

DRONES VERSUS SECURITY OR DRONES FOR SECURITY?

*Anton MANDA, PhD candidate**

***Abstract:** Drones represent the most controversial subject when it comes to the dimension of national security. This technological development has implications politically as well as when it comes to practices pertaining to the field of national defense. Quite expectedly, the simple matter of putting a camera on an aircraft changed the way we perceive information gathering and actions during warfare, giving greater room for maneuver to persons using them. On the other hand, technology has allowed for the creation of remotely controlled devices. By combining these two characteristics, drones were created. They started representing a new instrument in warfare, humanitarian actions and even policy making. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly discuss the conceptual and practical implications of drone technology for national security, policy making and information gathering, with comments also in the field of intelligence which brings together all aspects in its practice.*

***Key Words:** security, national security, technology, drones, information, intelligence practices.*

The thought behind drones

Nowadays, drones are states' secret weapon. Be it for surveillance or delivering missions, drones have the comparative advantage of being Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, which means that they do not require humans to carry out missions.

Their first employment for the purpose of national security was however as a means to deliver explosives too hard to reach sites. It was only during the '60s, in the Vietnam war carried out by the United States¹, that drones were beginning to be used as a means to gather information, perform

* Lawyer at 'Law office Manda Anton', Bucharest, mobile 0722/404126, e-mail: avmandat@yahoo.com

¹ Thomas Mahnken, *Technology and the War in Vietnam 1963-1975*, Columbia University Press, USA, 2008, p. 113

damage assesment, unmask the enemy's available anti-aircraft devices, their position and type, in order to develop countermeasures. This period also marked the beginning of CIA usage of drones in order to gather intelligence, a role which has stuck with drones for most of the late 20th century. They were also used in the late '70s in the Yom Kippur War by the Israeli forces, alongside manned vehicles, in order to gather information that helped them adapt to the enemy's conditions, giving the Israeli forces a comparative advantage.²

We see a purely military application trend here and a military background for that matter. By shifting the purpose of the drone from purely military usage, to information gathering and reconnaissance, its implications have changed as well.

Drones for security

Security is a concept that has many meanings, nowadays being also extended to many areas that clasically are not associated with the security field. In the classical sense, security relates to the integrity of the borders of the state, its values, culture and people. Because in today's world security of the people has come to depend on much more than borders and land protection, the concept of security has extended to include factors that have become important for the sustainability of a state's welfare. This is a shift, from mere survival of the state as an entity and of its people, to its welfare and prosperity. Thus we have areas like energy security, cyber security, environmental security, social security, and so forth. Each actor of the international arena is free to decide what it prioritizes when it establishes its national security agenda, and this gives also freedom in choosing the type of instruments a state can use to pursue these objectives.

The international system is built upon the constant disbelief in the intentions of other states. This is due to the generally accepted idea that the international system is based on anarchy, without a higher authority than the state, but the international institutions like NATO, economic institutions or the UN provide for checks and balances in this field. Still there is the notion of security dilemma, according to which, if a state increases its security by

² David Rodman, "UAVs in the Service of the Israeli Air Force," Gloria Center, (September 7, 2012), <http://www.gloria-center.org/2010/09/rodman-2010-09-07/> accessed 26.05.2016

developing and expanding its military capabilities, it becomes threatening to another.³ This concept is referred to as the *security dilemma* and it is the purpose of dynamics in international relations to reduce this effect. Since drones are extremely versatile devices, they could easily become a problem for the security dilemma, being seen as threats to the security of another state. This is more likely to happen if the drone is armed. If it is not, then its mission becomes that of reconnaissance. In this case drones can be indeed used just for the security of the state or as a substitute for a mission that would normally endanger human lives. It is to this purpose that even non-state actors, such as the UN, use drones for humanitarian missions.

Some arguments in defending the ethical matters in the use of drones are the value put on human lives, on less collateral casualties by increased striking accuracy, and the less obvious role of being the eyes and ears of the military thus leading to more informed and effective operations which translates again into fewer losses of human lives.⁴

In the last 20 years or so, we have seen a shift of practices regarding threats worldwide. War has moved from the battlefield into cities, and a state to another state is not the primary threat anymore, an army fighting another army is less common, rather armies of different states collaborating to oppose a different type of enemy. I am referring here of course to terrorism, to threats coming from extremism. Terrorists are perceived in the international arena as an asymmetric threat due to their modes of combat, the techniques they use, a combination of military style fighting with guerrilla techniques and propaganda, motivated by religious and political aims.⁵ As their target are the people of another country, society, and concepts as democracy, they do not fight the state directly, but the state has to respond with its own means, which makes for an unequal fight. In combating such threats, states are more inclined to use versatile means such as drones,

³ John HERZ, *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*, article in *World Politics*, vol.2, nr.2, 1950, Cambridge University Press, UK, pp. 157-159

⁴ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force Mar. 23, 1976, art. 6 (ICCPR); UN General Assembly, Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism, A/Res/51/191, 10 Mar. 2005, para. 1

⁵ Alex P. Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism", *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, Routledge, UK, 2011, p. 39

which not only can address these situations more fairly and according to international law, but also reduce its costs of fighting a war. Terrorists use cheaper means, and alternative fundings⁶ to carry on aggressions.

Implications for intelligence gathering

It is only appropriate to mention here the numerous advantages of drones when gathering intelligence. Intelligence activities lie at the very center of policy making, aiding decision makers in their endeavours. By using drones for surveillance and reconnaissance, the intelligence community gains much easier access to information, with the added benefit of not having to employ agents for missions. Of course, this is not only specific to the case of drones, since launching the internet had similar consequences, with much public info being available online, but drones are much better in the sense of being able to deliver information immediately, which the internet cannot do.

The consequence of having more intelligence officers available at the workplace allows for a greater control of their activity and products, but also for their better training and thus specialization. With the amount of information being readily available today, this latter aspect is needed in order to be able to process information more quickly.

During wartime, the use of drones for the purpose of espionage is exempt from international law, in the sense that under the umbrella of national security, treaties governing human rights establishing rules regarding privacy and human dignity are lessened; however, during peacetime their use is often contested.

Drones versus security

One of the main features, which is also a big plus for drones tactically as well as ethically, is drones' ability to watch and wait for the best moment to strike a target, thus to receive confirmation of the target, allowing the operator to discriminate between civilians and militants. Before, wars were indiscriminate in this regard, now having the ability to discriminate more. This impacts not only the strategy used, but also the

⁶ Offshore money laundering, fake charities that support terrorism, information gathering from infiltrated supporters, etc.

efficiency of the operators, which constantly contribute to the effort by their experience. Still, there remains the question of responsibility – if the drone allows a person to carry out missions remotely, how much is it their fault if something should go awry? This is actually a question of novelty, because in classic warfare lower rank soldiers were rarely held responsible or not at all. On the same note of responsibility, drones also give the possibility of even live streaming a war, which leads towards accountability in warfare, a dimension yet to be explored.

Even with the increased precision, there is still the off-chance of casualties that rise from drone strikes.

In the legal debate of drones, there are to be identified two essential aspects, drone characteristics which make the difference between their morality and legality. One aspect is the type of drone, whether it is armed or not. Drones which do not possess the capability to strike are regarded as being friendlier than those which are armed, but even the ones that do not have arms raise the question of the destinations of the information that they collect. An example of this is the 2013 Congo drone surveillance carried out by the U.N. in order to gather data for risk assessment in the area, which sparked an opposition from the Congo government. It was settled in the end but the issue raised is still debatable with respect to regulations.⁷ Even if the stated purpose of the drone's mission is seemingly harmless, there is a grey area in which drones can still be used for actions not agreed upon by third parties.

In the political realm, because of the characteristics of drones described in the previous section, this technology can be used to abuse power and supersede democracy. As a political tool, drone strikes can be argued as being less harmful and cheaper than traditional technology used for the purpose of either intelligence gathering or military strikes. Thus they get approval more easily not only from institutions, but also from the public. Also, their being acquired and used even during peace time is easy to argue because of their large usage in national security, despite the debate around them. This potential for power abuse by a state is not yet regulated through international law specifically, but through other secondary laws that are

⁷ UN Starts Drone Surveillance in DR Congo, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25197754> accessed 27.06.2016

governing the use of this technology, such as privacy law, human rights, and the Free Skies Treaty. Furthering one's subjective interests by means of drone use under the argument of national security is a danger yet to be addressed.

Even the argument of using drones for humanitarian actions presents a peril to power abuse, providing for the opportunity to interfere in another state's internal affairs.

Conclusion

There is still much to explore regarding how drones change the concept of security and national security, and how it affects policy making and the field of intelligence. By going through the concepts of this article we notice a few key elements being highlighted by the existence of drones: they have become an efficient tool in carrying out national security, in accordance to the new broader definitions that states have agreed upon; furthermore, they represent the number one argument when it comes to getting approval for actions in the name of national security because of the low costs and ease of public approval. From another perspective, their highly versatile function make them perfect for intelligence activities, but post themselves on the grey area of democratic principle and rule of law in their activity.

When considering the implications of drones, this technology has a double-edged nature. On the one hand, drones are extremely effective in carrying out missions, military or otherwise, by either assisting or replacing completely the human element in each case. Each drone mission is regulated by the state to which the drone pertains, or the organization that approves the missions. However, the capabilities of drones are hard to control, in the sense that one feature can have multiple uses. So even if drones are used officially for national security reasons of a state, they can also either work against national security interests of another state, or have a hidden agenda that is hard to prove in face of accusations.

Even with a proper legal framework abiding by the principles of peace laid out in international law, the use of drones will always remain a controversial subject. Unless states take on the responsibility of their actions individually, drones will be used to do as much good as they do harm, but

even this seems an unlikely perspective as each state is still anchored in the mindset of safeguarding their own security first.



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