

Drones: Instruments of State Terror

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A new [report](#) jointly prepared by Stanford University's International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (SU) and New York University School of Law's Global Justice Clinic (NYU) is titled "Living Under Drones." Part one discusses strikes on rescuers, funerals, and other civilian targets. Part two examines surveillance, the effects of drones overhead, and how their use creates fear and distrust. Part three considers the economic and impoverishment hardships families and communities sustain.

Overall SU/NYU examines key aspects of the CIA's drone policy. It exposes facts political Washington and media scoundrels suppress.

The dominant narrative claims drone strikes are precise and effective. They involve "targeted killings." Terrorists are assassinated with "minimal downsides or collateral impacts." As a result, America is much safer.

"This narrative is false." It's a bald-faced lie. Drone strikes are indiscriminate. Mostly noncombatant civilians are killed. The SU/NYU report followed nine months of intensive research.

They included two investigations in Pakistan. Over 130 interviews were conducted with victims, witnesses, and experts.

Thousands of pages of documentation and media reports were reviewed. This report "presents evidence of the damaging and counterproductive effects of" America's drone-strike policy.

Firsthand evidence confirms it. So-called benefits don't exist. Civilians sustain enormous harm. "Living Under Drones" exposes what official accounts won't say.

Reevaluating Washington's drone policy is urgently needed. Civilian casualties are rarely acknowledged. Significant evidence proves they're commonplace.

US officials claim "no" or "single digit" civilian casualties alone. They lie. Coverup is policy.

At the same time, "it's difficult to obtain data on strike casualties because of US efforts to shield the drone program from democratic accountability, compounded by the obstacles to independent investigation of strikes in North Waziristan."

The [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) (TBIJ) provides best available aggregate public data. Last February, TBIJ published a report titled "Obama terror drones: CIA tactics in Pakistan include targeting rescuers and funerals," saying:

Predator drones sanitize killing on the cheap. Currently about one-third of US warplanes are

drones. One day perhaps they'll all be unmanned. Secrecy and accountability aren't addressed. Aggressive killing is official policy. Little about it gets reported.

Civilian rescue parties, funerals, and weddings are targeted. Evidence disproves Obama saying drone killings are "targeted" and "focused."

Obama's a serial liar. Nothing he says is credible. Last winter he claimed drones haven't "caused a huge number of civilian casualties. They're targeted, focused at people who are on a list of active terrorists trying to go in and harm Americans."

BIJ research showed otherwise. Hundreds of civilians are killed, including dozens of children. On the ground investigative work proved it. Eyewitnesses provided damning testimonies. Legal experts condemned Washington's tactics.

In 2004 or earlier, Bush began drone attacks. Obama continues them relentlessly. Predator drones reign death on civilians regularly. CIA operatives conduct them. Battlefield casualty figures are suppressed.

Administration officials claim covert attacks anywhere in the world are legal. International, constitutional, and US statute laws say otherwise. Chief US counterterrorism advisor John Brennan said:

"Because we are engaged in an armed conflict with al-Qaeda, the United States takes the legal position that, in accordance with international law, we have the authority to take action against al-Qaeda and its associated forces."

"The United States does not view our authority to use military force against al-Qaeda as being restricted solely to "hot" battlefields like Afghanistan."

International law experts disagree. State-sanctioned extrajudicial killings are lawless. Harvard's Naz Modirzadeh said:

"Not to mince words here, if it is not in a situation of armed conflict, unless it falls into the very narrow area of imminent threat then it is an extra-judicial execution."

"We don't even need to get to the nuance of who's who, and are people there for rescue or not. Because each death is illegal. Each death is a murder in that case."

Attorney for the charity Reprieve, Clive Stafford-Smith, said drone strikes targeting rescuers "are like attacking the Red Cross on the battlefield. It's not legitimate to attack anyone who is not a combatant."

Congress never debated or approved them. In the Af/Pak theater, America has about 7,000 drones operating. Another 12,000 stand ready on the the ground. They're rapidly replacing manned aircraft. US aerospace companies have no ongoing research to develop new ones.

Privately some Pentagon commanders express unease about Obama's drone policy. They're extrajudicial. CIA enforces extreme secrecy. It won't admit their operations exist.

Legal experts say drone killings outside war theaters set a dangerous precedent. Other countries may follow America's lead. UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Christof Heyns said:

“Our concern is how far does it go? Will the whole world be a theatre of war?”

“Drones, in principle, allow collateral damage to be minimized but because they can be used without danger to a country’s own troops they tend to be used more widely.”

“One doesn’t want to use the term ticking bomb but it’s extremely seductive.”

TBIJ reported harrowing narratives of survivors, witnesses, and family members. It provided detailed information on specific strikes.

SU/NYU said:

“US drone strike policies cause considerable and under-accounted-for harm to the daily lives of ordinary civilians, beyond death and physical injury.”

“Drones hover twenty-four hours a day over communities in northwest Pakistan, striking homes, vehicles, and public spaces without warning.”

“Their presence terrorizes men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities.”

“Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment, and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves. These fears have affected behavior.”

Targeted areas are struck multiple times in quick succession. The practice is called “double tap.” It dissuades bystanders and professionals from helping. One group ordered staff to avoid struck sites for six hours before investigating.

People in targeted areas are on their own to help. What they find is horrifying. Strikes “incinerate” victims. They’re left in unidentifiable pieces. Traditional burials are impossible.

Firoz Ali Khan’s father-in-law’s home was struck. He graphically described what he saw, saying:

“These missiles are very powerful. They destroy human beings.”

“There is nobody left and small pieces left behind. Pieces. Whatever is left is just little pieces of bodies and cloth.”

A doctor who treated drone victims described how “skin is burned so that you can’t tell cattle from humans.” Another family survivor at the same site said his father was killed. “The entire place looked as if it was burned completely, so much so that even (the victims’) own clothes had burnt.”

“All the stones in the vicinity had become black.” Ahmed Jan lost his foot last March. He discussed challenges rescuers face in identifying bodies, saying:

“People were trying to find the body parts. We find the body parts of some people, but sometimes we do not find anything.” It’s incinerated and gone.

Rescuers, community and family members, and humanitarian workers are vulnerable. Parents keep children at home. With good reason, they’re traumatized. Fear grips everyone.

Families who lost loved ones or their homes now struggle to survive.

Official statements about drone killing keeping America safer are false.

At most, only 2% of victims are high-level combatants. Evidence suggests that US strikes facilitate anti-American recruitment. The New York Times said drone attacks replaced Guantanamo as “the recruiting tool of choice for militants.”

The vast majority of Pakistanis consider America the enemy.

Targeted killings also undermine respect for international and US rule of law principles. They’re lawless and unconscionable. Secrecy is official policy. Transparency and accountability are absent.

In light of serious concerns, SU/NYU’s report said Washington must conduct “a fundamental re-evaluation of current targeted killing practices, taking into account all available evidence, the concerns of various stakeholders, and the short and long-term costs and benefits.”

A “significant rethinking (is) long overdue.” Policy makers can’t ignore civilian harm and counterproductive impacts much longer.

Rule of law principles are fundamental. Violating them encourages others to replicate US practices. US lives become vulnerable. That alone is reason enough to rethink policy. Most important is state-sanctioned murder. Nothing justifies what’s clearly illegal.

Stanford’s James Cavallaro was one of the report’s authors. He said “real people are suffering real harm,” but they’re largely ignored by US officials and in media accounts.

Cavallaro added that the study was intended to challenge official notions of precise targeted killings with little fallout. Investigative work proved otherwise.

CIA officials and National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor declined comment. Perhaps they fear anything they say can be used against them. Whatever they say is false.

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