



Q and A about the use of drones by the USA, one of the most controversial users of drones

▶ Where is the U.S. sending drones?

The U.S. uses drones primarily in areas where it has military campaigns; Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, but has also used drones in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

▶ What damage can a drone do?

Depending on the model of the drone, a drone such as a Reaper can carry thousands of pounds of payloads which result in high collateral damage. Predator drones have a less of a collateral impact, but the Hellfire missiles are lethal for the target.

▶ How accurate are drone strikes?

The accuracy rate for hitting the intended target is approximately 1.5-2%. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has estimated that 98% of victims of drone strikes are “collateral damage,” or in more human terms, civilians, children, or suspected militants who are either minor, low-level affiliates or whose involvement with militants has never been proven.

▶ How many casualties have there been?

The US Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates (in 2014) that nearly 4,000 total casualties have resulted from U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Many have been civilians including children.

▶ Are drone strikes a violation of international law?

The United Nations has stated that the U.S. use of drone strikes in Pakistan violates international law and is a threat to human rights not only because of the mass casualties drones strikes cause but also because the Pakistani government does not always agree with the drone strikes. The UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, Ben Emmerson, released a statement expressing that the Government of Pakistan “considers US drone strikes to be counter-productive, contrary to international law, and a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Authorisation for the Use of Military Force, passed by U.S. Congress in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks, legally empowers the President to “use all necessary and appropriate force” to pursue those responsible for acts of terrorism.

According to the American Society of International Law, international human rights law does not allow the use of Hellfire missiles because their heavy fire power exceeds the limits of fire power allowed for law enforcement purposes.

▶ Does the U.S. use drones domestically?

Domestic drone use is currently limited to surveillance along the nation’s borders and within a few states, such as Texas and Florida. In February of 2013, the U.S. sent surveillance drones into Mexico to gather information about drug trafficking. The restrictions currently in place are due to concerns about air safety and infringement of privacy. The push for drone use within the United States is strong, and drones manufacturers are considering the option of drones that would fire rubber bullets and spray tear gas to assist law enforcement.

▶ Does the use of drones in the US invade privacy rights?

Because surveillance drones have thermal and x ray imaging capabilities, they are extremely pervasive. The Fourth Amendment to the US constitution protects citizens against unreasonable searches and seizures but surveillance drone technology violates those rights.

▶ How much is spent on drones for military use in the USA?

According to The San Diego Union-Tribune article ‘Prowling for Profit’ Predator and Reaper drones generally cost \$4 million to \$12 million each. In 2010 the US spent \$489 million on 24 new Reaper drones. The U.S. Defence budget in 2011 includes \$2.2 billion for buying 28 new Predator-class drones and the doubling the number of the MQ-9 Reaper over the next few years.

Compiled by Chris Waller, ACT from a variety of sources 2014