

# Drones and robotic warfare

## What is robotic warfare?

Robotic warfare is a significant new development – a "step up" from bombing in that there is no immediate risk to the person mounting the attack.

Australia has used unmanned spy planes during operations in Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and Iraq.

## Drones and robots

There are two types of robots used by the military – unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs).

**UGVs** are lawn mower sized ground-crawling tanks called PackBots and Talons. They are useful for defusing incendiary devices. They can also be useful in rescuing people from rubble.

Some **UAVs** are used as spy planes, but others are armed with missiles to attack targets on the ground.

The use of drones and their manufacture is increasing. They are particularly useful to military forces in areas such as Afghanistan where the terrain is difficult.



## Where are drones being used?

Drones armed with Hellfire missiles are currently being widely deployed in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Drones used by American troops in these countries are launched manually, and controlled via satellite from the USA.

Drones were used in the aerial bombardment of Libya in March 2011.

In 2010 the Australian military established a UAV facility in Afghanistan run jointly with the Canadians.

## Concerns: international law and human rights

### The use of drones contravenes widely accepted international norms

1. The targeting of particular people could be seen as **summary execution**. Philip Alston's UN Special Rapporteur Report on Extrajudicial Killings states that the US military has used drones and airstrikes for targeted killings in Afghanistan and Iraq. The CIA reportedly used "Predator" or "Reaper" drones in targeted killings in the aftermath of 9/11 and some of these killings have been attributed to civilian contractors. Targeting decisions are said to be based on surveillance and "patterns of life" assessments. A Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report released in August 2009 disclosed a list of targets in Afghanistan for the military. The list included drug lords thought to be financing the Taliban.
2. The use of armed drones by US forces in Pakistan, which is not an official conflict zone, could be regarded as a **violation of human rights**.
3. The use of sophisticated technology against poorly equipped terrorists or resistance fighters could be seen as a **disproportionate use of force**.

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## Concerns: psychological effects

The notion that modern warfare is clean and surgical is used to promote robotics. It appeals to the voting public and appeases the concerns of would-be soldiers.

There are concerns that the remote operation of drones may produce a "Play Station" mentality in soldiers and that this further alienation might be harmful to them.

The issue of disproportionate force may lead to increasing desperation among those targeted, and escalation to terrorist attacks.

## Concerns: transparency

### The use of drones is secretive and not subject to public scrutiny.

The use of these weapons is not being discussed in the public arena. In an age when we expect to be informed and have an input into what is being done in our name, information is limited. We do not know how many civilians are being killed. There is little discussion about the cost of their development and whether or not it could be justified by peaceful uses in earthquakes etc. While details of the technology may be kept secret, these matters need not be.

The increasing universality of education and respect for human rights is leading to a revulsion against war in the general public. We would like more debate about it in parliament.

In the US control of UAVs rests with the executive rather than with the democratic legislature.

## Concerns: unforeseen risks

The accuracy of UAVs is not yet well developed leading to accidents such as an attack on a wedding party in response to celebratory gunfire.

Their use may be counterproductive, leading to increasing cycles of violence or terrorist attacks.

## A unique danger

What can we do?

These concerns have led to the view that drones pose a unique danger. They have inspired a campaign by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, England (FoRE) and Pax Christi UK for a thorough public investigation. We could follow suit.

*Acknowledgement and references*

*This fact sheet was prepared by Dr Carole Wigg and is based on the detailed research of Jennifer Gerrand, whose detailed paper can be read in full, with appropriate references, at [www.mapw.org.au](http://www.mapw.org.au). March 2011.*

