

The Shortcomings of Washington Policy Recommendations

Drone Warriors and Warfare: The Shortcomings of Washington Policy Recommendations

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The author examines a recently-released study from the US Government Accountability Office, titled: "[Unmanned Aerial Systems: Actions Needed to Improve DOD Pilot Training](#)." Below is a summary of his conclusions.

- This two-page document is bloodless. It fails to acknowledge the sheer shamelessness and cowardice of drone assassination and other such robotic killing.
- The document fails to indicate real world consequences of insufficient training (accident rate, pilot PTSD, trigger happy strikes, illegal killings, maimings, etc.).
- The document fails to indicate reasons for drone pilot shortage. These include:
 1. The expanded drone use under President Obama in Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, etc. beyond "legitimate" declared wars, and
 2. although the document fails to mention it, according to some reports, there are low drone operator re-enlistment rates. It might be useful to compare such re-enlistment rates with (say) that of manned aircraft pilots.

- Reasons for low re-enlistment and turnover of experienced drone operators include:
 1. Poor working conditions (long hours, staff shortages, isolated, clandestine work environment).
 2. The lack of glory, adventure, prestige and “sexiness” of operating drones, as compared to piloting manned aircraft.
 3. PTSD and “moral injury” – the sheer immorality and cowardice of assassination – especially remote and riskless assassination.
 4. Although military training generally, and drone training specifically, “robotizes” military personnel, many recruits retain their humanity and many surely listen to their consciences. Unlike (say) F-16 pilots, weaponized drone operators see the dismemberment and incineration of their targets (and non-targets) up close.

- Another reason for low re-enlistment may be the persistent anti-drone civil resistance at Creech Air Force Base, Whiteman Air Force Base, Beale Air Force Base, Hancock Air Force Base and elsewhere. Such nonviolent resistance has led to many arrests, trials and even incarcerations, to say nothing of publicity, both local and international. Here in central New York (near Syracuse), Upstate Drone Action, a grassroots coalition, has been persistently demonstrating outside the Hancock main gate since 2010. We demonstrate from 4:15pm to 5pm at shift change on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. Our signs have messages like “DRONES = TERRORISM,” “DRONES FLY, CHILDREN DIE,” “STOP HANCOCK WAR CRIME,” “ABOLISH WEAPONIZED DRONES,” etc. We may never know what impact seeing such signs has on drone personnel (and family members) who drive in and out of the base.

- Besides the expansion of weaponized drone use beyond

declared wars, there is the seemingly inevitable expansion of surveillance drone use throughout the US and elsewhere. US police departments (already increasingly militarized) and intelligence agencies have begun to deploy surveillance and crowd control drones, but the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires that their operators be licensed and have some minimum training, which, typically, the US military would provide.

- [*On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*](#), points out that 98 percent of humans are repelled by having to kill, and so need to be trained and de-sensitized to do so. Is “insufficient training” a euphemism for the problem of insufficient indoctrination and de-sensitization? Does the “insufficient training” problem lead to the drone operators being insufficiently robotized, so that when they kill, they have moral qualms leading to PTSD and to refusal to re-enlist?
- Lastly, what should be done about the “problem?”
 1. Demand that the US military use lethal drones only in “legal” declared wars.
 2. Demand that the US prohibit the use warrant-less drones domestically for general, systematized, NSA-like surveillance.
 3. Work to ultimately abolish lethal drones worldwide.

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