



Military Applications of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS)

Statement of Pax Christi International on Drones

The increased use of Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAs) – also called unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones - has inaugurated a new phase in modern warfare and is raising grave moral and legal questions that deserve immediate attention. Pax Christi International has given serious consideration to different perspectives on this issue and is persuaded that the use of these armed unmanned vehicles as weapons should be prohibited.

1. Pax Christi's opinion refers specifically to the use of RPAs (or UAVs) as weapons and does not preclude their deployment for some non-military, non-human surveillance purposes such as the monitoring of power or gas lines, infrastructure inspections, air quality management, resource monitoring, communication or broadcast services or monitoring human rights abuses. Although not the focus of this statement, concerns about the invasion of privacy using drone technology for human surveillance, including civilian purposes such as law enforcement or border control, must be taken very seriously.
2. According to advocates, the use of robots and unmanned systems increases the safety of civilians during military operations. Despite U.S. government claims that drone operators can distinguish an al Qaeda terrorist from innocent civilians¹, recent studies² present significant evidence that US drone strikes have killed hundreds of civilians and injured many more. Furthermore, the 24-hour-a-day hovering by drones over communities unable to protect themselves in any way has terrorized men, women, and children; caused

1 John O. Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, The Efficacy and Ethics of U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy, Remarks at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Apr. 30, 2012), *available at* <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-efficacy-and-ethics-us-counterterrorism-strategy>.

2 International Human Rights And Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School) and Global Justice Clinic (NYU School Of Law), *Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From Us Drone Practices in Pakistan* (September, 2012) and *Covert War on Terror*, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/> (last visited Sept. 12, 2012).

tremendous anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities; and disrupted essential community activities such as school and tribal dispute-resolution efforts. Evidence in a recent Stanford Law School/NYU study³ suggests that U.S. drone strikes have undermined U.S. relationships in the region, especially with Pakistanis, facilitated recruitment to violent non-state armed groups and motivated further violent attacks. Furthermore, a serious lack of government transparency about drone strikes hampers ongoing monitoring and public accountability.

3. Some of the most serious questions about the use of lethal drone technology relate to the rule of law. The U.S. government has failed to make public the legal basis for its program of targeted assassinations and is setting dangerous precedents for other governments, including repeated likely violations of other nations' sovereignty. To execute people without due process or an opportunity to surrender should violate the moral and legal sensibilities of people who claim to believe in the value of every human life and the right to a fair trial. The legality and morality of killing weak targets (or every last potential "enemy") outside of a war zone is itself highly questionable.
4. Furthermore, the objectification of targeted human beings and their remoteness is likely to lower the threshold for using armed violence to resolve conflicts. In the near future, the option of fully autonomous drones or "killer robots," capable of making their own decisions about killing without a human operator "in the loop" are expected to be seen on the battlefield.⁴ Killing by remote control is deeply offensive to Pax Christi's belief in active nonviolence that is committed to taking on violence rather than inflicting it on others.
5. Pax Christi International continues to emphasize the need to deal with security threats in non-military ways. The use of drones in armed conflict, because they are relatively low in cost and exact few military casualties, will likely increase the move to war and military intervention. We believe that international cooperation in criminal

3 International Human Rights And Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School) and Global Justice Clinic (NYU School Of Law), *Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From Us Drone Practices in Pakistan* (September, 2012)

4 Losing Humanity: The Case against Killer Robots, Human Rights Watch, (November 10, 2012) www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/arms1112ForUpload_0_0.pdf

investigations; the arrest and trial of suspected terrorists; investment in human development, jobs, and education; plus dialogue, diplomacy and compromise are more effective routes to sustainable peace and inclusive security and reflect more accurately the kind of people we hope to become.

6. Pax Christi International, in opposing the use of RPAs or drones as weapons, believes that they lower the threshold for resorting to violent force to resolve complex conflicts. In particular we oppose the use of lethal drones for targeted assassinations on what could become a battlefield without borders.
7. Pax Christi International calls on the United States and other governments using drone technology for counterterrorism purposes to cease immediately the use of lethal drones for targeted assassinations; to ensure transparency and accountability related to the use of lethal drones; and to demilitarize counterterrorism strategies.
8. We call on the United Nations to develop binding legal standards based on the principles of international law for the production, use and proliferation of RPAs or drones and to prohibit the use of fully autonomous “killer robot” drones.

Brussels, 28 November 2012

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