

# Drone warfare- A Gray area

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*Abstract— The paper delves into the shifting dynamics of international relations in the age of Drone warfare. Through this paper, I explore the complex and morally ambiguous terrain of Drone Warfare in the era of globalisation as the boundaries between nationalism and terrorism are perpetually blurring, striking concerns with the questions of military regulation and ethics surrounding the battlefield and the delegation of AI in decision making during warfare. This paper throws light on the moral dilemma of the operators sitting miles away from the conflict zone, detached from war's immediate consequence and also centres around accountability and the implication of abdication of human agency within international law.*

**Keywords— Drone Warfare, International Relations, Military Regulation, Ethical Dilemma, AI in Warfare**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2008, there has been an increase in the number of drone operations conducted throughout the world. Pakistan has seen an increase in drone strikes along with the US, contributing to over 2400 (approx) deaths worldwide targeting Al Qaeda and Taliban militants. To explore the evolving dynamics of geopolitics in an era dominated by unbalanced warfare, we also need to focus on the Non state players and terrorist organizations who have now obfuscated the distinction between warfare and acts of terrorism by harnessing drone technology to challenge traditional security paradigm. However, nations like the US have witnessed growing acceptance for drone warfare due to the repeated statements by government officials regarding the precision of AI and the sophistication in the weapon design causing few to no civilian casualties. In this paper, we shall elaborate more upon the banes of AI in the battlefield, whose ubiquity has empowered personal state agencies and non state actors which dilutes the distinction between criminality and legitimate military operations working on terms of international law- leaving a gray area where personal interests and monopoly can prevail over a set principles to warfare. The targeted killings risked regional destabilization and growing strain on international treaties causing a troubling confluence of norms governing warfare.

## II. EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF WARFARE- HOW MODERN CONFLICT CHANNELS ITS INNER GAMER

The drone soldiers, unlike traditional soldiers, do not interact with enemies on the field or local civilians which has several negative ramifications. This distance impacts war conduct- the drone killers watch the gory details of war from monitors, hence creating an emotional distance and further adding to moral indifference. This type of 'bureaucratic killing'- a collaboration of data analysts, operators, and people in command further blurs the sense of responsibility. This further enhances the unreality of 'war' on screens which is also an obstacle to dialogue and understanding, obscuring the prospects of peace. Introducing technology to the battlefield, without accountability raises significant ethical concerns and diminishes our humanity in several ways which release the individuals from the burden of consequences, eroding the moral fabric of society. The term 'PlayStation mentality' illustrates the parallel between operating drones and playing video games, highlighting how the real-world consequences of one's actions may not be immediately apparent or emotionally impactful. This leads to further impunity, where actions are not held responsible. Through these systems, the emotional as well as physical distance grows- reducing empathy and understanding for people affected by these technologies. This reduction in empathy erodes our fundamental understanding of human life- making it easier

to justify actions resulting in harm. This advent of technology on battlefields alters the dynamics of warfare forcing us to confront questions about our humanity. It creates a new challenge to preserve our empathy and ethical values even in the face of technological advancements. Upholding accountability becomes a moral imperative, ensuring that as we innovate, we do not lose sight of the shared human experiences that bind us together, even in times of conflict. In traditional warfare, soldiers on experience the direct impact of their actions, fostering a profound understanding of the gravity of their actions. This human element acts as a key unit of empathy, a reminder of the shared human experience even in the face of conflict. Furthermore, the absence of accountability exacerbates ethical dilemmas. When actions on the battlefield carry no concrete repercussions, there's a danger of moral principles being overshadowed by strategic goals. This transformation fundamentally questions the core of ethical decision-making, as accountability acts as a deterrent against the misuse of power. Take in the example of Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban who had over \$5 million over his name as bounty by the FBI. On the rooftop of his father-in-law's home in Wazirisatan on August 5, 2009, Mehsud was under treatment for Kidney failure in the company of his seven bodyguards as well as wife and mother-in-law. The Pakistani government under Nawaz Sharif condemned the drone attack as a violation of the country's sovereignty. Wailur Rehman, his second in command was killed in a similar way. This is an example of the intense 'man hunting' and surveillance for targeted killings in noncombat zones. The question here is raised- 'shouldn't humans of equal dignity fight one another?' Such lesser forms of killings and wars basically evaporate the concepts of nationalism, martyrs etc and makes the whole process of war look like a modern-day game- where the remorse of death slowly loses its meaning. While there is no doubt that Mehsud was a militant responsible for countless deaths, it is however a serious question mark on our conscience to pull the trigger on a man receiving medical care.

### III. THE BLURRED LINES BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND TERRORISM

A significant change observed is the decline in traditional nationalist sentiments historically associated with wartime endeavors. For instance, during World War II, citizens from diverse nations were mobilized in large numbers, fostering profound feelings of patriotism and national pride. The conflict unfolded on the battlefield, frequently featuring direct combat, strengthening the bond between soldiers and their respective nations. Additionally, drone warfare introduces a geographical and psychological distance that

blurs the distinction between war and peace for the affected populations. The conventional perception of a nation at war, encompassing shared identity and collective responsibility, can diminish as military operations occur remotely and discreetly.

According to Abbas 2013, with response to drone strikes 'terrorists and ordinary people are drawn closer to each other out of sympathy, whereas a critical function of any successful counter terrorism policy is to win over public with confidence so that they join in the campaign against the perpetrators of terror.' The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has inaugurated an era where individuals and non-state entities can employ AI-driven drones for targeted assassinations and military actions. This development prompts deep concerns about the future of international relations, with the possibility of cooperation among nations diminishing due to personal interests. This insightful essay delves into the complexities of this emerging problem, exploring how the widespread use of AI may weaken international collaboration, leading to significant repercussions for global stability. As non-state entities gain the capability to employ AI-driven drones for targeted killings, the distinction between lawful military operations and criminal activities becomes progressively indistinct. International law finds it difficult to match the swift pace of technological advancement, creating a murky realm where personal interests might supersede established norms and principles regulating warfare. Consequently, this convergence of military tactics and criminal behavior poses a significant dilemma for the global community. At the core of this problem lies the deterioration of international collaboration. With the increasing accessibility of AI technology, individuals and private entities are motivated to pursue their own agendas, often at the expense of collective security. The concept of nations working together for the greater good starts to diminish as personal interests take center stage. Numerous case studies and examples illustrate instances where private entities have pursued their objectives without regard for broader diplomatic consequences, thereby jeopardizing regional stability and risking potential conflicts. Adopting a comprehensive strategy is paramount in counterterrorism efforts. While drones can play a role, their use must be careful and integrated with diplomatic endeavors, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, and tackling underlying causes like poverty, lack of education, and political instability. A well-rounded approach, respecting international law, human rights, and the dignity of every individual, is essential in combating terrorism

#### IV. CHALLENGES

This raises another crucial concern regarding the reliability and fairness of algorithms. Human biases, whether intentional or subconscious, can infiltrate algorithms, shaping their results and potentially perpetuating societal prejudices.

In the context of drone warfare, this issue becomes particularly alarming. Autonomous drones, driven by AI, are increasingly utilized in military operations. If the individuals developing these machines possess biases related to race, ethnicity, or other factors, these biases could unintentionally affect the decision-making processes of the drones. For example, if AI systems are trained on data containing biased judgments about individuals based on their skin color, it could result in racially discriminatory outcomes in drone attacks. In essence, the flaw in AI algorithms does not lie within the machines themselves, but in the imperfect humans molding their codes and datasets. Recognizing and rectifying these biases is essential to ensure that AI technologies, especially in critical applications like drone warfare, are equitable, just, and devoid of discriminatory practices. The accessibility of these powerful tools, along with their susceptibility to cyber threats, creates a situation where they could end up in the wrong hands. This not only poses a threat to international security but also raises questions about the ethical use of force. Even graver are two practices condemned by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and acknowledged by the US government: "signature strikes," where CIA operatives target individuals displaying a "pattern of life" typical of a terrorist profile, and "follow-up strikes," in which armed drones attack those assisting the victim of a prior strike or attending their funeral, under the flawed notion that offering aid or mourning makes them terrorists. These undoubtedly constitute attacks that, during armed conflict, amount to war crimes and, in times of peace, qualify as crimes against humanity. The lack of strict regulations and international agreements on the qualifications and circumstances under which drones can be operated leaves room for potential abuse. As we continue to progress into an era characterized by technology-driven warfare, it becomes increasingly vital to establish well-defined guidelines, age restrictions, and qualifications for drone operators. This measure is essential to ensure the responsible and accountable utilization of this technology and to safeguard against its exploitation for nefarious purposes. To mitigate these issues, it is crucial for countries utilizing drone warfare to address biases proactively. Promoting diversity and inclusivity within the teams tasked with developing AI systems for military applications is essential. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, we can enhance the ability

to identify and correct biases throughout the development process. It is also crucial to conduct regular evaluations of AI algorithms to detect and rectify biases. Continuous improvement of machine learning models through learning from mistakes and feedback can significantly diminish the influence of biases over time. Though the obstacles are substantial, overcoming racial biases in drone warfare is achievable. It demands a joint endeavor involving governments, technologists, ethicists, and the public to guarantee that these technologies are created and utilized in a way that respects human rights, equality, and fairness.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Addressing this complex challenge necessitates a multifaceted approach. Firstly, it mandates an increased awareness and meticulous examination of biases ingrained in both the data used for training AI systems and the individuals responsible for programming them. Secondly, it calls for the engagement of diverse and inclusive teams in AI development, ensuring a wide array of perspectives are incorporated. Additionally, there is a pressing need for stringent regulations and ethical guidelines to govern the application of AI in sensitive contexts such as warfare, emphasizing transparency and accountability as fundamental principles. The paper highlights the challenges of military regulation and ethics concerning battlefield decisions and the delegation of AI in warfare. It emphasizes the detachment of drone operators, leading to emotional distance and moral indifference, and raises concerns about the erosion of empathy and ethical values due to technological advancements. The concept of the 'PlayStation mentality' is discussed, illustrating the disconnect between actions and consequences, further diminishing accountability and ethical considerations.

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