

WILINGNESS TO INTERVENE: A STUDY ON DRONES, PUBLIC OPINION
AND THE USE OF LETHAL ACTION

A Master's Thesis

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*To Daddy George, Grand Motte and Pere Tom whose love and support were
fundamental in my completion of this thesis, my family and my friends at home and
abroad.*

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AND THE USE OF LETHAL ACTION

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ABSTRACT

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The U.S. military and the CIA have been using unmanned drone aircraft, in various ways, for the past two decades. The CIA began using armed drones in 2002 to wreak havoc on Al-Qaeda and its operatives, primarily in Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Somalia. However, the CIA's targeted drone killing program was kept officially secret until President Obama admitted, indirectly, to its existence, in 2013. The U.S. public was effectively kept in the dark about this program for over a decade. Recently, with growing public awareness of the use of drones, questions have been raised as to whether or not unmanned technologies in general – and drones in particular – have the potential to lower the threshold for the use of lethal force. However, the literature surrounding this subject is limited. This thesis aims to provide the reader with a detailed background regarding the evolution of the U.S. military drone program. Moreover, it provides an analysis of the results from a public opinion survey I administered in 2014, in an attempt to discover what effect the use of military drones may have on a select sample from the Charlottesville and Albemarle area in the State of Virginia and the willingness to intervene militarily overseas.

Keywords: U.S. Drone Program, U.S. Public Opinion, Public Opinion Survey.

ÖZET

MÜDHALAE ETMEYE GÖNÜLLÜLÜK: İNSANSİZ HAVA ARACI, KAMUOYU, VE ÖLÜMCÜL EYLEM KULLANIMI ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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ABD ordusu ve CIA, geçtiğimiz son yirmi yıldır çeşitli şekillerde insansız hava aracı kullanmaktadır. CIA, silahlı insansız hava araçlarını öncelikli olarak Pakistan, Yemen, Afganistan ve Somali’de faaliyet gösteren El Kaide’yi ve ajanlarını yok etmek amacıyla 2002 yılında kullanmaya başladı. Ancak CIA’in hedef gözeterek yok etme programı, 2013 yılında Başkan Obama, dolaylı olarak bu programın varlığını kabul edinceye kadar resmi olarak gizli tutuldu. Amerikan halkı, on yıldan daha uzun bir süre bu programdan haberdar edilmedi. Son zamanlarda, insansız hava araçlarının kullanımı hakkında artan toplumsal bilinçle kafalarda, özellikle insansız hava araçları olmak üzere genel anlamda insansız teknolojilerin; öldürücü kuvvetin kullanım eşiğini düşürme potansiyelinin olup olmadığına dair soru işaretleri oluşmaya başladı. Ancak bu konudaki kaynaklar sınırlıdır. Bu tez, okuyucuya ABD askerî insansız hava aracı programının evrimiyle ilgili ayrıntılı bir alt yapı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca askerî insansız hava araçlarının kullanımının, Amerikalıların, deniz aşırı müdahalelere istekli olmaları konusunda nasıl bir etkisi olduğunu ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla 2014 yılında gerçekleştirdiğim bir kamuoyu araştırmasının sonuçlarının analizini de sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD’nin İnsansız Hava Aracı Programı, ABD Kamuoyu, Kamuoyu Araştırması

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I was perhaps a bit naïve when I decided to create and administer my own public opinion poll, since I assumed it would neither be extremely difficult nor time consuming. I was, of course, wrong on both accounts. However, I received very helpful feed back from Professors Dr. Can Mutlu, Dr. David Lewis and my supervisor Dr. Paul Williams. I cannot thank them enough for taking their precious time to provide me with the insights I needed to bring to my project. Moreover, I must formally mention that I received much help in the area of statistical analysis from my friend and peer, Gregor Bozic, who helped me understand and develop a more complex method to interpret my survey results.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUMF	Authorization for Use of Military Force
BIJ	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTC	Counterterrorism Center within the CIA
‘F3’	Find, Fix, Finish
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JSOC	Joins Special Operations Command
PRC	Pew Research Center
RPA	Remotely Piloted Vehicle
SIGINT	Signal Intelligence
UAS	Unmanned Aerial System
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States, its military and the CIA have been using armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly referred to as drones, for over a decade. For the most part, the past two presidents, Bush and Obama, have viewed drone strikes as an effective tool for decimating Al-Qaeda's network. The United States has carried out hundreds of strikes that have resulted in thousands of deaths. While some estimates put the civilian death toll from the strikes around 1,000, it is impossible to know any exact numbers (**Fig 1**). Whatever the original intentions of the drone program were, targeted aerial killings rapidly became a favorite tool of President Bush and under President Obama, some argue, it has become his only foreign policy tool in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Yet, Obama's extensive use of drones is logical. He assumed the presidency in 2009 with a promise to end both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to bring U.S. soldiers back home whilst at the same time he restated the U.S.' commitment to the global war on terror. Yet, with a war-weary American public that wanted and still wants to keep its soldiers out of harms way, how could Obama effectively conduct his global war on terror? The answer: Drones. Why drones? There are certainly a number of strategic, economic and

logistical reasons, but the one that will be discussed within this body of research lies in the realm of public opinion.

This first part of this study will aim to provide its audience with a detailed, concise background of the U.S. drone program as well as explain the history and important works of literature that have been written about public opinion, public opinion theory and public opinion polling. Since the drone program remains shrouded in as much secrecy as the current administration can provide to it, there are a limited number of sources to draw from regarding its development. However, even with almost everything being classified, authors, investigative journalists and think-tanks (as well as one speech by Obama himself about the program and a couple of interviews with John Brennan, former White House counterterrorism advisor and current Director of the CIA) provide enough information to paint a fairly clear portrait of the evolution of the drone program.

The second component of this study involves reviewing and analyzing the results of a public opinion poll that was administered in the summer of 2014 in and around Charlottesville, Virginia. The purpose of this poll is to determine if the addition of drones to a military intervention would increase support for the intervention. Major polling organizations have only recently begun administering U.S. public opinion polls with regards to the approval or disapproval of U.S. drone strikes. Those that have been conducted by large polling institutions only have data from polls that generally date back to 2012. One exception is the Pew Research

Center, which, prior to 2011, has no data regarding U.S. public opinion and drone strikes (Cohen 2014, 18). However, the polls that do exist show that the majority of Americans do support U.S. drone strikes, while the rest of the world, excluding Israel and Kenya, oppose them (**Fig 2**). Moreover, there has been only *one* CBS/New York Times poll administered where support for airstrikes in Iraq was linked to the use of drones versus the use of manned aircraft. While this poll did find that “...there is public support for using unmanned aircraft or drones to target militants in Iraq” and, more importantly, “there is less support for airstrikes using manned aircraft,” those responsible for this report understandably did not venture past making this distinction (CBS/NYT 2014). My hope is that this thesis, with its original survey, designed to test an inchoate hypothesis that drone warfare and the U.S. drone program in particular, as the largest and first of its kind, have the potential for lowering the threshold of acceptance for lethal violence, will contribute to the general literature surrounding on drones.

Additionally, this thesis raises a number of other important questions that exist within the two-abovementioned components of this study. If drones do have an influence over people’s opinions regarding intervention, does the global proliferation of drones mean we are destined for an era of more violence? Americans support the targeted killing program at the moment, but can we expect this collective acceptance of the program to change as outside pressures begin to build on the CIA to become more transparent? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there currently exists no international legal framework governing the

use of drones by states outside of their sovereign territories. In terms of international justification, the United States invokes the right to self-defense since al-Qaeda and its affiliates represent an imminent threat to the people and the government of the United States. Nationally, the drone program receives its authorization from the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) signed by President Bush in 2001. Moreover, the U.S. political doctrine regarding the program seems to be based solely on executive authority (with minimal congressional oversight). Will Americans remain content in continuing to cede more authority the executive branch when it comes to decisions on war and lethal action? These questions and many more must continue to be raised as the advent of drones into militaries around the world will only continue to increase the need for common understanding in order to avoid unintended consequences.

The survey itself was designed to be short, as it has only twelve questions, six of which are related to demographics (see **Fig 3.**) One of the many arguments against the use of armed drones is that they make the decision to use lethal force, or to intervene militarily, much easier (BBC Online 2008). This is due to many reasons, some of them being that there are fewer political controls (at least, in the United States this is especially the case), which increases the likelihood that drones will be used, and drones allow militaries to strike targets without risking the lives of any of their soldiers (Lee 2013). The questions refer to possible U.S. interventions in which drones would/would not be used, in hopes of assessing several potential

correlations, the most important of which relates the willingness of the respondents to intervene to the potential use/non-use of drones.

1.1 Methodology

The answers offered for the first six questions, or “Likert items,” were based off a standard 7-point Likert scale. A Likert item is simply a statement that the respondent is asked to evaluate according to any kind of subjective or objective criteria; generally the level of agreement or disagreement is measured (in this case, drones vs. soldiers and likelihood of agreement). It is considered symmetric or “balanced” because there are equal numbers of positive and negative positions. As long as this 7-point scale is consistently used throughout the survey, one can assume that each response is equidistant from the next. This is important to understand because the seven options for each question – strongly disagree, somewhat disagree etc. – are given a corresponding number, 1-7, which theoretically makes it an ordinal scale, since the corresponding number could be 2-8 or 3-9. However, while there has been some debate over the ordinal/interval compatibility of Likert scales when using descriptive statistics to interpret the results (since technically an ordinal scale cannot be used to measure any correlation), strong arguments have been made that support interpreting the ordinal values assigned to options as interval data, which can then be analyzed using descriptive statistic techniques such as multiple regression analysis or cross-tabulation (Brown 2011).

Finally, I attempted to incorporate pretesting into my survey. This is important because I needed to test for the meaning (clarity) of the questions and

respondent interest in regards to my survey (i.e. the survey should not take longer than ten minutes) (Converse and Presser 1986, 54). For “meaning,” I pretested to ensure that all aspects of each question are understood. Is the vocabulary clear? Does the participant understand the question? Are the answer choices given clarifying or confusing? While it is impossible to know if a potential participant is interested in my topic or not, there are some things that can be pretested in order to ensure that the survey will not reduce a respondent’s interest over the course of the survey. I pretested to assess if the survey was too long, if the survey had an appropriate “flow” and whether or not the instructions were internally consistent (Converse and Presser 1986, 55-61).

1.2 Limitations

I had considered an additional variable that would have been very useful in my analysis, but one that I was not able to incorporate into my survey. I believe that the knowledge a participant has about the drone program could be a compounding factor in determining the outcome of the dependent variable (the support for drone usage). However, in a short survey it is difficult to ascertain just what “level” of knowledge a participant has. A simple question such as “how familiar are you with the drone program” might not ask enough. However, if more specific questions were asked, to which only a very small number of the respondents knew the answer, it could lead one to believe that the majority of respondents had almost no knowledge of the program. A “familiarity” question could be asked along with more specific questions, but if the answers did not match

up (e.g., a respondent says he or she is familiar but answers the more specific questions incorrectly), then I would have no real way of gauging the participant's knowledge. If I or another researcher chooses to expand on the research presented here, I would most certainly choose to add this element to the survey.

1.3 Sample and Population

In order to keep the focus narrow and enhance the credibility of the survey findings, the target population chosen included Virginians living in either Albemarle County or the City of Charlottesville. This particular population was chosen because it is the only population that I could feasibly sample given my timeframe and resource constraints (Also, it is interesting to note that the City of Charlottesville was the first U.S. city to pass legislation banning the use of drones and it will therefore be interesting to see how residents feel about drone usage outside of the United States).

My sampling procedure involved a mix of snowball sampling and “taking what is readily available” (Stephan and McCarthy 1958, 44). Snowball sampling is described as a “non-random” procedure, by which I used my initial contacts to reach participants in my target population (Pierce 2008, 91). In this case, I used local connections to put me in contact with local political party organizers. This included Richard Brewer, the Chair of the Albemarle County Democratic Committee, Mike Basille, the President of the Jefferson Area Tea Party, Cindi Burket, Chairwoman of the Albemarle County Republican Committee, and C.J.

Hatcher along with Chardon Jenks, Chairwoman and Program chair, respectively, of the Albemarle County Republican Women's League. Through their efforts, I was able to reach out to a responsive audience that was arguably more interested in this topic than a random respondent might have been due to their involvement in a local political organization. This was beneficial because one of the main concerns with a 7-point Likert scale is that allowing for the "neutral" option can be risky, especially in this case, where much of the information about the drone program is relatively new and general knowledge among the U.S. public about the U.S.' use of drones overseas is somewhat low (Murray 2013).

1.4 Sample and Population Limitations

The limitations here were considerable. I did not have the time or resources to conduct a large survey and even with the population limitations I was still unable to reach the 1% threshold. Yet, this would not seem to be a fatal flaw, since a "National Sample" is generally considered to be around one thousand respondents (Murray 2013) for a population of over three hundred million, and my target population is only around one hundred and fifty thousand. A simple statistical analysis suffices to show whether a relationship exists between questions. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis will be used to determine which demographic variables, if any, shift in their statistical significance from question to question. I cannot assert that my findings will be generalizable to any population outside of my target range and even generalizing within my target range may prove

difficult, which is why I will not focus on the explanatory power of the regression models but, rather, on any clear shifts in a variable's influence within the models.

As noted, the survey itself is short, with only twelve questions, half of them devoted to demographics. As will be explained later, the questions were chosen to represent three different scenarios. The positive side to this approach is it widens potential avenues for further research. As we will see, different scenarios produce different results, which warrant further research into these areas. The drawback is, as mentioned above, that with only one question per scenario, the strength of the analyses suffers. If the survey had been longer, more questions could have been devoted to each scenario. However, I knew from the beginning that the survey would have to be kept short for practical reasons concerning the nature of its administration. It was assumed early on in this project that random 'cold-calling' would be used. I therefore believed that, in order to ensure the respondents' willingness to continue with the survey, it needed to be kept short, as people are apt to hang up if they think the survey is too long; not to mention that getting someone to agree to take a survey via cold call is unlikely. While these cold calls did not take place, the alternative option that presented itself also required me to keep the survey short. As mentioned earlier, through the generosity of local party organizers I was able to attend political meetings from local Republicans, Democrats and Tea Partiers. Since they were gracious enough to allow me to interrupt their proceedings, I wanted to keep my intrusion short.

The purpose of this project should be seen as an attempt to find out whether or not drones make it easier for people to choose intervention, or if drones, in fact, encourage use of lethal force to some degree. If there seems to be a prevalent opinion, then my experiment could be expanded by another researcher who has funding. If there does not seem to be a strong opinion, this is also an important finding that further research could review on a larger scale. If I were able to find any correlations between my dependent and independent variable then this would only add to the potential need to expand this project.

CHAPTER II

THE DRONE PROGRAM

2.1 Brief Introduction to the Program

Since the first drone strike in 2002 against suspected Al Qaeda members (Sifton 2012), the United States has conducted hundreds of other strikes in Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and even the Philippines. For the most part, The Bush and Obama administrations were able to keep all elements of America's drone program out of public view. Each administration's ability to keep the program secret for so long was due to a number of factors. Generally, when a strike occurred outside of a theater of war, such as Yemen or Pakistan, those countries would attribute it to their security forces and thus deny any U.S. involvement. Likewise, the United States would also deny having any involvement as it did in the first strike in Yemen and the first strike in Pakistan in 2004 against Nek Muhammad (then a prominent Pashtun militant and leader of Pakistani Mujahideen in the tribal areas of Pakistan)(Mazzetti 2013: 108-10). Furthermore, most of the strikes were carried out by the CIA, while a smaller number have been carried out by the highly secretive but now renowned Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the same organization responsible for the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in

Abbottabad, Pakistan. The CIA is protected from disclosing any activities under Title 50 of the United States Code and JSOC is only required to report to Congress that ‘direct action’ occurred but no specifics (Zenko 2013).

Not surprisingly, public knowledge about drones over the past decade has been severely limited. In fact, a study conducted by Monmouth University claims that 15% of Americans know ‘nothing at all’ and 25% know ‘just a little’ about America’s overseas drone program (Murray 2013). The fact that the drone program was and continues to be a key instrument of Obama’s foreign policy is certainly interesting for a president who is a Democrat, but the lack of public knowledge, albeit through no fault of the public, is striking. Yet, even with 40% of the public somewhat in the dark there have still been polls conducted regarding U.S. public opinion and drones. So far, the research that has been conducted on the drone program is very good but lacking in sufficient quantity, a characteristic that certainly applies to public opinion polls and the drone program.

2.2 Evolution of the Drone Program

One of the most important questions one has to ask when looking into public opinion about the drone program is, how did the U.S. clandestine drone program come into existence and how did the CIA – an institution that has traditionally been tasked with human intelligence and banned from political assassinations since 1976 (CNN Law Center 2002) – end up controlling, for the most part, this targeted killing program? Since 2001, a few investigative journalists have sought to trace the

origins and development of the program, and although much of the information has yet to be declassified, enough data exists to present the audience with a clear and understandable picture of what has been happening in this area.

The post-9/11 world brought about many changes in how the international community prevents and responds to terrorism. The most prominent changes occurred in the United States of America as the attacks unsettled the very social and political foundations of American society. National security seemed to become the one and only issue. Aside from the military interventions that followed, over 263 different federal agencies were either created or reconfigured in the wake of the 9/11, the defense budget was increased to over \$500 billion per year, and now more than 1200 government organizations and over 1900 private companies conduct work related to counterterrorism (Villemez 2011).

Since 2001, national security has remained a key issue for Americans, alongside the unemployment rate and general health of the national economy (Pew Research Center [PRC] 2010). The clearest manifestation of Americans' desire to bolster their national security apparatus came in the form of the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), which put the United States at war with any country where Al Qaeda may be operating (Mazzetti 2013: 77). Previously the operations conducted by the United States military were large-scale and seemingly overt. However, post 9/11, alongside the very public invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, core changes began occurring within the Pentagon and the CIA. While the

invasions served their purposes, the Bush administration understood that Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda commanders did not operate in one area alone. In order to track down, capture, and/or kill those responsible for the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration believed it would have to adopt a global strategy one that allowed the United States to strike rapidly and effectively anywhere and anytime. However, this would require not only a secret army, but also a network of spies who could provide this army with reliable and actionable intelligence.

The intelligence failures that took place prior to 9/11 were embarrassing for all aspects of the American intelligence community, but particularly for the CIA, which had been tracking bin Laden since the 1990s. One of the main issues in the hunt for bin Laden was timing. President Clinton decided towards the end of his two terms in office to post two submarines armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles in the Arabian Sea in the hopes of receiving a reliable intelligence tip-off that could enable his officials to quickly approve a missile strike on bin Laden's location (Mazzetti 2013: 89). However, any intelligence gathered on bin Laden came too late for these strikes to be approved; to order such a strike, the President would have to know for certain that bin Laden would be where he was supposed to be when the missile reached its target. The CIA broached many different ideas as to how they could find a reliable way to actually get rapid and real-time surveillance on bin Laden, rather than relying on relayed information from assets on the ground that always came too late (Mazzetti 2013: 90).

The United States military acquired drones in 1985 from Israeli Aircraft Industries and the drone, called ‘Pioneer’, was used in Operation Desert Storm (Michel 2013). Later, having further developed drone technology, the MQ-1 Predator was used by the CIA (Mazzetti 2013: 90-91) and the United States Air Force (USAF) during the Balkan wars to assist in military operations (Erhard 2010). Nevertheless, by 2000, the Predator drone was not that widely known within the U.S. military apparatus and intelligence community, nor was the idea of using the CIA to set up covert drone bases overseas in order to conduct real-time surveillance runs. Yet, a few prescient officials did see the enormous potential that a clandestine drone program had to offer. Richard Clarke served under both presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton as White House counterterrorism advisor. Clarke was against the idea of ‘messy’ covert action because, as he said, “we’re not like that. We’re not Mossad” (Mazzetti 2013: 88). However, he did realize that when such a high value target, like bin Laden, presented itself, the United States needed to have an option to neutralize it, and neutralize it quickly.

Clarke turned to Charles Allen, a senior CIA analyst who had served in the agency for over forty years (Mazzetti 2013: 90). Allen consulted with the Department of Defense and through these consultations the idea of using a Predator drone for long-range surveillance came up (Mazzetti 2013: 90). The ability to find, observe and track a target in real-time (or, slightly delayed time) would be an incredible leap forward in the realm of signal intelligence (SIGINT). At this time, the Predator did not have the capacity to carry any type of weapon whatsoever, but

if a Predator were able to locate a target, then perhaps a cruise missile strike would be possible. Allen brought his idea to Clarke, who called a White House meeting where he invited two other agency officials: Cofer Black, the chief of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center (CTC) and Richard Blee, the head of the unit tasked with hunting bin Laden (Mazzetti 2013: 91). Black, Blee and Allen convinced Clarke that a surveillance drone program was necessary and with the support of the White House, Allen managed to push through the initial opposition that was thrown up by CIA Director George Tenet and Deputy Director for Operations, James Pavitt. Predator surveillance flights over Afghanistan began in September 2000 (Mazzetti 2013: 90).

Sometime after the flights over Afghanistan began, a Predator managed to spot a truck convoy that CIA analysts believed to be carrying Osama bin Laden near a place called Tarnak Farms, a known home to bin Laden near Kandahar (Sifton 2012: 2). With the supposed bin Laden on the screen, CIA officials quickly relayed the information to the White House in hopes that the submarines sitting in the Arabian Sea for some time would finally be put to their intended use. However, as the White House officials informed those at the CIA watching bin Laden, it would take at least six hours to go through the launch protocols and there was no way of knowing whether bin Laden would actually be there when the missile struck (Mazzetti 2013: 93-94). The missile strike was not approved and less than a year later, the events of 9/11 took place. The Predator would soon turn from an observer into a killer.

Far from Afghanistan, engineers at Indian Springs Air Force Auxiliary Field were working to find a way to arm a drone. Their testing had been accelerated at the request of the CIA, but most of the details behind the CIA's request had been kept classified (Mazzetti 2013: 94). Within a matter of months the armed Predator was born, but debate was still ongoing within the CIA over the legality of such a weapon. Aside from the obvious prohibition against the CIA carrying out assassinations, military operations were for the military, not the CIA. Furthermore, as Mazzetti (2013: 99) writes, quoting Lt. General John Campbell, CIA's Director of Military Support at the time:

The CIA is different. They have much less protection. They can be operating under the provisions of a presidential finding where you get a piece of paper with the president's signature that says, 'I authorize you to do these things'. Then, the next administration can come in and Justice decides that the finding was questionable and maybe even illegal—and guess what?—those guys are personally liable for the things they did.

Yet, none of these concerns seemed to matter after 9/11. The AUMF gave the CIA the authorization it needed to counter Al-Qaeda anytime, anywhere and by any means necessary. As stated earlier, the first drone strike, conducted by the CIA alone, was conducted on February 4, 2002 in Afghanistan (Sifton 2012, 1). The U.S. has since carried out five hundred targeted killings, 98% of which were drone strikes (Zenko 2014b).

2.2 Drones Under Obama

The drone program came to life under President George W. Bush, but only under President Obama did the program truly come to fruition. Under Bush, fifty drone strikes occurred, while Obama has authorized the rest (over 450 and counting). Obama, together with his counterterrorism advisor John Brennan (now CIA Director), turned the drone program and targeted killings into what some have argued to be his sole foreign policy vis-à-vis Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. For example, as Gregory Johnson, a leading expert on Yemen stated, “I don’t believe the U.S. has a Yemen policy. What the U.S. has is a counterterrorism strategy that applies to Yemen” (Rohde 2012). President Obama claims to be aware of this accusation and has insisted that, although he understands that drones can “lead a President and his team to view drone strikes as a cure-all for terrorism,” creating “reservoirs of goodwill” through foreign aid and “patiently supporting transitions to democracy...will serve as a rebuke to violent extremists” (Obama 2013).

Perhaps this is what President Obama would like to believe, because to say that a secret and seemingly interminable war against terrorists in multiple countries is the only available option, while at the same time attempting to follow through on a campaign promise to end both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is not necessarily the best trade-off, but, then again, drones have been effective to a certain degree. As Daniel Byman (2013: 2) explains:

U.S. drones have killed an estimated 3,300 al Qaeda, Taliban and other jihadist operatives in Pakistan and Yemen. That number includes over 50 senior leaders...Drones have also undercut terrorist’s ability to communicate and to train new recruits...Drones

have turned al Qaeda's command and training structures into a liability, forcing the group to choose between having no leaders and risking dead leaders...Prosecuting detainees in a federal or military court is difficult because often the intelligence against terrorists is inadmissible...and given the fact that the United States is trying to close, rather than expand, the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba...It has become more politically palatable for the United States to kill rather than detain suspected terrorists.

The CIA's drone program under Obama has indubitably done irreparable damage to al-Qaeda's global network. It has allowed America to take its war on terror into the some of the most remote, dangerous regions of the world with absolutely zero risk to U.S. personnel. The strikes themselves create less collateral damage than say a cruise missile strike or all-out assault by the Pakistani military into hostile territory at the request of the U.S. Moreover, the governments of Pakistan and Yemen have made it quite clear that while they publicly decry the U.S.'s use of drones in their territory, they secretly give it their support. After it became known that the U.S. was responsible for the very first drone strike in Yemen in 2002, the relations between the U.S. and Yemen soured a bit, but drone strikes began again in 2009 under Obama and have continued since. The Yemeni Parliament voted in December 2013 to ban drone strikes in a non-binding resolution (Almasmari 2013a), but over a dozen U.S. drone strikes were carried out in 2014 alone (Bureau of Investigative Journalism [BIJ] 2014). Likewise, in response to a botched NATO airstrike in November 2011 that killed 25 Pakistani soldiers (Masood 2011), Pakistan's parliament closed NATO supply routes, and demanded that the U.S. stop all drone strikes, and even forced the CIA to stop using Shamsi airfield to house its drones (Woods 2011); yet, the pause in strikes lasted only 55 days and on January

10, 2012 (BIJ 2011), the CIA carried out another strike inside Pakistan, and has since carried out nearly 100 more.

There is no denying that America's increasing reliance on drones has been effective in many ways. At a time where the Department of Defense (DoD) is looking to make up to \$75 billion in spending cuts over the next two years, the use of drones in the military is likely to thrive due to how inexpensive it is compared to other programs (Department of Defense 2014). For example, the cost of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program is estimated to reach almost \$400 billion while the unit cost per jet is around \$120 million (Oestergaard 2014). While the DoD does not plan to purchase any more F-15 Eagles in the coming years, it is allocating almost \$800 million to the F-15 program over the next two years for Research, Development and Upgrade purposes (Oestergaard 2014). Moreover, the operational cost of one F-15 is around \$41,000/hr (Thompson 2013). When one compares these figures with the total cost of the MQ-9 Reaper program (the largest and most effective multi-role drone) at \$10 billion, the cost per unit of approximately \$14 million (Oestergaard 2014) and the operational cost of \$4,700/hr makes it less surprising that the U.S. Air Force is looking to expand its drone pilot force from 1,300 to 1,650 by 2017 (Chow 2013) and that the Pentagon purchased 24 MQ-9 Reaper drones (12 of which went to the Air Force) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 (Mead 2015) and will purchase 29 MQ-9 Reapers in FY 2016, all of which are for the Air Force alone (Gettinger 2015). The Army has requested 17 MQ-1C Gray Eagles (similar to the MQ-9 Reaper), the Navy and Marines will be getting three

long-endurance, high-altitude MQ-4C Tritons, at the cost of \$549 million, and the Air Force will also be allocating \$50 million to build another drone base in Agadez, Niger; and, of course, Research and Development for drones within each division of the U.S. Armed Forces will be boosted at varying levels (Gettinger 2015).

While there are many positives to using drones in the military, their full ‘potential’ was realized first by the CIA and it is here where problems arise. Critics of the drone program have presented a number of reasons as to why it should either be banned or fundamentally modified. In terms of law, the U.S. government claims that targeted killings via drone strikes are legal both under international law, as these strikes represent the U.S.’ right to self-defense (albeit *preemptive*) under Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic 2012), and U.S. law, as authorized under the AUMF, which gave the U.S. the right to counter al-Qaeda and its affiliates anywhere in the world. Although the practice of “signature strikes” has apparently stopped (Gannon 2013), its prior use did put U.S. moral and legal justifications for the program on shakier ground. The identities of individuals targeted by “signature strikes” were often unknown by the CIA, but they became viable targets because, after hours or days of being observed by a drone, analysts concluded that these persons exhibited suspicious patterns of behavior thought to be "signatures" of terrorists (Huffington 2013). Moreover, these vague parameters made acquiring the authorization to conduct ‘crowd killings’ – targeting groups of suspicious individuals instead of just one individual at a time – easier to justify (Klaidman 2012). It does not take a legal

expert to understand that killing an individual, let alone a group of individuals, because they *look* like terrorists is hardly a defensible case and most likely resulted in the deaths of innocent Pakistanis.

Furthermore, although it is impossible to know how many terrorists the U.S. ‘creates’ simply by using drones, blowback cannot be ignored. The recent film, “Unmanned: America’s Drone Wars” (Greenwald 2013), documents how the drone program, according to the documentary’s producer and others in the film, is causing more harm than good. Citing a specific case, Greenwald shows how in 2011 a *Jirga*, or an assembly of tribal elders called together in order to resolve a dispute, was targeted by a drone that resulted in the deaths of 42 people, including many of the elders responsible for holding their respective communities together. It was a public event with many witnesses, who, after being interviewed, explained that they had no prior qualms with the United States, but after the strike vowed to take up arms against the United States. In the film, Lawrence Wilkerson, a retired U.S. Army Colonel and the former Chief of Staff to Colin Powell, explains that, “the Vietnam body count as a metric was flawed. It did not really give you a measure of how successful you were being, in fact, it lead you astray in assessing that. And the drone strikes are the same way. They’re the wrong metric. Tell me how we’re winning if every time we kill one we create ten?” (Greenwald 2013). It is no secret that the drone program is extremely unpopular in Pakistan (Friedersdorf 2013) but a look at this Pew Research poll (See **Figure 2**) will explain just how unpopular the program is in general. The possible reasons for this unmistakably large contrast will

be discussed later but it is clear that the U.S. public is almost singularly alone in its support for the use of drones.

Finally, there are the issues of precedent and proliferation. As of now, there are only three known countries that have used armed drones to authorize attacks outside their respective sovereign territories: the U.S.A., Israel, and the United Kingdom. The U.S. is undoubtedly the leader in every category, from number of active drones to strikes carried out, people killed, etc. However, it will not remain the unquestioned leader for much longer. As many as 87 nations possess and use drones for surveillance purposes, and of those, 26 have either bought or are currently developing drones equivalent in size to the MQ-1 Reaper (Taylor 2013). Others, like Iran and China, are working hard to produce drones similar to the current most advanced U.S. hunter-killer drone, the MQ-9 Reaper (Taylor 2013). In fact, in a report by the Iranian Tasnim News Agency, Iran claims to have made an exact replica of a U.S. RQ-170 Sentinel drone, which was “brought down by the Iranian Armed Forces' electronic warfare unit which commandeered the aircraft and safely landed it.” It further adds that, “Iran managed to reverse engineer most parts of the drone” (Lendon 2014) though this claim has since been disputed. In an apparent confirmation that these events did occur, President Obama actually asked for Iran to return the drone. Moreover, America isn't the only country capable of producing and selling drones. Plenty of countries, including Russia, India and Germany have purchased Israeli drones and China is in the market as well.¹ Even

¹Note: Please refer to New America Foundation section in the Appendix for a detailed list of countries' drone capabilities/programs.

non-state actors have acquired drones. In fact, in one extraordinary case in September 2014, Hezbollah claims to have used an armed drone to strike (video included) what is believed to have been Al-Nusra's headquarters in northern Lebanon, which claimed the lives of 23 alleged terrorists (JPost Staff 2014). Furthermore, claims have surfaced over the past several months that the Islamic State (IS) gained the use of some surveillance drones. In an apparent confirmation of these claims, the U.S. Central Command confirmed that it had destroyed an IS drone during airstrikes between March 17th and 18th (United States Central Command 2015)

The U.S. is still considered the most powerful actor in the realm of drones, but that will change, and as Micah Zenko (2013a: 4), an expert on drones on the Council on Foreign Relations, explains:

In this uncharted territory, U.S. policy provides a powerful precedent for other states and nonstate actors that will increasingly deploy drones with potentially dangerous ramifications. Reforming its practices could allow the United States to regain moral authority in dealings with other states and credibly engage with the international community to shape norms for responsible drone use. The current trajectory of U.S. drone strike policies is unsustainable. Without reform from within, drones risk becoming an unregulated, unaccountable vehicle for states to deploy lethal force with impunity.

There is no question as to whether or not there will indeed be a global proliferation of drones; the drone industry itself is projected to be worth nearly \$90 billion in the next ten years (Teal Group 2013). There is little the United States can do that would allow it to retain its already deteriorating monopoly on drones, both armed and unarmed. However, as Zenko and other critics have stated, there needs to be a

clear precedent, which would require more transparency so that regulations could be implemented and reviews of the U.S. program conducted, either by Congress or some other federal organization, and that is something the CIA is highly unlikely to embrace. Both President Obama and CIA Director John Brennan are clearly aware of the delicate problem they face. According to *The Washington Post*, both individuals were aware of the need for a manual or ‘playbook’ that would establish clear guidelines for targeted killing operations undertaken by the CIA (Miller *et al.* 2013). That was near completion in January 2013 and some of the issues addressed in this ‘playbook’ “included the process for adding names to kill lists, the legal principles that govern when U.S. citizens can be targeted overseas and the sequence of approvals required when the CIA or U.S. military conducts drone strikes outside war zones” (Miller *et al.* 2013). Of course, one of the special conditions surrounding Obama’s approval of this second-term counterterrorism manual is that CIA drone strikes in Pakistan be exempt from these guidelines for up to the next two years (Miller *et al.* 2013). Yet, even with this manual, the question still remains: can a clear precedent be set by the CIA – an organization that by its very nature is unable or unwilling to disclose anything about its practices – so that the international community is less likely to abuse its ability to use armed drones when the times comes? Many are of the opinion that drone operations should be in the hands of the U.S. military, which brings us to the potential future of the U.S. drone program.

2.3 Future of the Drone Program

George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was first introduced to the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in 2001 and was apparently mesmerized by the show put on by the Delta Force operatives and Navy SEALs, of which units JSOC was comprised (Mazzetti 2013: 63). As Mazzetti (2013: 75-76) describes:

Rumsfeld saw the appeal in JSOC's independence. It could be a strike force answering directly to the Defense Secretary and the president, not under the control of some four-star general worried about his turf...If Rumsfeld could throw money at the command, allowing Delta Force and SEAL team six to enlarge their ranks and buy enough equipment for lengthy overseas deployments, he figured he could send it virtually anywhere.

Since the AUMF gave Rumsfeld the ability to operate essentially anywhere, all he had to do was wait until JSOC was fully operational. During that time, it is hard to imagine that Rumsfeld envisioned JSOC running America's drone program, as he was more interested in turning this highly secretive component of America's military into a number of global counterterrorism squads. Yet, with the increasingly asymmetrical nature of warfare in which the U.S. and its allies have become involved, it may now make more sense to combine America's two asymmetrical responses (JSOC's special forces and the CIA's drones) to this challenge under the roof of one organization, the JSOC. Moreover, JSOC is not unfamiliar with operating drones. While the CIA conducts most of the drone strikes carried out in Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan, it is important to understand that JSOC is also responsible for carrying out a number of its own strikes (Dilanian 2014).

The desire to shift the drone program from the CIA to the U.S. military was articulated in 2013 after a wave of scrutiny focused on Obama and his administration for its lack of transparency surrounding the drone program (Dilanian 2013). In response, during his speech in May 2013 at the National Defense University, President Obama explained that he also believes the drone program should shift to the Pentagon to allow, among other things, more transparency (Klaidman 2013). Moreover, current CIA Director, John Brennan, also believes that the CIA “should not be doing traditional military activities and operations” (Miller 2013). This was a serious statement from the man who is considered to be the one who pushed for heavier reliance on the CIA’s drone program as Obama’s previous counterterrorism advisor in 2009-2013, a period during which the most drone strikes occurred killing some 1,500 people in Pakistan alone. (BIJ 2014b) Senator John McCain also believes that the “the majority of it [the drone program] can be conducted by the Department of Defense (Schmitt 2014), while Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif) says that the efforts to shift the C.I.A’s lethal drone operations into the hands of the DoD represent a “goal broadly shared within the administration” (Miller 2013).

Yet, obstacles remain. It has been almost two years since Obama and Brennan both expressed their desire to shift the CIA drone program and so far no progress has occurred. This is because Congress, in an unusually direct way, added a clause to the federal budget plan that would restrict any attempt to transfer the

program outside of the CIA (Auner 2014). A major reason for this congressional obstacle could be that some inside Congress, including influential Senator Dianne Feinstein, who was, until recently, the Chairwoman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, believe JSOC cannot be trusted with the program. As stated earlier, JSOC may have some experience with drones, but mistakes have also been made. This mistrust could stem from a botched JSOC drone strike in Yemen on December 12, 2013, where at least six innocent people in a wedding convoy were killed (Schmitt 2014). U.S. military officials maintain that no civilians were killed in this strike, but “U.S. officials have said that both the CIA and the National Counterterrorism Center, which was directed by the White House to review the operation, concluded that civilians were probably injured or killed” (Miller 2014). The fact that the CIA chose to contradict JSOC’s version of events regarding this strike could mean that Brennan may have had second thoughts about parting with a program with which he has so closely associated himself. Furthermore, the victims of this strike were paid a total of around \$1 million (\$60,000 each), which, according to one expert, was unlikely to have been financed by the Yemeni government alone (Miller 2014). Yemen suspended JSOC’s ability to carry out airstrikes in Yemen, which the U.S. has abided by so far.

It could be that the CIA has simply become too adept at its drone operations for Obama, Brennan or Congress to consider moving it elsewhere. One congressional aide stated that “The amount of time that goes into a strike package at CIA is longer and more detailed than a strike package put together at the Defense

Department" and that "Their standards of who is a combatant are different. Standards for collateral damage are different" (Dilanian 2014). It has been nearly 19 months since Obama mentioned the proposed 'shift' to the Pentagon, with no real developments to speak of occurring since then. It would be more prudent to assume that Obama's speech at NDU and the subsequent interviews given by John Brennan about the drone program (Reid 2013) were crafted in a way to deflect criticism by openly acknowledging the drone program (which may seem to some as 'being more transparent'), defending it and then promising more transparency through this proposed 'shift' to the Pentagon. However, even if the program were transferred away from the CIA, the supposed transparency that would follow is minimal at best. As stated earlier, even though the U.S. military, including its highly secretive JSOC component, are governed by rules that require it to report to Congress, the extent to which JSOC informs Congress of its operations amounts to acknowledging 'direct actions' that occur, but never with any specifics (Zenko 2013a: 8). For the time being, it appears as though America's drone program will remain under the control of John Brennan and the CIA and it will most likely remain so until the end of Obama's term. Moreover, it would not be surprising if it remained so under the next president's watch.

In regards to the question of lethal action and the President's willingness to use it, his drone campaign paints an easily discernible pattern. Obama's desire to back the drone program began almost immediately with his war on terror. Over his two terms in office, drone attacks grew beyond anything imagined by the Bush

administration. In December 2009, less than a year after taking office, Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. By this point, he had also authorized more drone strikes than George W. Bush had approved during his entire presidency (Klaidman 2012) and by now he has set a record that no President may ever match. The head of the CTC told the Washington Post in 2011, "We're killing these sons of bitches faster than they can grow them" (Klaidman 2012). Although Obama is not the first President to authorize drone strikes overseas, he is the first to do so in such an aggressive and unrestricted manner. Numbers do not lie. For Obama, drones made the choice to pursue lethal action against known or supposed threats much easier to make.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC OPINION

3.1 The Concept of Public Opinion

Although it is not the intent of this work to make any new conclusions or attempt to critique or discredit existing theories on public opinion, it is necessary that the audience understand some of the most important debates and ideas that have taken place in the U.S. throughout the 20th and into the 21st century (though the term ‘public opinion’ was coined in the 18th century)(Habermas 1989). The nature of public opinion along with the multiple theories that surround it and the complex methods used for testing it make it a difficult subject to fully grasp. This is mostly due to the fact that, as a subject, public opinion scholars, analysts, pollsters etc, attempt to quantify humans’ attitudes, behaviors and/or preferences towards, essentially, an infinite number of options. Fortunately, in the United States, public opinion is a subject that has received a significant amount of attention over the past one hundred years, which should come as no surprise, as the very foundation of the United States rests upon democratic principles and ‘public opinion’ is considered to embody the voice of the people. Public opinion regarding

certain issues does exist and is quantifiable to an extent; however, the question that theorists and scholars continue to debate over is just *how* influential U.S. public opinion is on politicians and policy formation; specifically, foreign policy.

While it is commonplace to use the term today, the very idea of ‘public opinion’ did not fully come into existence until the Age of the Enlightenment. Rousseau was the first to actually use the word *opinion publique*, albeit not in the same sense it is used today as the term *opinion* was originally understood as something that was uncertain, uncritical and lacking reason or devoid of critical thought (Habermas 1989: 92-93). Shortly thereafter Edmund Burke proclaimed that there was such a thing as ‘general opinion’ that existed in society, albeit in the societies’ of free countries, where “the opinion of the public that put its reason to use was no longer just opinion; it did not arise from mere inclination but from private reflection upon public affairs and from their public discussion” (Habermas 1989: 94). The term ‘public opinion’ came to mean the result of deliberations and discussions of an enlightened public about the nature of the current social order. As Habermas (1989: 96) explains, “it [public opinion] did not rule, but the enlightened ruler would have to follow its insight.” Though many would be hesitant to name the U.S. president a ‘ruler’ rather than a ‘leader,’ we experience a similar phenomenon today in the U.S. The President, along with other elected officials, has a campaign team within which a division exists for the sole purpose of testing the public’s opinion about a variety of issues from social to economic to foreign.

Yet, the liberalist/pluralist notion that the public is capable of holding an opinion or sets of opinions that are measurable, rational and stable, and that it is in each respective leader's best interest to take these opinions into account when making decisions, was not immediately accepted into mainstream thought and academia. There was and remains a realist opposition composed of those who believe that the majority of the public is incapable of possessing either the intellectual fortitude or attentiveness to matters outside the realm of one's self that is necessary for the formation of an informed, rational opinion. The realist side of the debate sees the public as capricious, emotional and, at times, dangerous. Even the founding fathers of the United States shared the concerns that public opinion is apt to fluctuate and be susceptible to delusions, which is why Madison, Hamilton and others thought to constrain popular sovereignty (Page and Shapiro 1992: 3). Although the more liberal side of this debate made significant headway in proving the importance of public opinion in the United States, both sides continue to battle. However, public opinion itself is too broad a topic for the purposes of this work. Since U.S. military drones are a foreign policy issue, it would be prudent to understand the effect of U.S. public opinion on U.S. foreign policy.

3.2 Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy

Here, the debate between realists and liberals over public opinion continues with similar, but more specific arguments. Theorists and scholars have continued to disagree over the role that the public, especially the U.S. public, plays in the foreign policy decision-making process. For the most part, liberals have argued that in democracies, where the public has a significant role, leaders are restrained from

being overly combative and more peaceful policies prevail. These claims rest on Kant's theory of 'democratic peace,' which argues that republics are more likely to avoid war than non-republics since those who have a choice would much rather avoid destruction and death (Holsti 2004: 4). Jeremy Bentham, Rousseau and James Mill also championed the liberalist approach by advocating the importance of the people and their opinions on foreign affairs. Their view was that diplomacy conducted in secret and dependent on the whims of leaders was ineffective and dangerous.

However, on the other side of this debate realists argue that the public is generally uninformed, emotional and irrational when it comes to foreign policy (Holsti 1992: 440). It would be much better, realists argue, for the public to focus on local issues and leave the foreign policy to the better informed, more rational state representatives. For realists who are governed by a 'balance-of-power' mentality, trying to explain to the public why alliances with brutal dictatorships are necessary because they preserve national interests is a waste of time and the public will most likely remain unable to understand the relationship as a means to an end rather than an end (Holsti 2004: 6). Realists are very skeptical of public opinion and view it more as a hindrance than anything else when it comes to formulating foreign policy. As stated earlier, even Alexander Hamilton held similar pessimistic views about the involvement of the American public in policy making and when it came to foreign affairs he believed the senate could act as a "defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions (Holsti 2004: 6).

The debate surrounding public opinion generally fluctuates according to the existence and degree of conflict. World War I, which was the first so-called ‘public relations war,’ provided an outlet for both sides to argue their point (Holsti 1992: 440). President Wilson was seen as a champion of the liberal cause who believed that the war was the result of secret diplomacy and an uninformed public. During the war, Wilson stated that, “the counsels of plain men have become on all hands more simple and straightforward and more unified than the counsels of sophisticated men of affairs... That is why I have said that this is a people’s war, not a statesman’s. Statesmen must follow the clarified common thought or be broken” (Holsti 2004: 10). Yet, even with a President so outspoken about the role of public opinion, not all shared Wilson’s views. Journalist Walter Lippmann, who was first the assistant to the Secretary of War, published works in which he claimed that the gap between the average citizen and foreign affairs could not be reconciled (Lippmann as cited in Holsti 1992: 440-1). He seriously doubted whether or not the average citizen could make any contribution to the realm of foreign affairs because a citizen is generally far removed from it. He believed that the average person was more concerned with daily life and even if he or she did devote some attention to foreign affairs the information they would get would be incorrect or distorted. Lippmann greatly distrusted the ability of the media to accurately portray international happenings and argued that even the widely read, highly regarded *New York Times* produced stories that were very misleading (Holsti 2004: 13). The inability of the

U.S. and Allied Powers to stop German aggression due to the isolationist backlash that WWI produced put the realists and skeptics at the forefront of the debate.

In the years leading up to World War II and ever since, the opinion poll, most notably as introduced by George Gallup, became an empirical method for testing public opinion. After having correctly predicted the 1936 election when another poll, one that was administered by *Literary Digest* incorrectly forecasted that Alf Landon would win, Gallup's method of using a more representative sample rather than simply more participants (*Literary Digest's* poll claimed to have sent out nearly ten million ballots) proved to be the more reliable scientific polling method (Holsti 2004: 15). Gallup's polls throughout the 30s showed that the U.S. public was still very much against U.S. involvement in Europe and that up until Pearl Harbor the overall sentiment was an isolationist one. The sudden American shift towards intervention was certainly understandable after the Pearl Harbor attack but many, including Roosevelt, worried that it would slip back towards isolationist preferences. Many others who, after WWII, had a very unfavorable view of American public opinion shared this concern and also became skeptical of just how 'scientific' the poll was itself (Holsti 2004: 25). In the aftermath of WWII, Gabriel Almond produced a similar but more damning argument (Almond 1950 as cited in Holsti 1992: 442) of public opinion and together with Lippmann's skepticism it led to the 'Almond-Lippmann consensus' or the 'post-WWII consensus': U.S. public opinion is highly volatile, incoherent and has essentially little impact on a leader's decision (Holsti 1992: 442).

This consensus would remain in place until the Vietnam War, when even Walter Lippmann, who strongly believed in a powerful executive to combat the capriciousness of the public, became a severe critic of President Johnson's handling of the war (Holsti 2004: 41). It was during this era that scholars and pollsters increased their secondary analysis of Gallup polls and became more critical of their ability to measure opinion because their questions were too simple and did not offer the respondent a chance to thoroughly express his or her opinion (Holsti 2004: 42). In order to combat this perceived lack of precision, more independent polls appeared that focused on specific policies rather than broad, over-generalized questions such as "do you support the current American policy regarding country x?" The Verba-Stanford studies, for example, provided evidence of support for some of Johnson's policies in Vietnam but also support for other alternative ones (Holsti 2004: 42).

The 'Almond-Lippmann' consensus began to lose ground following Vietnam and more scholars began to view the public as more rational and less whimsical than it had previously been portrayed. In fact, one of the biggest foundations of the 'Almond-Lippmann' consensus was that the American public was fickle in regard to being either isolationist or interventionist, yet, since 1942 and until 2013 no major survey (Gallup, Harris, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, etc.) recorded a number higher than 40% of respondents who believed it was better to stay out of international affairs (Holsti 2004: 45). Moreover, in their landmark work on public

opinion, Shapiro and Page found that since the 1930s and through the 1980s, “American’s collective policy preferences are real, knowable, differentiated, patterned and coherent” (Page and Shapiro 1992: 383). Page and Shapiro (1992: 16) argue that collective public opinion is rational and stable. Individuals may be ignorant or their answers may change from one day to the next depending on how much new information they are exposed to about a certain topic, but if they change randomly over a period of time then we can discover that a person will show a long-term preference or a central tendency of opinion. Because of this, at any given moment Page and Shapiro (Page and Shapiro 1992, 17) argue:

...the random deviations of individuals from their long-term opinions may well cancel out over a large sample, so that a poll or survey can accurately measure collective preferences as defined in terms of the true or long term preferences of many individual citizens.

Public opinion is important, it does matter and it is measurable. Individually, Americans’ views on the drone program may change each month depending on their level of interest and response to new information. However, collectively Americans continue to approve of the drone program and that is an important distinction (Drake 2013).

In my research, I will look to uncover both individual and collective attitudes surrounding my research question. Are Americans’ decisions regarding overseas military intervention influenced outright when drone are used to augment a military force? What if the force is only comprised of drones? Moreover, if there is an influence exerted, how strong is it? Furthermore, although the sample size is small, the use of regression analysis should provide insight into any smaller, less obvious

potential demographic correlations (independent variables in this case) and the responses for each question. Finally, I hope that my findings will contribute positively to the literature on public opinion.

3.3 Observations Regarding Public Opinion and Drones

Of course, even with all of the research and arguments surrounding public opinion and foreign policy, the subject of this thesis, the drone program and public opinion, is relatively new. This is not to say that the drone program itself is new, as was explained in the previous chapter, but the public's knowledge about the program is still severely limited and, therefore, it would be safe to assume that opinions about the program are still consolidating. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the survey from Monmouth University that found roughly 40% of Americans to still be in the dark about the program took place *after* President Obama's speech defending the drone program at the National Defense University (Obama 2013), after he first admitted that U.S. drones killed 4 Americans in drone strikes (Savage and Baker 2013) and after John Brennan's CIA Director confirmation hearing, which was highly publicized *because* of the fact that he was and is such a strong supporter of the drone program (his hearing was consistently interrupted by anti-drone activists not to mention a 13-hour filibuster by Sen. Rand Paul in which he demanded the White House confirm that it would not use a drone on U.S. soil to kill an American suspected of terrorism) (Finn and Blake 2013). Moreover, in an article titled "Media Coverage of the Drone Program", Tara McKelvey explains that between 2009 and 2011, media coverage of the drone program was "relatively positive with only sporadic reporting on collateral damage"

(Mckelvey 2013: 11). Yet after the drones strike on American-born radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki on September 30, 2011 in Yemen, U.S. media began raising more critical questions about the program and coverage spiked over the next several months, prompting Obama to send John Brennan, then White House counterterrorism advisor, to give a speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center in which he outlined all the justifications for the U.S. targeted killing program and hailed its superior ability to neutralize terrorists (Brennan 2012). Therefore, even though this program is still technically classified, recently there has been considerably more reporting of it and more official commentary clarifying its existence and the methods used.

There is no doubt that the number of Americans familiar with the program has grown day by day. However, by hiding the program from scrutiny for so long, both Bush and Obama were able to mold a favorable narrative about a program that has been over a decade in the making. Before critical pieces starting being published, the only time drones appeared in U.S. media was to show that another successful strike had occurred against Al-Qaeda operatives in some place like Yemen or Pakistan. In fact, as Grant Cohen (2014: 22) explains in his report on “Public Opinion and Drones:”

The analysis of NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN and FOX evening news stories about drones that appeared between 1/1/2000 and 1/1/2014 yielded some revealing results...None of the 115 stories coded as “national security” frames offer debate or comment about issues related to the actual military success. Human rights and law/sovereignty frames do appear, but are most often featured following a major report from an NGO or human rights organization.

The national security frame is the predominant one with the law/sovereignty frame coming in a distant second with only 34 stories over the span of fourteen years (Cohen 2014: 18).² Moreover, as Cohen points out, the ‘sources’ that U.S. media tend to use in stories about drones are individuals who are predominantly military or ex-government (almost always from the U.S. security apparatus, i.e. military, CIA, FBI), which are sources that would be less inclined to oppose or even slightly criticize the drone program (Cohen 2014: 24). Finally, the drone program is something that, unlike many issues in today’s polarized political environment, enjoys broad bipartisan support (Ballhaus 2013). It is natural, then, to see why the program enjoys such high overall public support. In fact, current support for the drone program is hovering around 70%, the highest it has been in three years (Rasmussen Reports 2014).

It is not the intention of this work to argue for or against the drone program in its current state but some suggestions can be made. There are strong, well-argued views on both sides, but as of now it appears that the public is satisfied, or even more than satisfied, with how the U.S. government operates its drone program. Although, again, this is not to say that a majority of the U.S. population has well-informed ideas as to what exactly the program encompasses. Critics of the program have seen their views expressed in the mainstream media within the past few years. Moreover, as previously mentioned, public opinion polls that, in some way or

² Note: this is out of a total of 248 broadcasts.

another, involve questions about the drone program are also a relatively recent development.

Before Brennan publicly acknowledged the program in 2012, it was a topic that most Americans devoted little time reflecting upon. It is difficult to determine if or when the program will lose its popularity among the U.S. public. As shown earlier, drones are *not* popular outside of the U.S. so there's no reason why this could not become the case *within* the U.S. as well, but the reverse is also entirely possible. Moreover, foreign publics may generally hold unfavorable opinion of the U.S. overseas drone program (**Fig 2**), but between 2005 and 2011 the number of countries that had drones, armed and unarmed, rose from 41 to 76 (Government Accountability Office [GAO] 2012). Furthermore, now that the U.S. has relaxed its restrictions on the export of Category I Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS; Category I being drones that have an operational range of at least 300km and a payload of at least 500 kilos)(U.S. Department of State [USDS] 2015), U.S. allies and NATO members will likely start putting in bids for armed drones in an effort to create drone programs of their own (Australia announced it has already sent a handful of Australian airmen to be trained on the MQ-9 Reaper at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico) (Inside Defense 2015)

Any negative shift in U.S. opinion regarding military drones overseas is not likely to happen in the near future, even in the midst of increasing critical scrutiny. Drones allow the U.S. to continue counterterrorism operations in countries where a

government is essentially non-existent, without endangering any military personnel. Obviously, when the U.S. is able to cooperate with the intelligence services of another country it is very beneficial, but if this government collapses, as is currently the case in Yemen, U.S. drones are still able to operate regardless (there have been three, possibly four strikes in Yemen in 2015 already) (Serle 2015), something Obama made very clear in January (Beattle 2015). This does not imply that Special Operations Forces lack the ability to operate in this type of situation as well, but the risks of casualties are much higher. In fact, aside from the operation on Bin Laden's compound in 2011 and a handful of other either successful (i.e. Abu Anas al-Libi) or unsuccessful (i.e. Abdulkadir Mohamed) Special Operations capture/kill missions (Economist 2013), there have only been a total of 3 known attempts (Zenko 2014a) by U.S. forces to capture compared to over 200 attempts to kill. Covert cross-border capture operations have not been Obama's preferred method of eliminating terrorists abroad; simply put, he would rather just kill them. The U.S. public does not seem to oppose this method for now.

In conclusion, the public's view of the drone program may be one that is not fully informed, but it is quite difficult to argue that a fully informed public would have a radically different opinion than the one that currently exists. More critical elements will continue to emerge as long as the U.S. drone program continues to be operated mostly or even in part by the CIA but it is impossible to know whether the public will ever oppose the idea of targeted killings by the U.S. government in general or those directed in particular by the CIA. The polls that have been

administered regarding the drone program rarely mention the CIA as the operator, but there is no question as to whether or not the U.S. military will continue to develop and acquire drones. It will be three years at the end of April 2015 since John Brennan publicly acknowledged America's targeted killing program (Brennan 2012). Support has always remained over 50%, sometimes soaring over 70%. It is difficult to speculate how the program will evolve over the next several years and *if* John Brennan will indeed follow through on his desire to shift the entirety of the CIA's *targeted* killing program to the Pentagon, since the CIA has gotten very capable of killing the people it targets (Hirsch 2014).

What is more important is to try to determine how targeted killings with drones via the CIA and the increased reliance on drones by the military, especially the Air Force, for both intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions and strike missions, influence Americans' perceptions of warfare. One of the strongest critiques leveled against military drones, and the main research question in this thesis, is that drones can significantly lower the threshold for violence. As Sarah Kreps and Micah Zenko (2014) argue,

So far, the United States has had a relative monopoly over the use of such drones, but it cannot count on maintaining that for much longer...And although these new weapons will not transform the international system as fundamentally as did the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, they could still be used in ways that are highly destabilizing and deadly...Countries will not be deterred from launching drone attacks simply because an adversary has drones in its arsenal, too. If anything, the inherent advantages of drones -- most of all, not placing pilots or ground forces at risk of being killed or captured -- have lowered the threshold for the use of force. Spurred by the United States' example, other countries are likely to threaten or conduct drone

strikes in ways that are harmful to U.S. interests, whether by provoking regional adversaries or targeting domestic enemies.

This is something the U.S. needs to be very concerned with. Although the drone revolution will not cause a complete change to the international system, as Kreps and Zenko stated, it has the potential to be very destructive. The findings presented in the next section are only the beginning of what I hope can be a larger project in the future. Although the sample size is small and the scope of the questions limited, the findings allow those interested in the subject of drone proliferation and its potential ramifications a bit of harder data to work with.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction to Survey Findings

Americans are not more prone to use force than any other people on the planet. When their interests are threatened or they perceive a threat, they respond accordingly, though not always *correctly*. America's leaders always attempt to take a rational, calculated approach; at least, that is how they defend their actions. Yet, even 'rational' approaches can be wrong. The 2003 invasion of Iraq represents a notable blunder by most popular and academic accounts and America continues to pay dearly for it, but the administration that authorized it managed to convince themselves, Congress and the American people that it was a rational, sensible undertaking. There is no need to delve into the intricacies of the Iraq War and how an administration could get something so wrong (though, Irving Janis' 'groupthink' (Janis 1972) model is rather convincing), I simply use it because it appears to be a timeless example of the need for *forward thinking* in the realm of U.S. foreign policy.

The War on Terror has created an extreme need for quick and reliable intelligence like never before. With ISR demand far outweighing supply, it is impossible for the U.S. to be everywhere all the time. However, the U.S. does *not* need to be everywhere all the time; instead, drones can allow the U.S. to create a “dynamic presence” (See Fig 4), as Maj. Gen. John Shanahan, Commander, 25th Air Force, stated in his address to the Center for Strategic & International Studies (Shanahan 2014). In his presentation, he goes on to explain that actually the current framework regarding remotely piloted aircraft allocation (RPAs), or drones, is:

...much more about co-com ownership than it is about flexibility and agility....it is, in fact, relatively inflexible. There is a different way of approaching the low supply, high demand problem. Here the focus is on placement not allocation or ownership. For now take drones as the ISR capability under consideration. Dynamic presence would involve establishing a number of fixed global locations postured to accept RPAs on a reasonably short notice...there would be enormous benefits from this approach mostly manifested in the form of global agility. It would enable rapid response on a truly global scale. The ISR capabilities would not be everywhere all the time but instead could be anywhere when needed.

Of course, MQ-9 Reapers certainly have the ability to carry out ISR missions but they are dynamic in themselves as they are both ‘hunters’ and ‘killers’. These unmanned platforms can drastically reduce the amount of time, energy and resources that go into the counterterror doctrine of “find, fix and finish”, or ‘F3,’ (for more info on ‘F3’ see Peritz et al. 2012) as the drone can accomplish each of these three requirements on its own. It is precisely this ability that worries critics of the drone program and why I chose to design a survey that would test the level of Americans’ willingness to intervene with regards to drones. If the U.S. is in fact

heading in the direction that was suggested by Maj. Gen. Shanahan, then it is essential that future research tries to understand two things: First, we need to analyze whether or not the proliferation of drones in the U.S. military (including the CIA), as well as in foreign militaries, and the strategic shift towards ‘dynamic presence’, will indeed lower the threshold for violence for both state and non-state actors alike. Second, and more relevant to this work, more polls need to be administered to the American public so that we may ascertain whether or not Americans are inclined to accept such a shift. More specifically, has America’s drone program in some way desensitized Americans? If so, what are the new boundaries Americans are willing to accept or will *need* to accept to continue the asymmetrical and now more *dynamic* War on Terror? The findings from this survey offer one beginning to much needed future work.

4.2 Survey Findings

Essentially, there are two ways to interpret these results. The simple statistical analysis is different from the multiple regression analyses because with the simple statistics the response itself, along with the demographics, are the dependent variables while the independent variable is the actual addition (or increased reliance) of drones in questions 2, 4, and 6 that acts as the independent variable. This allows us to observe any macro-level or micro-level changes between questions on the values of the dependent variables. The questions were grouped in the following manner: Questions 1 & 2 (Group A), 3 & 4 (Group B), and 5 & 6 (Group C). These three groups were designed in a way to be

representative of what should be considered essential categories (but not *all* categories) within the realm of military drones. Group A represents the broadest, most vague condition, Group B is mission specific as well as relevant in real-time and Group C tests the humanitarian factor. The thinking behind this is that while there is overall support for the use of drones, this support most likely varies depending on the *scenario* and not only the target itself. While the explanatory power of the analyses may suffer since these three scenarios are being tested by only two questions each (rather than choosing to focus on only one scenario, which would allow me to generate a better data set for that scenario in particular), it must be understood that the choice to be broader in scope, therefore rendering the results less generalizable, was always the intent of this project; it is a stepping-stone towards a larger and, in my opinion, necessary project concerning drones, different scenarios and lethal action.

The results of the survey are more or less what I had expected. The easiest and most straightforward way to observe any significant changes in the dependent variable was by grouping the questions, as mentioned above, and counting the total number of each Likert value chosen (V. Likely, Unlikely, Neutral etc). The initial findings are interesting for a number of reasons. First, in the interests of simplicity, one way to observe the data is by grouping the overall likelihood into two sections, which will be called “Positive Likelihood” and “Negative Likelihood”-- Positive Likelihood consists of “V. Likely, S. Likely and Likely” while Negative Likelihood encompasses the other end of the scale, “S. Unlikely, Unlikely, V. Unlikely.” In

doing so, we can observe if a larger shift happens rather than small changes, which involves a tedious though not unimportant process, as we will observe (Groups A, B and C are presented respectively in **Fig 6, 7 and 8**). Admittedly, the type of question posed in Group A was extremely broad and, therefore, probably a difficult to answer. However, we observe that the responses to Question 1 produce an overall Positive Likelihood of 70% while Negative Likelihood is only 16%. Yet, contrary to what I expected, when the type of military intervention shifts to ‘only drones’ in Question 2, Positive Likelihood decreases to 54% with Negative Likelihood increasing to around 30%. Before this observation is further analyzed, the results of groups B and C must first be explained to better understand Group A’s outcome.

Group B’s responses represent more of what was expected. The Positive Likelihood from Question 3 to Question 4 increased from 46% to 52.5% while the Negative Likelihood decreased from 39.5% to 31%. Moreover, the percentage of those who chose ‘V. Likely’ rose over 10%, which represents the largest individual increase within Group B. Group C also saw an increase in Positive Likelihood from 65% to 72.5% between Question 5 and Question 6 with Negative Likelihood falling from 22% to 15%. Again, here we see a positive increase in the choice of ‘V. Likely’ of over 15% from Question 5 to Question 6.

These results, with the exception of Group A, are in line with my thesis that drones will increase the likelihood of support for military intervention, thus

lowering the threshold for violence. Below is another graphic that shows the summed averages of responses within varying demographics (Average answer: 7-very likely, 1 – very unlikely):

Table 1: Macro Results with Demographics

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Total average (136 people)	5.1765	4.5294	3.9191	4.4118	4.7132	5.2279
Male (55 people)	5.6182	4.8000	4.6545	4.8545	4.8727	5.3455
Female (81 people)	4.8765	4.3457	3.4198	4.1111	4.6049	5.1481
Age 20-50 (28 people)	3.7143	3.3571	2.2143	2.8571	4.0357	4.5714
Age 51-70 (80 people)	5.5875	4.9500	4.3750	4.8750	4.9125	5.5375
Age 71- (28 people)	5.4643	4.5000	4.3214	4.6429	4.8214	5.0000
Independent (24 people)	3.6250	3.2500	2.2083	2.8333	4.1250	4.5000
Democrats (25 people)	5.3600	4.7600	3.8000	4.5600	4.7600	5.6400
Republicans (62 people)	5.5645	4.8548	4.5000	4.7903	4.8226	5.3709
Tea Party (25 people)	5.5200	4.7200	4.2400	4.8400	4.9600	5.1600
High school (8 people)	6.3750	5.7500	5.1250	5.8750	5.6250	6.1250
Some College (23 people)	5.1304	4.6522	4.0000	4.9130	5.3913	5.2174
College Graduate (39 people)	5.2308	4.6410	3.6923	4.2301	4.3077	5.1026
Some post-graduate (9 people)	5.5556	4.2222	4.7778	4.2222	5.0000	5.5556
Post graduate (57 people)	4.9298	4.2807	3.7368	4.1579	4.5439	5.1403

Again, the sample size when spilt into different variables is small but not without interest. One of the interesting observations here is that those who fall into the age range of 20-50 offer some of the lowest support (least likely) in regards to all the questions; however, they too are susceptible to increase their support if we look at their shifts from Question 3 to Question 4 and Question 5 to Question 6. A good supplemental study that was done by YouGov.com, especially in regards to age, also shows that the younger the age group the less likely one is to support drones (**Fig 5**). Another result that is in line with prior polling research is that women are less likely to support the use of drones. A study by the Pew Research Center found women's approval of U.S. drone strikes to be at 44% while men's was almost at 70% (PRC 2013). Therefore, although women *did* increase their likelihood for support between questions in Groups B and C, their average overall support was lower than that of men's. Those who chose to identify as Independent supported using drones the absolute least, but even this group was not immune to at least *increasing* their likelihood to support intervention when drones were added to the "interventions" in questions 4 and 6.

Furthermore, it appears as though Democrats are most susceptible to increase their likelihood of support when drones are added with the shift in their responses increasing by almost one whole interval from questions 3 to 4 and 5 to 6. Moreover, in the next table we see that in terms of those who *strongly* identified with their party's ideals, 'strong' Democrats were the most likely to support any of the suggested interventions and were the most susceptible to increase their

likelihood of support when drones were added in questions 4 and 6. In comparison, those who ‘strongly’ identified within the Tea Party and Republican Party were less susceptible. For Republicans, it made almost no difference whether or not drones were used in the case of intervening in Iraq in questions 3 and 4.

Table 2: Strong Ideological Identification

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Tea Party (strong)+* (23 people)	5.3913	4.5217	4.1739	4.7391	4.9565	5.0435
Republicans (strong)+* (47 people)	5.7234	4.8936	4.8511	4.8936	5.0638	5.6170
Democrats (strong)+* (16 people)	6.1250	5.4375	4.8125	5.6875	5.1875	6.3125

There are a number of possible reasons as to why Democrats who strongly identify with their party would offer the most support to intervention when it involves the use of drones. Perhaps it is simply because they strongly support their president and tactics he has chosen to fight with, especially the drone program. Therefore, they associate drones with a successful counter-terrorism policy, which translates into more support for drones and operations that rely on them. This logic could also be used to explain why those who strongly identify with the Republican Party and the Tea Party are not as susceptible to the drone variable in the questions, as increased support could be interpreted as giving tacit support to the Obama administration’s drone program. Partisan politics in the U.S. make it unlikely for either side to credit those across the aisle for anything. For now, it is enough to understand that there *may* be a significant difference. To answer the question as to

why strong Democrats are more susceptible and the others less would require more research and more polling.

Multiple regression analysis (MRA) was used to test the explanatory strength of this model of questioning and look for important distinctions between variables. In order to find any potential correlation between the independent variables, the demographics, and the dependent variable, the likelihood of support, the following formula was used (Note: race and gender are not shown because they were insignificant for this MRA):

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3$$

y = likelihood of support (1-7)

β_0 = intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = marginal effect of X_1, X_2, X_3 respectively on y

X_1 = Age

X_2 = Education

X_3 = Political Affiliation

As expected as a limitation, the explanatory power of this model, or R^2 , is very low due to small sample size. However, this does not necessarily mean that this MRA is without worth. Some questions did produce somewhat more decisive results. For example, Question 3 produced an R^2 of almost 30%, which means this particular model can explain 30% of the variability in the response data to this question, with

most of the influence coming from the political variable, age playing a smaller role, and education being insignificant. Although the R^2 in Question 4 is lower, it is still obvious that the political variable has the most impact, with age slightly impacting the outcome of the question. So, while there is not a strong connection with age and education, there is a very strong connection with political affiliation. This connection is positive (1 – other, 2 – independent, 3 – democrat, 4 – republican, 5 – tea party). Ergo, the higher this variable, the higher the probability for supporting drones. While this is good to know, the real benefit of this MRA comes from comparing the models between and within the groups.

For example, education is the only variable to have an inverse relationship. The more educated someone is, the less likely they are to answering *any* of the questions in this survey positively. Yet, if we compare the significance and marginal effect (Beta) of education between questions 1 and 2, we see that both the significance and Beta values increase in question 2 where drones have been added. This occurs again when comparing questions 3 to 4. In Question 3 education is essentially totally insignificant and its Beta value non-existent, but in Question 4 its significance as well as its Beta value greatly increase. Since the only difference between questions is the advent of drones, this data results in the assumption that the more educated an individual, the less likely he/she is to support the use of drones.

The simple statistics and MRAs allow for many insights and, most importantly, provide this project with a basis for the claim that drones may decrease the threshold for lethal violence depending on the scenario. As is shown in Group A, when the scenario is broad and vague, there seems to be less support to intervene with just drones, but when the mission becomes more specific (Group B) or specifically humanitarian (Group C) drones increase support for intervention and not just on a macro scale, but across the smaller demographic variables as well. The data shows that, in line with other studies, women are less likely to support a more specific form of intervention with drones, *but* are still susceptible to increase their support for an intervention that would rely either heavily or solely on drones when compared to one that would not. Moreover, this survey and the survey from YouGov (**Fig. 7**) point to a trend for younger people to be less supportive of drones, a distinction that warrants further research. These preliminary findings are useful, interesting and leave this project with a lot of potential for expansion.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The War on Terror will never end. The current international climate is more than hostile: Russian aggression has yet to meet any real counter-response from Europe or the U.S., ISIS will most likely plague the Middle East for years to come, Syria remains in hopeless chaos, Iraq does not look much better, Yemen is threatening to dissolve into something *like* Syria, and Israel and America currently have a chilly relationship. However, the biggest threat to the American people remains extremism as well as how America continues to combat it.

Although the number of drone strikes carried out under the U.S. targeted killing program has decreased (**see figure 9 and 10**) we can see just how critical drones are for the U.S. military, not just the CIA. Although the U.S. does not say which of the airstrikes have been carried out by drones, it is safe to assume that any U.S. airstrikes inside Syria are probably done by drones, due to the Syria's air defense capabilities as evidenced by the downing of a U.S. surveillance drone by Syrian forces in March (Stewart and Karouny 2015). Drones are certainly used to carry out strikes in Iraq as well, but again, exact numbers are not known. Because of their ability to stay aloft for over 10 hours, these drones are critical for tracking

movements of *all* the various factions operating within this area (e.g. a U.S. strike last year against the al-Qaeda linked group, Khorasan, inside Syria) (Hosenball and Stewart 2014). Moreover, in regards to the Saudi-led air campaign in Yemen, one can be sure that much of the logistical and intelligence support the U.S. is giving the Saudis is coming from U.S. surveillance drones. The ability of U.S. military drones to operate in these areas *and*, as witnessed, get shot down with essentially no repercussions is a considerable luxury enjoyed by President Obama. Syria, Iraq and Yemen represent complex, multifaceted proxy war battlefields and the farther the U.S. can keep its service men and women away, the better. Until a certain threat threshold is crossed (and it may never be), President Obama and his National Security Council would rather rely on robots and supersonic aircraft to try and control these situations.

America would do well to establish a ‘dynamic presence’ around the globe and unmanned aerial technology will play an enormous role. However, America and Americans must first come to the realization that although the United States remains the leader of the drone regime, its monopoly is quickly diminishing. As the default forerunner and leader, the U.S. is the most heavily accountable for the precedents that it sets regarding the use of militarized drones overseas. When drones are used by the U.S. military, the actions of their pilots and those who command them are governed by certain Rules of Engagement (ROE), U.S. military law, and the Geneva Convention signed by the U.S. regarding warfare. Yet, the lack of transparency surrounding the targeted killing program by the CIA *and* JSOC

makes it impossible to establish any real precedent. Are U.S. allies also allowed to run targeted killing programs with drones overseas? What if Russia decides it needs to set up a fixed drone hub in Cuba, for example, citing security concerns? These questions and many more remain unanswered.

In the new export policy regarding drones (UAS, UAVs, RPAs etc.) outlined by the U.S. Department of State (USDS 2015), those countries deemed eligible to receive armed drones must agree to adhere to these four principles:

(1) Recipients are to use these systems in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable; (2) Armed and other advanced UAS are to be used in operations involving the use of force only when there is a lawful basis for use of force under international law, such as national self-defense; (3) Recipients are not to use military UAS to conduct unlawful surveillance or use unlawful force against their domestic populations; and (4) As appropriate, recipients shall provide UAS operators technical and doctrinal training on the use of these systems to reduce the risk of unintended injury or damage.

These principles are broad and vague, but only because the U.S. is not prepared to make them specific enough to the CIA and JSOC under more scrutiny than they would desire. Practically speaking, the U.S. State Department realizes that it cannot afford to appear hypocritical. As Micah Zenko (2015: 4) stated in his piece in

Foreign Policy:

Subsequently, it [the U.S.] has a unique opportunity and responsibility to not only set precedents for the use of armed drones, but to determine which countries might acquire these systems and hold them accountable for their use. What is unfortunate about the new policy [on exporting drones] is the

principles that it claims countries must follow before the United States will authorize the transfer of military drones....Even analysts less skeptical than me would ask if the United States itself adheres to these principles. Most notably, the United States does not say when international humanitarian law and/or international human rights law applies to which of its drone strikes. Christof Heyns, U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, suggested in his 2013 report that countries should work collectively to determine how international law applies to the use of drones, and that armed drone states that invoke the right to self-defense — as the United States does — should submit a report to the Security Council for each country in which they use force. The United States has not yet done either...Based on the new policy, it would be difficult to justify selling military drones to the United States itself, given that the Obama administration has never provided the transparency or clarity to know if it is adhering to the principles that it now asks of potential recipient countries.

The United States – but more specifically the Obama administration – has assumed a “just trust us” approach to the issue, which seems to be accepted by the American public. There is nothing wrong with trusting one’s government (to a certain extent), but the U.S. is not asking only its citizens to ‘trust it’ but rather that, every person, anywhere that extremist targets exist, must accept U.S. targeted killings. This stance is shortsighted, dangerous and simply *not* acceptable if the U.S. considers itself a world leader. Moreover, as my results suggest (and as larger future studies hopefully may show) these drones RPAs, UAVs, UAS etc. have the potential to, in fact, lower the threshold for violence *on a global scale*. In its defense, there have been vast benefits gained by the U.S. from its targeted killing program, and, to some extent, this targeted killing program conducted by the CIA and JSOC has done much to decimate Al-Qaeda and its affiliates’ operations throughout the globe. I agree that the U.S. military should implement the use of more drones on the battlefield and for ISR. However, as drones become more widely used and widely

available, especially armed drones, the nature of warfare is likely to change, as well as how it is perceived, and the U.S. needs to adopt an approach that does not make drone strikes continue to seem arbitrary or haphazard as this risks decreasing reliance on non-lethal approaches to counterterrorism that can be much more beneficial than simply neutralizing a target.

However, in the absence of public pressure, it is unlikely that the current narrative of support will change. There have been many instances in the past where the U.S. public has prompted the U.S. government and military forces to implement measures that better protect civilian life, but this has not yet been the case with the targeted killing program. There thus appears to be a disconnect here on some level, because every poll administered regarding drones strikes and the risk of civilian casualties shows that Americans are much less likely to support a drone attack if civilian lives are threatened. As political scientist James Walsh explains in an experiment he tested in 2012, “respondents attach as much or more value on the lives of foreign civilians as they do on U.S. military personnel”(Sides 2013). However, in his own work (Walsh 2013: 18), he goes on to state that “This specific result should not be over-emphasized...the public may be more likely to express disapproval in hypothetical situations than in response to actual attacks by the United States.” The latter part of this statement seems to hold more truth in this case than the actual “agreement in public opinion” that civilian casualties are bad and should be minimized.

However, it is also possible that the Obama administration itself has recognized the potential danger in continuing to carry out unlimited drone strikes against targets in Pakistan and Yemen, which is perhaps why they have decreased in frequency (**Fig 9 and Fig 10**). There are a number of possible reasons for this decrease (this not to say that drone strikes in these areas have dwindled to nothing; moreover there have been an unprecedented series of drone strikes in Somalia (BIJ 2015) since the beginning of the year), but one explanation could be that Obama understood that the targeted killing program could not be kept from public view forever. Ergo, he decided to start toning down the program by removing the practice of “signature strikes” and tightening the criteria that needed to be met before a strike could be authorized in order to minimize civilian casualties. This way, when public interest in the program increased (as it did before, during and after Brennan’s CIA confirmation) there would be fewer recent strikes to account for and less of a chance that one of the strikes could have been botched (luckily for Brennan, the aforementioned strike that killed many civilians in a wedding convoy in Yemen didn’t take place until many months after he got confirmed)(Almasmari 2013b). Moreover, just recently in March it was made public that the man responsible for hunting bin Laden as well as directly supervising the CIA’s drone program as head of the CTC was removed from this post as part of a “major reorganization under CIA director John Brennan”(Miller 2015).

It is clear that civilian casualties were something that the administration was concerned about, as in, concerned that the actual number of civilian deaths might not sit well with the American public. For example, one of the most astounding

statements regarding the drone targeted killing program was Brennan's statement in June 2011 that *no* civilians had been killed in drone strikes in almost a year, which according to leaked documents is simply not true (Serle and Woods 2013). Even less convincing is the contention that the targeted killing program has, according to the Obama administration, generally been responsible for "no" or "single-digit" civilian casualties (Pilkington 2013) While the actual number of civilian deaths will never be agreed upon, as stated earlier, it certainly pushes the limits of reason to truly believe that civilian casualties have been in the single digits. Yet, Obama is neither deaf nor blind when it comes to public opinion and in the wake of media attention given to the targeted killing program in early 2013, he and Brennan most likely chose to espouse an unrealistic representation of civilian casualties rather than admit to an unacceptable number (not sure what that number would be) and risk public disapproval and demand for more transparency.

The age of remote warfare has arrived without an existing legal and political framework governing the use of drones. There are many who argue that there is relatively little difference between a drone and a fighter jet when it comes utilizing both in a combat situation, because the manner in which a target is killed is essentially the same. There are only a few very positive differences: (a) there is no pilot in a drone but that is a good thing because it keeps its personnel safer, (b) drones can remain in the air for up to 14 hours, thus allowing for an exponential increase in ISR capabilities and quick reaction/support capabilities, and (c) they are significantly cheaper to operate than traditional manned aircraft. Yet, while drones

may operate in a manner similar to manned aircraft, their very *nature* is creating a fundamental difference in warfare. As this thesis has hinted at and as future studies may further prove, drones *can* lower the threshold for violence/military intervention, even more so in the case of the U.S. targeted killing program. More importantly, the use of drones apparently increases the willingness of the American public to intervene militarily in a situation. Drones are an exceptional asset for any military or intelligence organization, but the U.S. and the CIA may need to reconsider whether or not to continue using them in such an unrestricted manner.

Finally, we cannot fully at present ascertain *empirically* whether or not unmanned systems, drones in particular, have the potential to lower the threshold for violence. Although these preliminary findings suggest *why* they might, only through the creation of a massive database, which monitors lethal actions carried out via unmanned systems on a global scale, would researchers and analysts be able to observe if such lethal action were on the rise. The scope of this concept is broad and the amount of data and analysis required to develop and maintain something of this nature would be immense. Yet, as presented in this thesis, there are already a handful of organizations that have successfully been able to accurately follow many of the targeted killings carried out by the U.S. (Long War Journal, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, etc). However, other countries are rapidly developing their own armed drone capabilities (Pakistan recently unveiled its first armed drone in March)(Varandani 2015). I believe that, through the existing mechanisms for tracking drone strikes, combined with the continued rigorous work by investigative

journalists and the increasing abilities of statisticians to process meta-data in this rapidly advancing technological era, such a project is possible. If not for anything other reason, the use of lethal unmanned technology should cause us to try and understand how willing humans are to use it.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Casualty Estimates

ESTIMATES OF U.S. TARGETED KILLINGS AND FATALITIES

Source/Year	Number of Strikes	Total Killed	Number of Civilians Killed	% of Civilians Killed
Pakistan				
NAF	366	2,725	280	10.3%
2004-2007	10	177.5	101	58.0%
2008	36	281.5	24.5	10.0%
2009	54	535.5	25	6.0%
2010	122	818	13.5	2%
2011	72	482.5	6	1%
2012	46	277	5	2%
2013	26	153	4	3%
LWJ	353	2,730	156	6%
2004	1			
2005	1			
2006	3	142	20	14%
2007	5	73	0	0%
2008	35	317	31	10%
2009	53	506	43	9%
2010	117	815	14	2%
2011	64	435	30	7%
2012	46	304	4	1%
2013	28	137	14	10%
TBIJ	381	3,091	683.5	22.1%
Yemen				
NAF	82	817.5	80	9.8%
LWJ	85	502	99	20%
2002	1	6	0	0%
2009	2	55	41	74%
2010	4	16	6	37%
2011	10	81	0	0%
2012	42	228	35	16.0%
2013	26	116	17	14.7%
TBIJ	62	347.5	47.5	13.7%
Somalia				
TBIJ	18	116	8	6.9%
EST. TOTAL **	461	3,520	457	11%

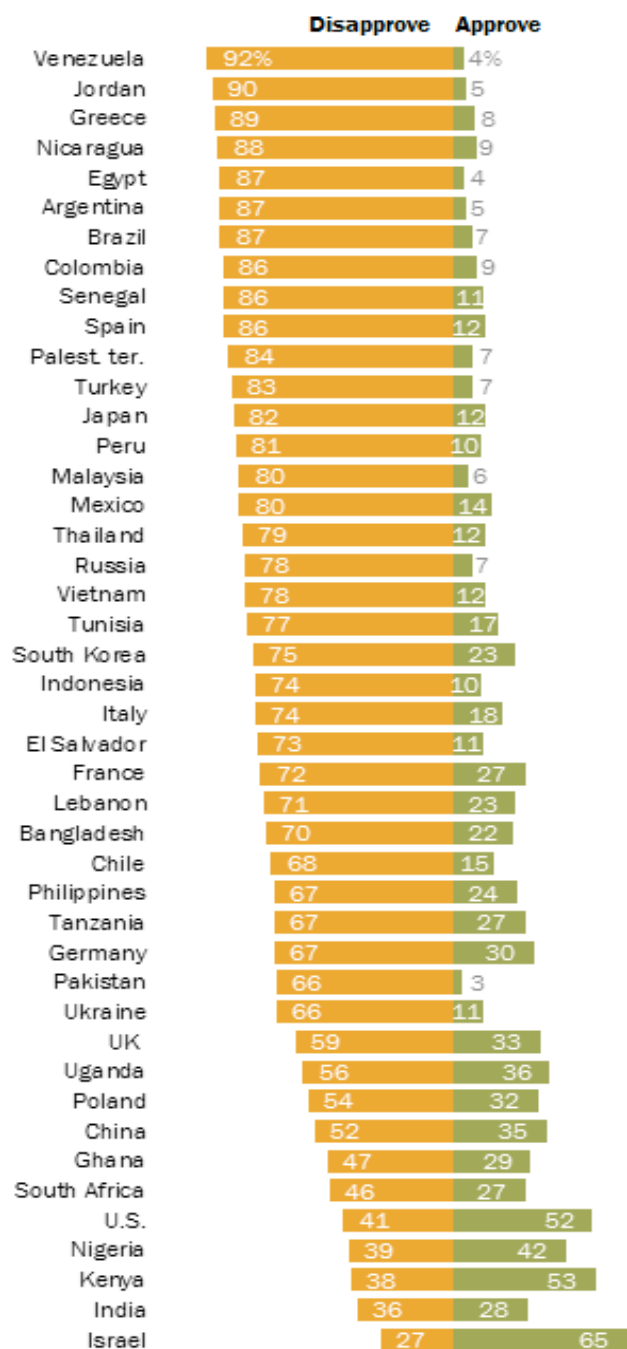
Sources: New America Foundation (NAF); Long War Journal (LWJ); The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ)

** Based on averages within the ranges provided by the organizations monitoring each country as of December 31, 2013.

Source: Micah Zenko 2013b

Figure 2. Pew Research Poll

Widespread Opposition to Drones



Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q63.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Figure 3. Sample Survey

1. If the United States were to enter into a military conflict in the future, how likely would you be to support this engagement if there were a heavy reliance on unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) rather than U.S. soldiers thus decreasing the likely number of U.S. casualties?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely	V.Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. How likely would you be to support this engagement if only aerial drones—no U.S. soldiers—were involved?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Unlikely	V.Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. How likely would you be at this moment to support direct U.S. combat operations in Iraq where U.S. soldiers would be put at risk?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Unlikely	V. Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. How likely would you be to support military engagement in Iraq if only drones—no U.S. soldiers—were involved?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Unlikely	V. Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. In the event of a humanitarian crisis in another country where the possibility of genocide exists, how likely would you be to support sending U.S. troops to contain the situation?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Unlikely	V, Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. In the event of a humanitarian crisis in another country where the possibility of genocide exists, how likely would you be to support U.S. intervention to contain the situation if drones could effectively be used, thus decreasing the likely number of U.S. troop casualties?

V. Likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Unlikely	V. Unlikely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Demographics (Check all that apply)

7. What is your gender?

Male Female
☐ ☐

8. What is your race?

White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latin American Black/African-American Asian-Am. Am. Indian
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Other

☐ Could you specify? _____

9. What is your Age? _____

10. With which political party are you affiliated (if any)?

Republican Tea-Party Democrat Independent
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Other

☐ Could you specify? _____

11. From the party you chose, how strongly do you identify with its principles and ideology?

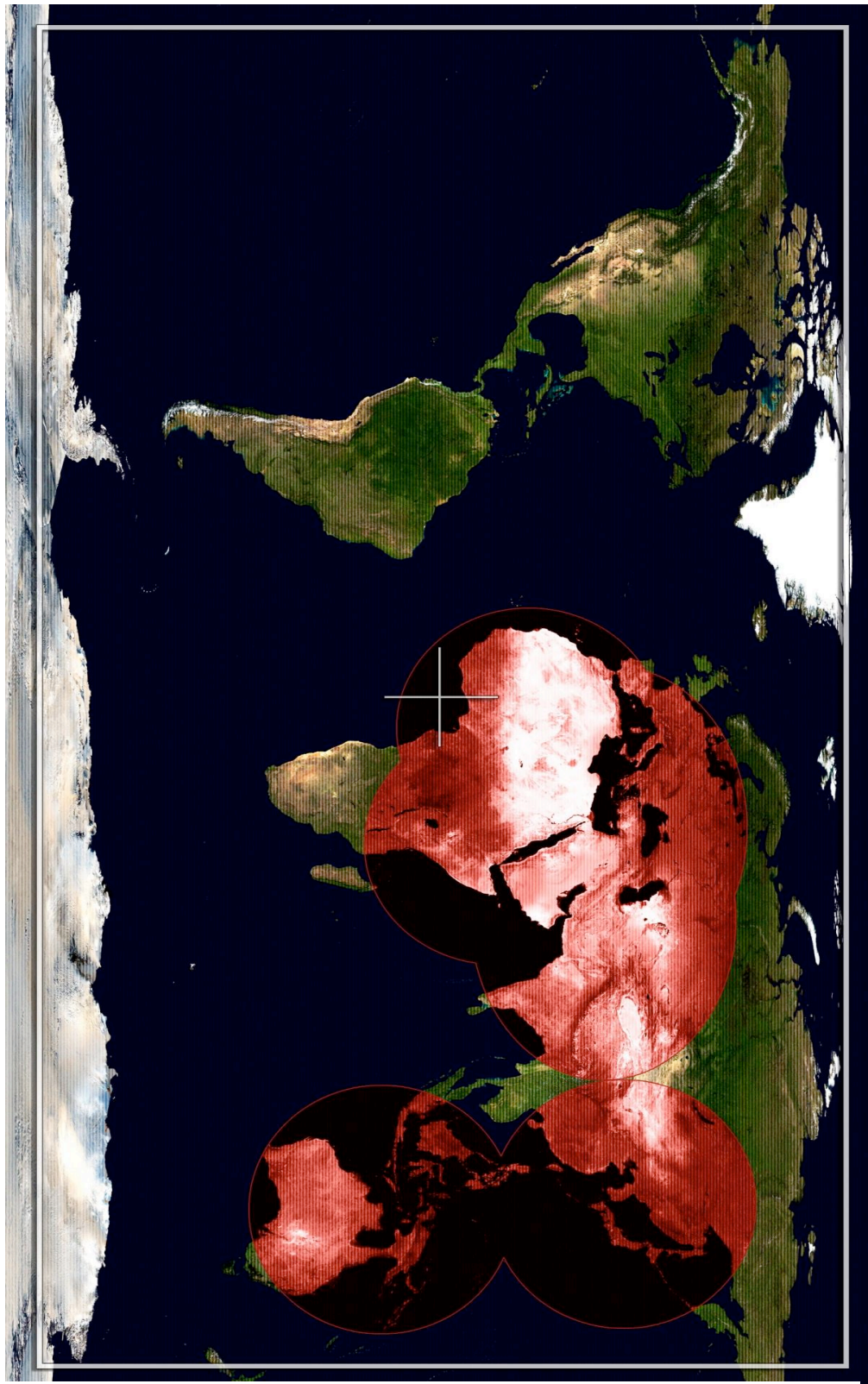
V. Strongly Strongly Somewhat strongly Neutral Somewhat weakly Weakly V. Weakly
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

12. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Some High School High School Some College
☐ ☐ ☐

College Graduate Some post-graduate work Post-graduate degree
☐ ☐ ☐

Figure 4. Dynamic Presence



Source: Maj. Gen Shanahan, CSIS Remarks

Figure 5: Survey Responses to Questions 1 & 2

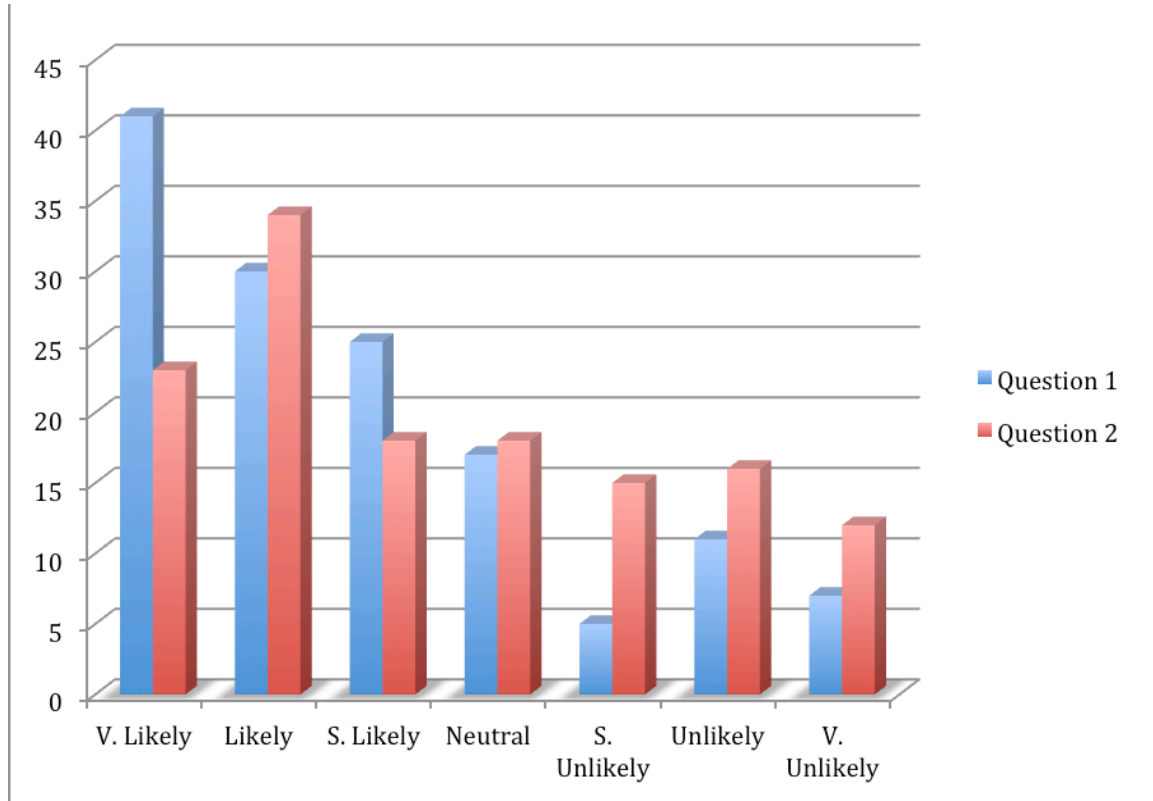


Figure 6: Survey Responses to Questions 3 & 4

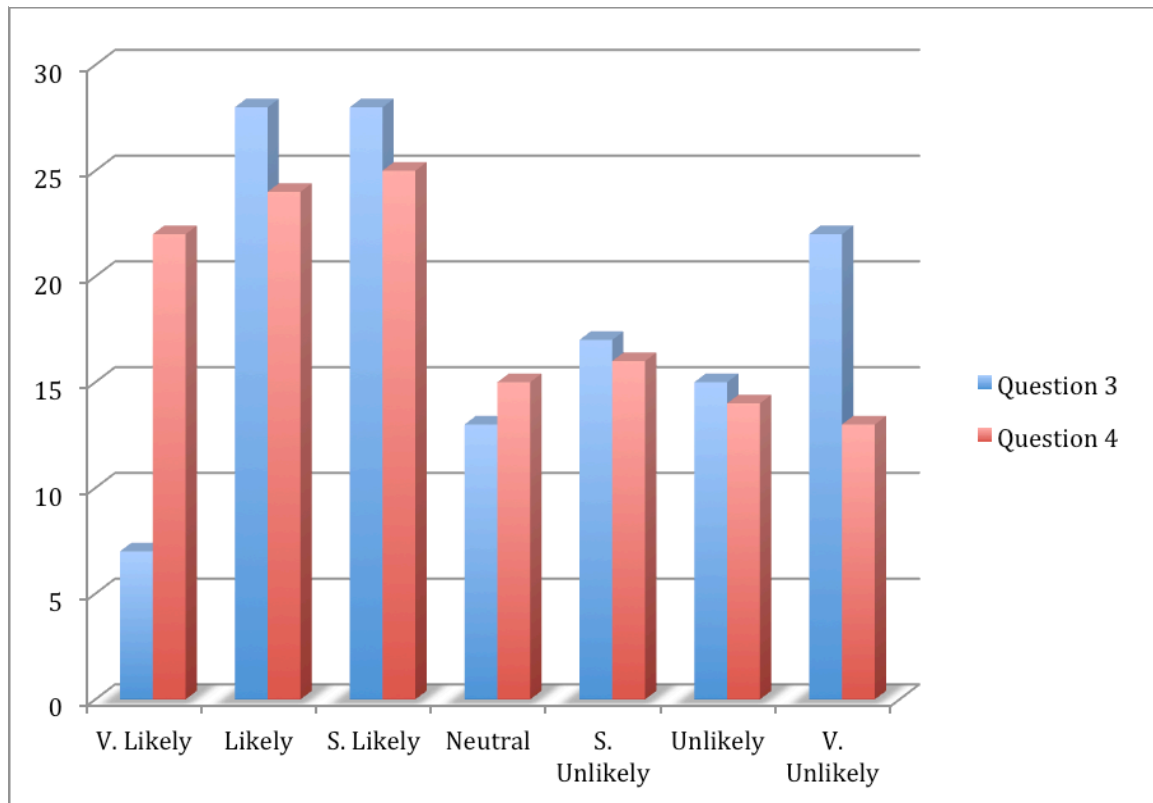


Figure 7. Survey Responses to Questions 5 & 6

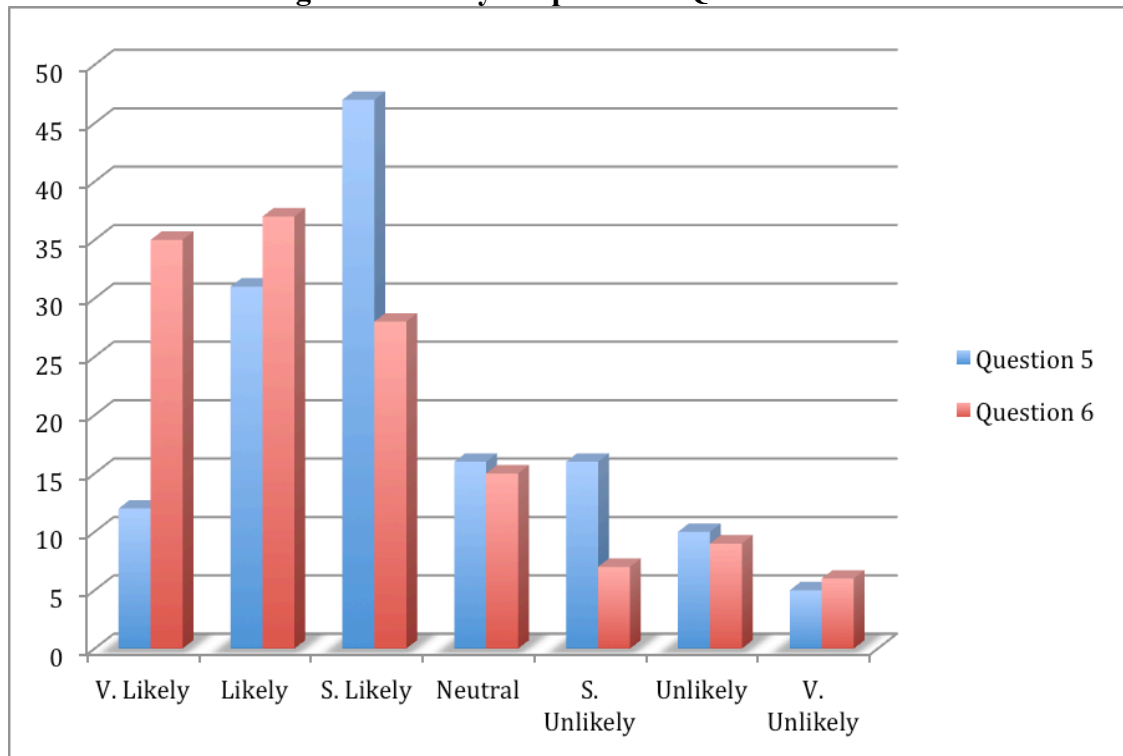


Figure 8. YouGov Poll

YouGov

October 23 - 24, 2013

YouGov

5. Drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects

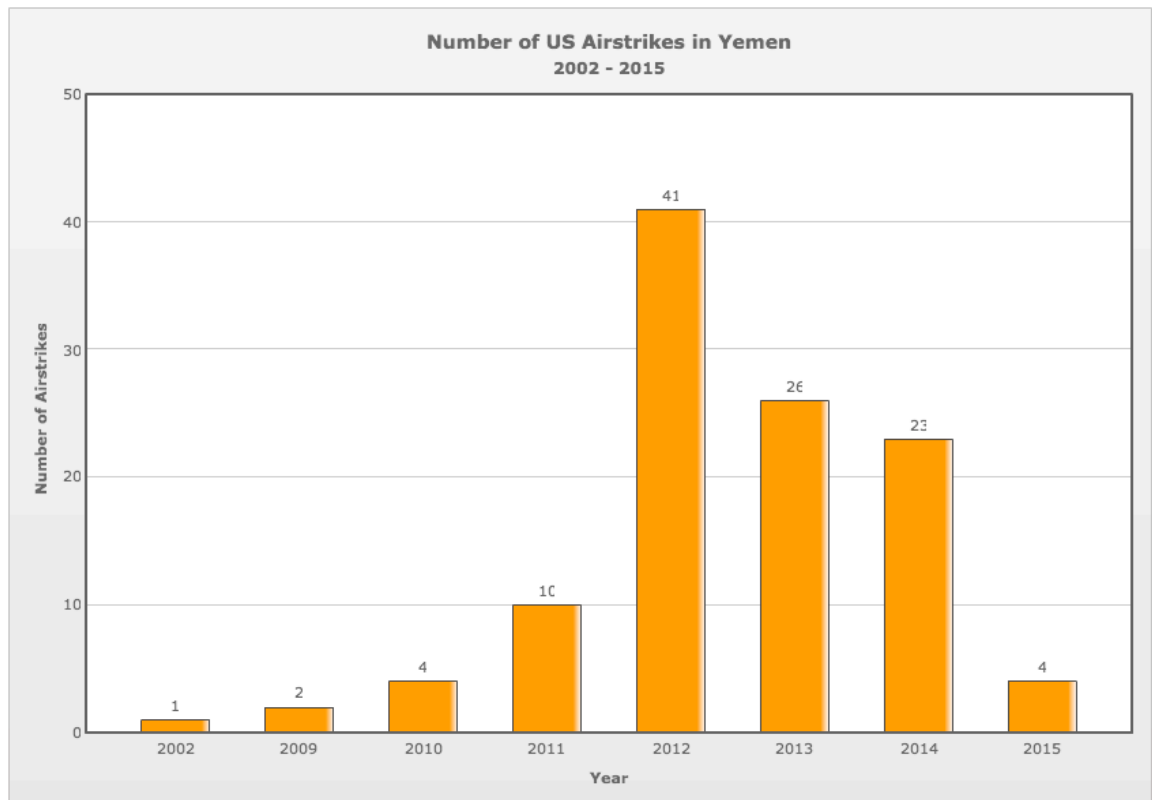
Do you approve or disapprove of the U.S. government using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?

	Gender			Age				Party ID			Voter Registration	
	Total	Male	Female	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Registered	Not registered
Approve	60%	69%	52%	38%	61%	69%	69%	64%	50%	72%	63%	41%
Disapprove	18%	18%	18%	31%	18%	13%	12%	18%	20%	14%	17%	25%
Not sure	22%	13%	30%	31%	22%	18%	19%	18%	29%	14%	20%	34%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(Unweighted N)	(998)	(457)	(541)	(158)	(291)	(383)	(166)	(335)	(420)	(243)	(891)	(107)

	Race				Education					Region			
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Less than high school	High school	Some college	College grad	Post grad	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Approve	60%	61%	56%	58%	66%	63%	57%	56%	61%	51%	65%	62%	59%
Disapprove	18%	18%	16%	22%	15%	16%	19%	21%	19%	20%	17%	14%	23%
Not sure	22%	21%	28%	20%	20%	20%	24%	24%	20%	29%	18%	23%	18%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(Unweighted N)	(998)	(792)	(120)	(86)	(42)	(343)	(340)	(189)	(84)	(165)	(190)	(389)	(254)

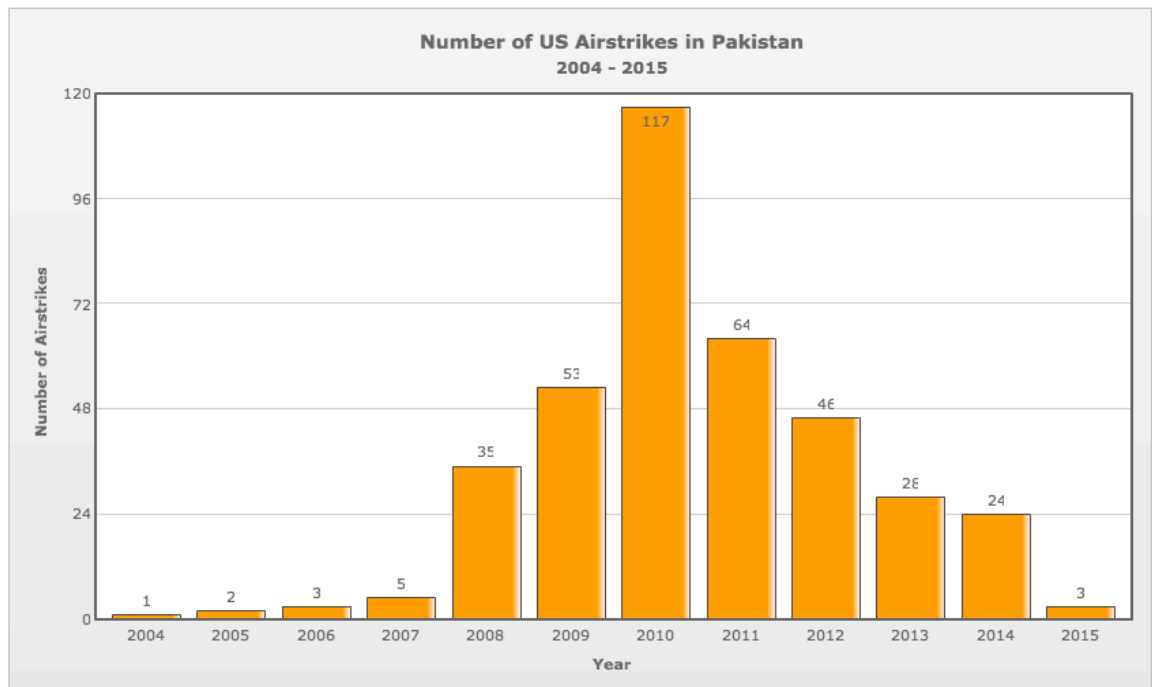
Source: YouGov 2013

Figure 9. Total Airstrikes in Yemen



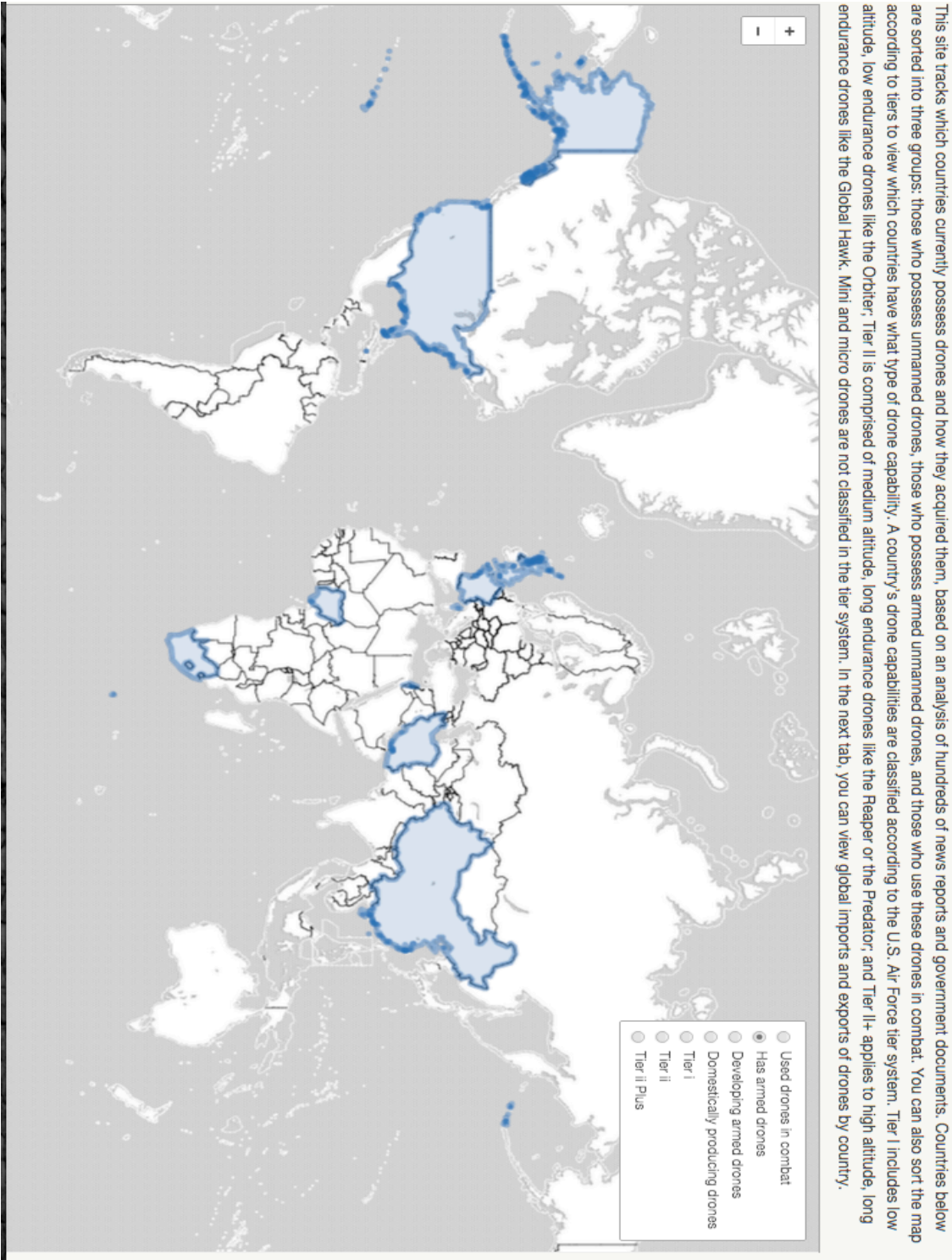
Source: Bill Roggio 2015a

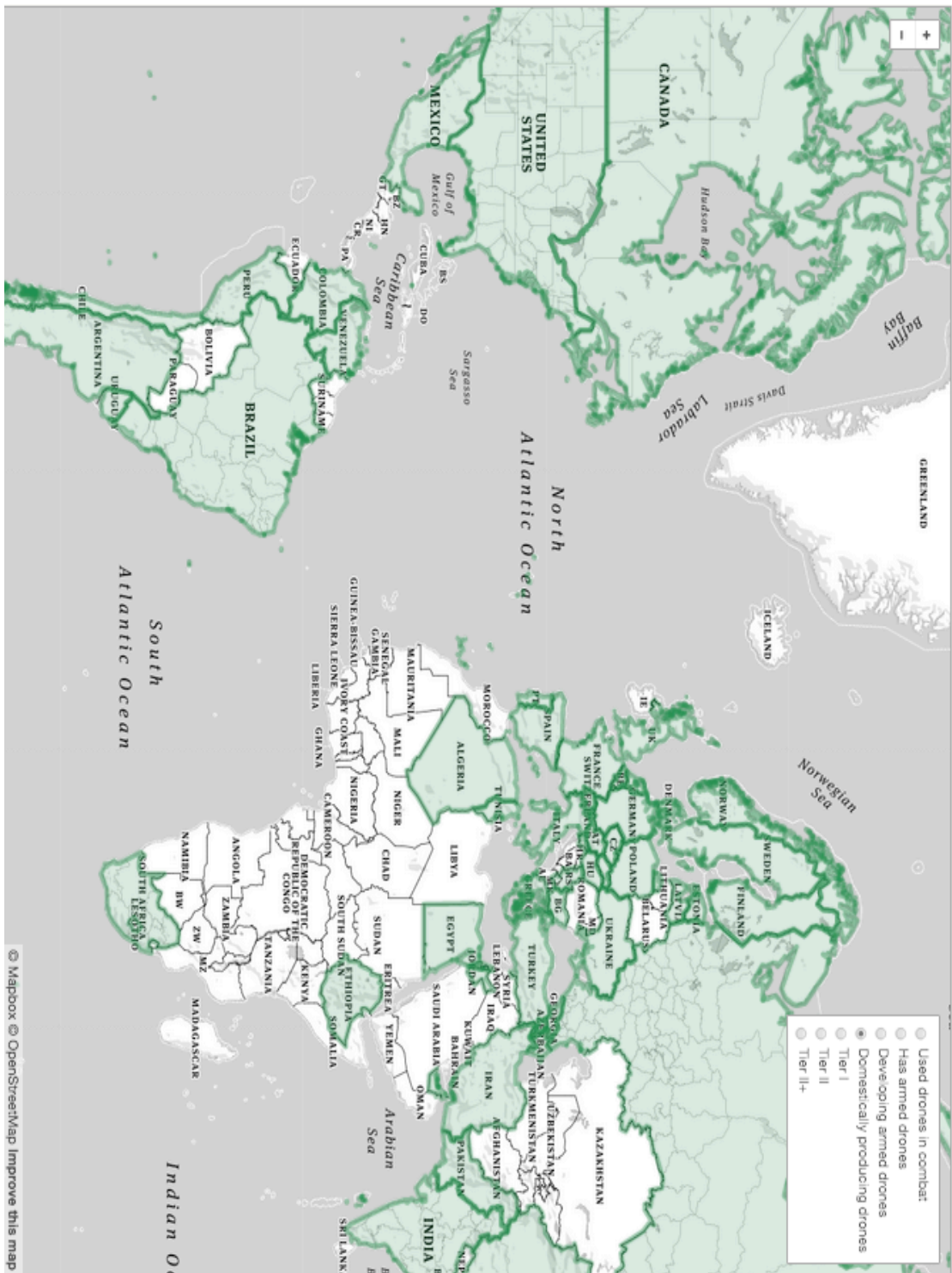
Figure 10. Total Airstrikes in Pakistan



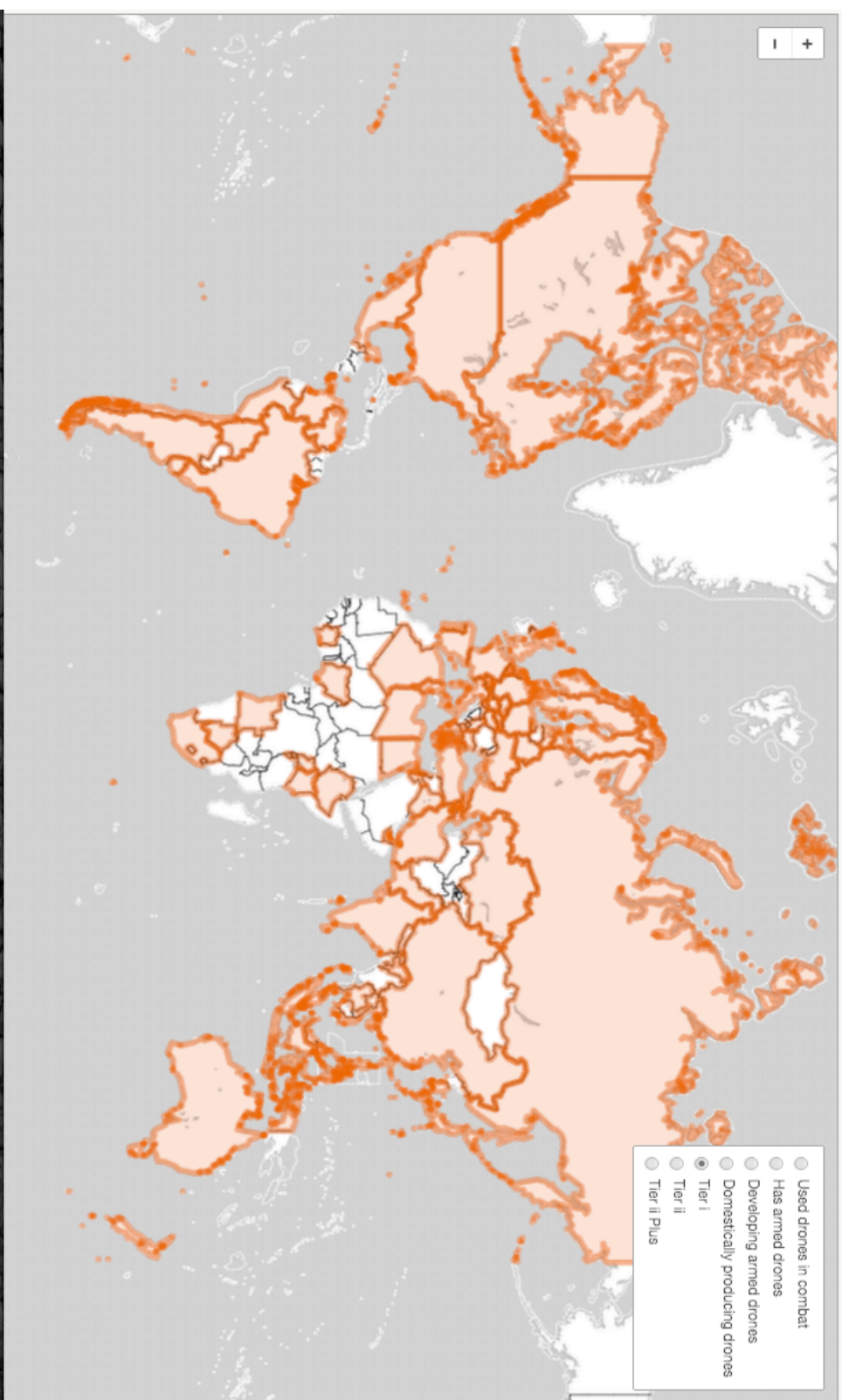
Source: Bill Roggio 2015b

NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION DRONE MAPS

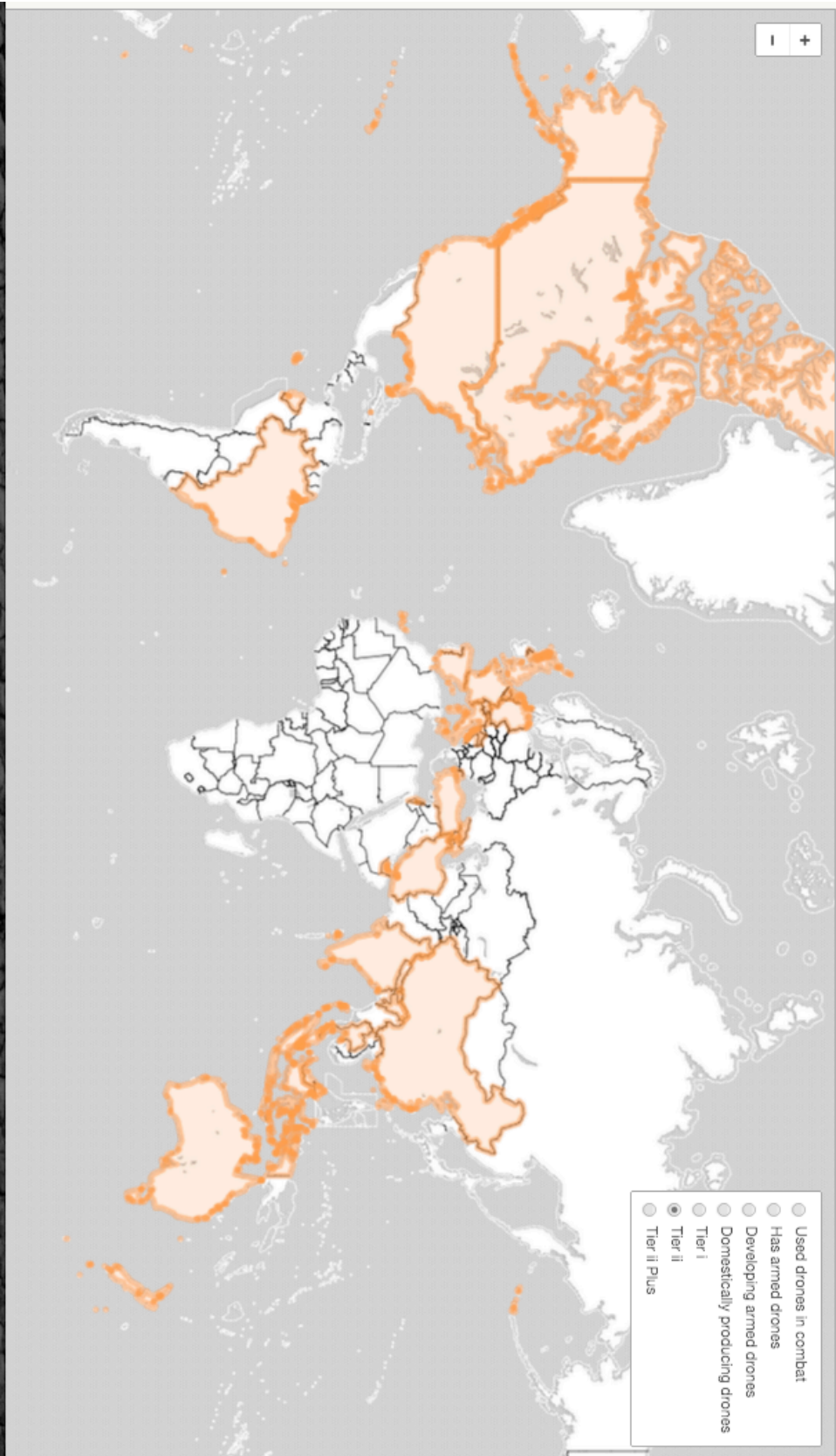




This site tracks which countries currently possess drones and how they acquired them, based on an analysis of hundreds of news reports and government documents. Countries below are sorted into three groups: those who possess unmanned drones, those who possess armed unmanned drones, and those who use these drones in combat. You can also sort the map according to tiers to view which countries have what type of drone capability. A country's drone capabilities are classified according to the U.S. Air Force tier system. Tier I includes low altitude, low endurance drones like the Orbiter; Tier II is comprised of medium altitude, long endurance drones like the Reaper or the Predator; and Tier II+ applies to high altitude, long endurance drones like the Global Hawk. Mini and micro drones are not classified in the tier system. In the next tab, you can view global imports and exports of drones by country.



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