may be a direct incentive to make deals with nations where we want to conduct drone strikes in exchange for tacit permission to



conduct military actions on their land. Friersdorf cautions that those deals may include assassinating individuals who pose no threat to the U.S.

He also makes the additional point, which you should highlight in a debate, that even if the Obama administration hasn't done any of this, **it's the precedent that matters**. If the rules remain poorly defined, future leaders who may not be as concerned with ethics may abuse the lack of clarity and engage in truly immoral behavior. This is a particularly compelling argument because, even if the pro wins that abuses aren't happening now, you can argue that ambivalence about the rules now can translate into war crimes in the future. It's a perception-based argument.

This has a number of impacts. Zenko explains,

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

The problem with maintaining that drone strikes are covert is that both the American and international publics often misunderstand how drones are used. And in affected states, citizens often blame the United States for collateral damage that could have been caused by the host states' own weapon systems. According to a recent report from Yemen: It's extremely difficult to figure out who is responsible for any given strike. . . . It could be a manned plane from the Yemeni Air Force or the U.S. military. Or it could be an unmanned drone flown by the U.S. military or the CIA. . . . But no matter who launches a particular strike, Yemenis are likely to blame it on the Americans. What's more, we found that many more civilians are being killed than officials acknowledge.³⁷

Without clear rules and norms (not to mention oversight, which would require drone strikes to be a bit less covert), drones may be blamed for strikes for which they aren't responsible. That can cause undeserved resentment against the U.S.

Another impact is entanglements. Zenko explains:

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

From a strategic perspective, however, it remains unclear if drone strikes are successful or sustainable. There is a clear disconnect between whom the Obama administration claims to target with drones and who has actually been killed. According to U.S. officials, individuals targeted by drones are limited to "high-level al-Qaeda leaders who are planning attacks"; "individuals who are a threat to the United States"; individuals involved in "some sort of operational plot against the United States"; and "specific senior operational leaders of al-Qaeda and associated forces."²⁰ **Of the estimated three thousand people killed by drones, however, the vast majority were neither al-Qaeda nor Taliban leaders. Instead, most were low-level, anonymous suspected militants who were predominantly engaged in insurgent or terrorist operations against their governments,** rather than in active international terrorist plots.²¹ **By targeting individuals who are not terrorist leaders and who do not pose a direct threat to the United States or its allies—but are predominantly fighting insurgent operations—the United States risks being dragged further into internal armed struggles, because it is explicitly intervening on behalf of the government.**



Zenko here expands on the problem Friersdorf points out, arguing that targeting foreign militants who pose no direct threat to the U.S. risks our military becoming involved in foreign conflicts. There are a number of authors who discuss why this is a bad idea (see our topic analysis for the LD foreign intervention topic for more evidence), but most generally, it overextends our military and tests alliances for very little gain. You can diversify your impacts here again by reading some overstretch or entanglements cards. Impact diversity will help distinguish your offense from the pro's mainly terrorism-based offense.

Another possible issue with drones is the fear that **drone use will develop into a kind of drone industrial complex**. Sharkey explains:

Sharkey, 2012 [Drone race will ultimately lead to a sanitised factory of slaughter," Noel, professor of artificial intelligence and robots at the University of Sheffield, The Guardian, August 3.]

This is big business with billions of dollars at stake. Israeli companies are pursuing new drone markets in Asia and Latin America. The US has restricted drone sales to its allies but now, with defence budgets shrinking, companies such as Northrop Grumman and General **Atomics are lobbying their government to loosen export restrictions and open foreign markets** in South America and the Middle East. **Other countries such as India and Pakistan are also hungry for the technology**. Russia has unveiled its MiG Skat combat drone with on-board cruise missiles for strikes on air defences as well as ground and naval targets, while Iran demonstrated an armed rocket launched drone, the Karrar, in 2010. **But it is China that is showing the greatest commercial potential for selling armed drones. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission noted with concern that China "has deployed several types of unmanned aerial vehicles for both reconnaissance and combat"**. More worryingly, **the Washington Post quotes Zhang Qiaoliang from the Chengdu Aircraft Design and Research Institute as saying, "the United States doesn't export many attack drones, so we're taking advantage of that hole in the market". Given the 10-year spate of CIA drone strikes, what can be said when other countries use drone strikes against perceived threats in other states?**

If something is perceived as effective or at least advantageous, then naturally others will want it. If the pro wins their arguments about why drones are good, they will have to at least concede this point. Other countries with drones, however, create a whole host of issues. An international economy cropping up around drones is even more problematic, because their spread is difficult to regulate. This, combined with the previous argument about weak norms, paves the way for widespread, unregulated use of drones resulting in conflict. Zenko elaborates on the possibility of drone proliferation, explaining:

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

The second major risk is that of proliferation. Over the next decade, **the U.S. near-monopoly on drone strikes will erode as more countries develop and hone this capability**. **The advantages and effectiveness of drones in attacking hard-to-reach and time-sensitive targets are compelling many countries to indigenously develop or explore purchasing unmanned aerial systems. In this uncharted territory, U.S. policy provides a powerful precedent** for other states and nonstate actors that will increasingly deploy drones with potentially dangerous ramifications. **Reforming its practices could allow the United States to regain moral authority in dealings with other states and credibly engage with the international community to shape norms for responsible drone use**.



Additionally, Cavallaro and Knuckey argue that ramifications on international law are not limited to drones:

Cavallaro and Knuckey, 2012 [“What the U.S. Won’t Discuss,” James, Stanford Law School and Sarah, New York University School of Law, NY Times, September 26.]

Fourth, U.S. practices undermine respect for the rule of law and international legal protections, and may set dangerous precedents for other governments. Do we want a world in which governments are permitted to track down their enemies in any other nation, and target and kill them, with no real oversight or accountability? Even a brief thought experiment along those lines becomes very frightening, very quickly. What should be done? The U.S. should conduct a fundamental re-evaluation of current targeted killings practices, taking into account all available evidence, the concerns of all relevant stakeholders, and the short- and long-term costs and benefits. These stakeholders must include the Pakistani civilians directly affected by drones. Today, it is almost impossible to have an informed public debate about U.S. policies on drone warfare – primarily because of efforts by the government to shield its targeted killings program from democratic accountability. The U.S. should release Department of Justice memorandums outlining the legal basis for targeted killings, make public critical information about U.S. policies, ensure independent investigations into drone strike deaths (with prosecutions, as appropriate) and establish compensation programs for affected civilians.

The international legal implications, as discussed above, set a number of problematic precedents regarding use and execution of drone strikes. Those precedents could affect a number of other cases, including those that do not include drones, causing a ripple effect that loosens constraints on conflict and war across the board.

They also argue that the confidential nature of strikes means that true **deliberation** (or discussion) on this issue is impossible, or at least difficult. Keeping strikes covert means we can’t assess the ramifications of strikes for international law and often assume the worst. These assumptions can also become the building blocks for policies which ultimately exploit the ambiguity. For example, even if drones are being used responsibly, the secrecy that surrounds them may make other countries assume that they aren’t and proceed with their own irresponsible use.

A final offensive argument against drone use is explained by Sharkey:

Sharkey, 2012 [Drone race will ultimately lead to a sanitised factory of slaughter,” Noel, professor of artificial intelligence and robots at the University of Sheffield, The Guardian, August 3.]

And **this is just the beginning; current drones are like the Wright brothers' prototypes compared with what's coming next. And here is where the real danger resides: automated killing as the final step in the industrial revolution of war – a clean factory of slaughter with no physical blood on our hands and none of our own side killed. Using programmed robots with no humans directly in the loop has been high on the agenda** set by the US military roadmaps since 2004. And BAE systems has been developing an autonomous combat aircraft demonstrator, the Taranis, for the Ministry of Defence. **There are several good military reasons for removing direct human control. Currently drones are used with ease against low-tech communities in a permissive air space. More technologically sophisticated opponents would adopt counter strategies such as jamming satellite signals to render them useless or bring them down. A fully autonomous drone could still seek out its target without human intervention. Other reasons include to take out the pilot – reduced numbers of personnel required to fly them, reduced cost, and faster control** time: the 1.5 second delays caused by humans in the loop thousands of miles away means that a drone is powerless against a manned fighter. The speed of an unmanned craft is limited by its structure rather than by human G-force limitations. It can manoeuvre



faster and take sharp turns that would injure or kill a human pilot on board. The US has been testing the fully autonomous supersonic Phantom Ray and the X-47b will appear on US aircraft carriers in the Pacific by 2015. Meanwhile, the Chinese (Shenyang Aircraft Company) are working on the Anjian (Dark Sword) supersonic unmanned fighter aircraft, the first drone designed for aerial dogfights. Hypersonic drones are also on the wishlist. Darpa, the Pentagon's research arm, has the HTV-2 programme to develop armed drones that can reach anywhere on the planet within 60 minutes. In recent tests their Falcon drone flew at a maximum speed of 13,000 mph (20,921.5 kph), about 8.5 times faster than the Russian MiG-25. **The hypersonic fully autonomous drones of the future would create very powerful, effective, and flexible killing machines. The downside is that these machines will not be able to discriminate on their targets – there are no programmes capable of distinguishing civilian from combatant. We have records of civilian casualties, including numerous children, from drone strikes when there are humans watching on computer screens and deciding when to fire. Think how much worse it will be when drones deal death automatically.** Is this really a technology we want the secret intelligence services of the world to control?

Sharkey makes two arguments:

1. All the advantages of drone warfare make warfare too easy, resulting in endless war. His view is that giving the military a means of engaging in combat without suffering American casualties upsets the calculations that go into deciding if war is an appropriate solution. Without having to worry about the American public becoming upset over loss of life, conflict and killing become attractive options for dealing with even minor geopolitical issues. This shift can be potentially disastrous, resulting in global policing and U.S. assassinations of dissidents worldwide, as well as many civilian casualties.
2. He also argues that, if drone technology continues to advance, it's only a matter of time before humans are out of the equation entirely (to save money, to avoid counter-measures, etc.). He argues that this would be dangerous because it would fully mechanize warfare and negate the potential to abort a mission at any time or review its legality. All the advantages of drones (time, planning, precision) go out the window without a human operator to assess the appropriateness of the situation up until the very last moment.

Zenko explains why this situation is particularly dire:

Zenko, 2013 ["Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies," Micah, Douglas Dillon Fellow in the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Council Special Report No. 65, January.]

The current trajectory of U.S. drone strike policies is unsustainable. Without reform from within, **drones risk becoming an unregulated, unaccountable vehicle for states to deploy lethal force with impunity.** Consequently, **the United States should** more fully explain and reform aspects of its policies on drone strikes in nonbattlefield settings by ending the controversial practice of "signature strikes"; **limiting targeted killings to leaders of transnational terrorist organizations and individuals with direct involvement in past or ongoing plots** against the United States and its allies; and **clarifying rules of the road for drone strikes in nonbattlefield settings. Given that the United States is currently the only country—other than the United Kingdom in the traditional battlefield of Afghanistan and perhaps Israel—to use drones to attack the sovereign territory of another country, it has a unique opportunity and responsibility to engage relevant international actors and shape development of a normative framework for acceptable use of drones.**



The U.S. is in a position to set the precedent on drone use. Zenko magnifies Sharkey's argument, stating that failure to do so will result in the very scenarios Sharkey describes, if not by the U.S. than by other nations developing drone capabilities.

The pro may argue that, even if drone use presents problems, **drones deter aggression**. This is because would-be terrorists, fearful of dying in drone strikes or endangering their families and villages, will think twice about attacking the U.S. This argument can be used to prove that, while drones wouldn't need to be widely used in the long run, keeping that option open is critical to keeping foes at bay. The Richmond Times-Dispatch addresses this argument,

Richmond Times-Dispatch, 2011 ["Are drones a deterrence? Not really," November 13.]
Successive strikes have also been recorded in late September. This is in direct contradiction to the belief that the U.S. is involved in a deterrence-style campaign for a number of reasons. The largest flaw in deterrence theory is that it cannot deter an enemy who is not afraid to die. Of course no militant is going to sit in a field and wait for a Predator to fly over, but the threat of using one does not discourage militants from furthering their agenda. The U.S. operates closely with neighboring countries in tracking the Al Shabab threat and provides equipment and training to those countries' forces. Attacks by these proxies — Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia — have not discouraged Al Shabab from continuing its armed resistance.

The newspaper makes a point about the nature of terror groups – militants do not generally have the same calculus as other antagonists, such as nation-states. In joining a terror organization, an individual generally understands that dying is a distinct, if not a likely, possibility. Drones are not as intimidating as they otherwise would be because militants generally expect to die for the cause, whether in a drone strike or otherwise.

In sum, the con argument boils down to a number of objections based on backlash, civilian casualties, and concerns for the murky international law environment surrounding drones. In comparison with the pro argument, impact diversity will be an asset when you're con, to leverage against the argument that drones are key to fight terror.

That concludes our topic "con" analysis for Nationals. Be on the lookout for our LD analysis, coming soon! We wish you luck on the Nationals topic.

As always, let us know if you have questions in the comments or via e-mail. When you finish your Nationals cases, don't forget to send them for a free critique to lauren.sabino@ncpa.org! Good luck this season!