

Drone technology: uses and ethics



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In the last several years, humanity has seen great advancements in technology. From the creation of smartphones to all-electric cars, technology is advancing at a faster pace with each passing day. One such technological advancement, in this time period, is in the area of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), commonly referred to as drones. When UAVs were first introduced, the public did not know how to respond to the new technology. Some individuals were strongly in favor of them while others were strongly against any use of this new drone technology. For these reasons, drone technology is now one of, if not the most, controversial inventions to come out of this so-called rapid technological boom. The fact of the matter is that now that drone technology has been introduced into society, any attempts to get rid of them completely will be useless. Therefore, the controversy should not be directed towards drones in general, but rather the regulation, monitoring and politics behind this new technology. The truth of the matter is that drone technology, primarily in warfare, should be developed due to the fact that they are cost-effective, and offer protection with very limited risk to the lives of American soldiers.

So, what exactly is a drone? The dictionary definition of a drone is “a pilotless radio-controlled aircraft” (Dictionary.com). In most cases, drones are controlled by a human that is remotely stationed, while in other rarer situations, drones are completely autonomous, meaning they are pre-programmed to perform any desired task. Drones, primarily come in two forms; military and commercial use drones. Nonetheless, both drone types have and continue to raise a lot of controversial debates. For example, since 1995 and 2004, drone technology has been incorporated into the military and

since then an estimated “ 4, 700 deaths have occurred as a result of drone attacks, primarily in countries such as Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan” (Drones- ProCon. org). From this population of drone-related deaths roughly “ 970 were casualties” (The Washington Post). It has been calculated that the civilian death rate of drone-related deaths has the potential of being smaller than manned machines since drones allow for more accuracy during airstrikes. In terms of commercial use drone technology, they are currently, primarily, used for filming, but there have been reports of drone-related criminal activities as well. Such cases involve spying via drones and even theft of drones. The truth is that there are innumerable aspects to consider when debating drone technology; this is further complicated by the fact that the technology is advancing rapidly and regulations are unable to keep up. Despite this fact, the interest in drone technology is now global. The most advanced countries with this technology include The United States of America, China, and Russia. China-based companies such as DJI are the largest producers of commercial use drone technology, while Russia and the United States are both competing to create drones for military use. In America, the use of drones in warfare is so controversial that a confirmation from the President is required before any and all air strikes. This power, in the wrong hands, can, very easily, be abused (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism). With recent data collection from wars overseas, the range of drone-related deaths has increased and now is up to an estimated 9, 200 (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism). With no doubt, this number is sure to increase as drones will soon become a necessity in warfare and thus America must push for the development and deregulation so as to stay ahead of those who wish to cause harm and chaos.

Drone technology should be developed as well as deregulated since the benefits far outweigh the costs. To this day, drones continue to be cost effective as well as efficient in decimating terrorist networks across the world. Last but not least, drones should be developed since America can not risk falling behind other countries in terms of unmanned aerial vehicles.

Whether or not society is in favor of drone technology, the simple fact is that they are here to stay. Currently, more than “ 87 countries own some type of surveillance or attack drone, changing the way nations conduct war.” Drone technology is the “ second arms race and America cannot risk falling behind” (Washington spectator). In addition, the cost of drone technology is far less than that of developing manned machinery. For example, America’s F-35 fighter program cost the United States \$9. 7 billion dollars in 2012 alone. On top of this, the estimated cost of using a single manned aircraft ranges from \$18, 000- \$169, 000 per hour (Drones- ProCon. org). Meanwhile, in comparison, unmanned machinery does not have to account for the safety of a human since they can be controlled remotely. The currently available data indicates that “ America’s entire drone program constitutes only about 1% of the entire annual military budget”. Last but not least, drone technology has decimated terrorist networks in enemy territory. The drone airstrike on November of 2013 which killed Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud illustrates this last point best (Washington spectator). The fact that drone strikes have and continue to disrupt malicious plots targeted towards Americans and American allies cannot be ignored and as a matter of fact, it provides more reasoning to continue drone development. Yet, despite all the good that drone development has brought, there are still some that are very anti-drone technology.

For those in opposition to drone technology, three main arguments are used to support their claims. They first argue that the use of drones to attack enemy territory is a violation of international law. To support this claim, anti-drone supporters quote the International Law. Under this law, "targeted individual must pose an imminent threat that only lethal force can prevent, simply being suspected of some connection to a "militant" organization is not legally sufficient to make someone a permissible target for killing" (Shaw, International Law). Along with this argument, adversaries of drone technology, continue to argue that as America launches more and more drone strikes, an emotional disconnect occurs which takes away the horrors of war and killing. This fact can be justified in that all wars come with pain, and throughout history, this pain has, to some extent, led to peace, therefore, what difference does it make as to whether people distance themselves from the pain and horrors of war? Last but not least, those against drones claim that since drone technology is so new and lacks sufficient government oversight, citizens will not be able to hold their leaders accountable. As previously mentioned, drone strikes have killed a lot of civilians, approximately 9,200 from January 2004, yet to whom can we blame for these deaths (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism)? The short and truthful answer is that not one single person can be held responsible since the individual who controls or programs the drone to kill is under the support and protection of the American Government. If drone technology continues to be used in the military, there is a great possibility for those in positions of power to abuse drone technology, kill thousands of "suspected" people and still bear no responsibility for their actions.

All in all, drone technology, in today's world, is a widely argued and profusely talked about topic. Yet, is this not the truth in most matters of today?

Drones, in particular, can be viewed on a wide spectrum; ranging from being a fun, recreational, leisure activity to being a deadly military weapon.

Because drone technology is rapidly embedding the society With drones being so new and just now becoming apparent in the society we live in, it can be difficult to determine between right and wrong when deciding laws and regulations to keep people safe. Some argue in favor of drones use, while others despise any ideas put forth regarding them. Yet, in the end, it is all about safety and human life. The question remains so should drone technology be less regulated and used to keep Americans and their allies safe, or should they be regulated so as to keep the pains and horrors associated with war?

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