

**Study Guide for**  
**NATIONAL BIRD**  
**A Film by Sonya Kennebeck**



**Produced by the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare**

This study guide was prepared to help you lead a religious education class or other gatherings at your congregation. Please show the 30 minute film. **The URL where you can register to watch the film is [www.interfaithdronenetwork.org](http://www.interfaithdronenetwork.org).** If you need a DVD, email [cfpa@peacecoalition.org](mailto:cfpa@peacecoalition.org) or call 609-924-5022. This thirty minute version of the film was produced by the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare with permission of the original producers.

**Settings for the film**

The film and discussion guide can be used in several settings:

- Using the video and study guide in a one-hour regular religious education class
- A specially organized event that will be more than an hour long
- Men's, women's, or young adults' organizations
- A five session event (like a Lenten study) using our various videos
- A study group at a local congregation that has study groups

**Introduction**

Between screening the video and beginning your discussion, please pass out the sign-in sheet that asks for the person's name, email, and phone number. It is found on page 9 of this study guide and online at <http://bit.ly/INDWemails>. The names will be added to the contact list for the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare to keep attendees updated on developments on drone warfare. Once completed, please mail to Peace Action Education Fund, 40 Witherspoon St., Princeton, NJ 08542, along with your review of the event (<http://bit.ly/INDWreview>). Once we receive these two items, we will mail you a check for \$100.

Open with prayer or follow your tradition for the opening of any group. Hand out copies of fact sheet (pages 3-4). Tell the group that all religions have raised questions about the morality of going to war. Most traditions believe that war is an evil, but the question that needs to be answered is "Is there ever a greater evil that requires the use of armed forces?"

Some religious traditions say no, there is never a greater evil that requires the use of military force. The Peace Churches, like the Mennonites, Church of the Brethren and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have a long tradition of saying that war is never the answer.

Other traditions say that sometimes the use of armed force is necessary. Catholics and most Protestants claim that sometimes war can be justified. There are criteria that must be met in order to claim that a particular war is a just use of force including: Just cause, Legitimate authority, Right intention, Probability of success, Last resort, and Proportionality. This tradition is called the just war tradition.

The just peace tradition is becoming more and more important to people of faith. This tradition concentrates on the elements that make for peace, instead of deciding when war is appropriate and responsible. It states that it is necessary to address the root causes of war and to take steps that create peace. The steps that are suggested include: encouraging diplomacy, encouraging participation (including participation of marginalized groups such as women, youth and/or lower income people), providing additional development support to troubled areas to encourage economic development, promoting reconciliation, promoting human rights and the rule of law, supporting just international policing and in other ways mitigate circumstances that can foster extremism.

Tell the group that we will watch the film now and then will have a 25 minute discussion at the end of the session. The film is a half hour version of the film, *National Bird*, a Film by Sonya Kennebeck.

After watching the film, lead a discussion using these questions:

1. What do you think might be Heather's concerns when she says, "You kill a guy who is your objective. You kill a guy who is not your objective. You don't know".
2. Heather states in the film, "It is as flawed as it can be with people operating the drone program from across the world." What does she mean?
3. Heather is quoted by a British reporter saying, "The videos are not clear enough to detect militants from civilians." What might be the effect of those sentiments on drone operators?
4. Heather's grandfather says in the film, "My granddaughter is having difficulty getting the kind of help she needs....Shame on us." Why do you think some veterans are having difficulty getting the help they need?
5. What do you think can be learned from the attack on the family that lost 23 members?
6. What do you think that Heather felt when she learned that she was officially diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

The Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare is reachable at:

Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare, a project of:  
Peace Action Education Fund  
40 Witherspoon St.  
Princeton, NJ 08542.  
609-924-5022

[www.interfaithdronenetwork.org](http://www.interfaithdronenetwork.org)

# FACT SHEET ON DRONE WARFARE

## The History of Lethal Drones

Israel was the first nation to develop armed drones by putting missiles on drones designed for intelligence gathering. After September 11, 2001, the U.S. moved quickly to produce its own armed drones. A growing number of nations, and even non-state actors, are now engaged in drone warfare.

In 2002, the U.S. began engaging in drone warfare in Yemen. There are two primary agencies conducting drone warfare – the U.S. military and the CIA. Drone warfare has been carried out in war zones like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in non-war zones like Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen.

The Obama Administration put limits on the use of drone warfare to try to reduce civilian casualties and ordered that the White House make the final decisions on the use of lethal drones outside war zones. Beginning in 2013, the Obama Administration prioritized the minimizing of civilian casualties and set up new rules for using lethal drones outside of war zones (outside of Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan). President Obama also stated that the White House would approve a list of targets.<sup>1</sup>

The Trump administration is close to finishing a review that would make it easier for the Pentagon to launch drone strikes anywhere in the world, by increasing the threshold on acceptable civilian casualties and scaling back other constraints imposed by the Obama administration, according to senior U.S. officials.<sup>2</sup>

The proposed changes would empower the Pentagon to make decisions on targets without approval from the White House and potentially scrap the “near-certainty” standard of no civilian deaths for strikes outside war zones. The Trump administration’s plans are also likely to relax the requirement that potential terror targets pose a “continuing and imminent threat” to U.S. personnel. Senior U.S. officials said that President Trump will probably shift final approval for individual strikes from the White House back to the Pentagon and the CIA, where they resided before the new rules were imposed.<sup>3</sup>

### Reasons to ban or limit the use of lethal drones:

1. Because lethal drones are so easy and cheap to use, it is tempting to expand warfare into non-war zones thereby increasing the likelihood that the U.S. will resort to war.
2. Though it is possible to kill terrorist leaders with lethal drones, drones cannot kill an extremist movement. In fact, the opposite is likely – drone attacks increase the determination of the terrorist and increases the number of extremists. There is an expression that says “Kill a terrorist; create ten more.” Drones do not kill violent ideology; they generate hatred and mistrust of America.
3. Though the number of civilian casualties, including children, may be smaller than those resulting from the use of other weapons, the weapon is not as precise as the government claims. As of 2013, Senator Lindsay Graham (R – SC) indicated that there were 4,700 civilians killed as a result of drone warfare.
4. Outside of war zones the use of lethal drones are extrajudicial killings that amount to assassinations.
5. Lethal drones terrorize civilian populations. Communities are traumatized by the sound of drones overhead for extended periods of time. They may also see an explosion killing or wounding numerous people, many of them civilians.
6. Drones are proliferating. More than 80 countries currently have lethal drones. It is increasingly likely that lethal drones will be used against the U.S. The world urgently needs strong international agreement banning or limiting the use of lethal drones.

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Jaffee and Karen DeYoung, “Trump Administration Reviewing Ways to Make it Easier to Launch Drone Strikes,” Washington Post, March 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

7. Drones are not the last resort. They have become the first resort.
8. Increasingly, drone strikes do not target particular individuals but instead target particularly types of people, such as males of military age, assuming that any male of military age is an enemy
9. The use of drones is not transparent. The U.S. government has kept much of this program secret. There is a disconnect between what Americans know and what the government is doing. It is difficult for Americans to publicly criticize drone warfare because they have very little information. When information has been made public because of litigation, policies have changed.
10. The use of drones directly harms attempts to promote human rights and the rule of law by violating international human rights law.
11. Terrorist groups, like ISIS, now use lethal drones.
12. Though drone operators cannot be killed or wounded, they are often damaged psychologically and some have been diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Most religions have raised questions about the morality of going to war. Most traditions believe that war is an evil, but the question that needs to be answered is “Is there ever a greater evil that requires the use of armed forces?”

Some religious traditions say no, there is never a greater evil that requires the use of military force. The Peace Churches, like the Mennonites, Church of the Brethren and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have a long tradition of saying that war is never the answer.

Other traditions say that sometimes the use of armed force is necessary. Catholics, most Protestants, Muslims, Sikhs and Jews claim that sometimes that there are just reasons for going to war. There are criteria that must be met in order to claim that a particular war is a just use of force including: Just Cause, Legitimate Authority, Right Intention, Probability of Success, Last Resort, and Proportionality. This tradition is called the “Just War” tradition.

In recent decades, the “Just Peace” theology has been emerging as a major new approach. This theology focuses on the elements that make for peace, instead of deciding when war might be justified. It states that it is necessary to address the root causes of war and to take steps that create peace. The steps that are suggested include: encouraging diplomacy, encouraging participation in peaceful conflict resolution (including marginalized groups), and providing additional funding to troubled areas to encourage economic development.

Why do people of faith from the various perspectives above care about the Drone Warfare? People of faith share common values from diverse traditions which go beyond national security objectives and national borders. The intrinsic value of all humanity and creation compel faith communities to work for the common good of all people through the principles of love, mercy, just peace, solidarity, human dignity, restorative justice and reconciliation. The U.S. practice of drone warfare is contrary to shared values which guide us, our faith communities, and most Americans.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> May 15, 2015 interfaith letter to President Barak Obama and U.S. Congress from 29 faith leaders representing Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Protestants and Sikhs

## Statement sent to the Transition Team

This statement was sent to the Trump transition team in **January 2017** and was signed by representatives from 21 denominations. *It provides helpful information for those leading this session.*

### **Drone Warfare: A Religious and Moral Perspective**

#### **Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare Recommendations for the Next Administration**

The question of whether to go to war and the question of how warfare is conducted are both profound moral and religious questions. Though there are differences of opinion within the religious community about the morality of going to war, most religions are unified in believing that when and if war occurs, it should be limited. This document suggests ways of extending that commitment to placing moral limits on wars to the lethal use of drones.

We are concerned that current policies for lethal drone strikes are unnecessarily opaque, are implicitly biased against efforts to capture those targeted, cause an unacceptable number of civilian casualties, allow targeting of unidentified individuals, violate international human rights law, may ultimately risk removing human judgment from drone strike decisions, create long-term hostility in affected communities toward U.S. interests, directly harm attempts to promote human rights and the rule of law, and dangerously reduce the political and psychological costs of using lethal force.

*The current drone program runs counter to the tenets of our respective faiths and violates the values held by most Americans; therefore, in order to reduce physical and spiritual harm caused by the drone program, we recommend that the next Administration:*

1. Make the requirements for authorizing a lethal strike more onerous than those for authorizing capture.
2. Recognize that the use of drones decreases the political and psychological costs – but not the moral costs – of approving the use of force. Such use should be a last resort.
3. Publish clear, readily understood standards for determining who is a targetable combatant and who is not a combatant or is otherwise not targetable.
4. End the CIA’s authority to carry out lethal drone strikes.
5. Adopt and publish a definition of “imminent threat” that reflects the common understanding of “imminent” and clear evidence of a specific threat.
6. Require that as a matter of course, when consistent with mission objectives, all drone strikes be publicly acknowledged within one year, and that in no event should public acknowledgement of a strike be delayed for more than three years. Such acknowledgement should include a description of the specific legal authority for the specific strike, the number of civilians killed in the strike, and a commitment to provide compensation for the families of any civilian casualties of the strike.
7. As drone technology becomes more efficient and drones become increasingly autonomous, establish and maintain a firm requirement that a human agent – with the authority to halt the operation at any point –

always be an active participant in any strike decision, including in the moments immediately preceding a strike.

8. End so-called “signature strikes” that occur outside areas of active hostilities. Specifically, require that each such strike be aimed at an identified target. Failing that, publish clear, readily understood criteria for determining which unidentified individuals are targetable.
9. Establish a government-sponsored commission of independent experts to investigate the long-term impacts of lethal drone strikes, including the political, economic, and psychological impacts on affected countries and communities, the impact on U.S. political interests, the effects on regional support for terrorism, and the psychological health of drone operators.
10. Proactively prevent future drone strikes by addressing the root causes of extremism and violence. In particular, provide additional development support to troubled areas to encourage economic development, reduce social and political exclusion, combat discrimination, provide access to education and employment, promote human rights and the rule of law, and otherwise mitigate circumstances that can foster extremism.
11. Support local programs to address the physical, economic, and psychological harm caused by drone strikes.
12. Ensure adequate and enduring psychological care for any drone operators who are negatively affected by their missions.
13. Lead in establishing international standards for the lethal use of drones. These standards should reflect the other recommendations in this document as well as steps the U.S. has already taken to restrict its lethal drone program. Additionally the standards should be transparent, conform to international law, include readily understood criteria for who can and who cannot be targeted, provide clear lines of authority and responsibility for a state’s decision to carry out a lethal strike, and provide procedures for redress if the standards are violated.
14. For each strike outside an area of active hostilities, require the Secretary of Defense to certify to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees that, consistent with the spirit of the Presidential Policy Guidance (PPG) and the Executive Order on Civilian Casualties, the strike addresses an imminent threat to human life, that capture is infeasible, that there is a near certainty that no civilians will be harmed in the strike, and that provisions have been made to compensate the families of civilians harmed in any previous strike as soon as mission objectives allow.
15. Require follow-up investigations and reports one year and five years after every lethal drone strike that occurred outside areas of active hostilities to determine the long-term effect of the strike on U.S. political interests in the region, local perceptions of the U.S., local support for terrorism, local rule of law and respect for human rights, and other long-term consequences in the affected community.

### **Background:**

As faith leaders, we are deeply concerned that by distancing people from kill decisions, drones lower the political and psychological costs of killing. They make it easier for politicians and other high level decision-makers, who no longer have to order soldiers into a hostile situation in order to use lethal force, to choose violence. Using armed drones for targeted killings makes it easier for conflicts to escalate and may make it easier to go to war. As drone technology advances and drones (and other pieces of military hardware) become

increasingly autonomous, humans, even at the operator level, may end up largely removed from what becomes a mechanized process of killing.

We believe strongly that while drones lower the political and psychological costs of killing, they do not lower the moral costs. We believe that those who order, authorize, or operate the remote killing of targeted people in a far off land ought to wrestle with the moral consequences of that decision every bit as much as a commander who has just ordered his or her troops into battle. Killing should not be an abstraction to those who are ultimately responsible for it.

We are also concerned that as currently written, the Presidential Policy Guidance (PPG) that provides rules for “direct action” against suspected terrorist targets outside the zone of active hostilities, creates standards for carrying out capture operations that are considerably more difficult to satisfy than those required to carry out a lethal strike.

“Direct action,” as described by the PPG refers to both lethal uses of force (i.e. drone strikes) and capture operations. Both forms of “direct action” require plans that indicate the counterterrorism objectives to be achieved and the legal basis for taking the action. Both also require near certainty that a lawful terrorist target be present and a near certainty that “non-combatants” will not be injured or killed, reasonable attempts to determine the identity of the target(s), and a consideration of implications for the broader regional and international political interests of the United States.

In order to carry out a lethal drone strike, the PPG also requires an assessment that capture is not feasible. In principle this requirement appears to prioritize captures over drone strikes, however in practice a remote-piloted drone strike is likely to be nearly always more “feasible” than a capture operation. Further, the PPG goes on to lay out an additional list of requirements for a capture operation that go well beyond those for a lethal drone operation. These additional requirements for a capture operation include: consideration of whether the suspect’s capture would further U.S. counterterrorism efforts, consideration of the plan for detention and interrogation of the target, and consideration of the risk to U.S. personnel in a capture operation. These requirements are appropriate and should be maintained, but in effect by raising the bar to capturing the targeted person, they further bias the use of “direct action” toward the use of lethal drone strikes.

Introducing additional positive requirements (such as those recommended above) to be met before authorizing a lethal drone strike would help ensure that lethal strikes are no longer the default option for addressing terrorist targets. Applying these requirements to the lethal use of drones – but not to efforts to capture the targeted person(s) – would serve to reduce the existing bias against capture.

As the leading developer of drone technology, the U.S. has a special responsibility to set standards for the use of drones. Drone technology is proliferating. 63 countries are producing drones domestically. At least 11 countries are developing armed drones. At least 8 countries and non-state actors, like ISIS, have used armed drones in combat. Some of the most powerful countries that are developing drone capabilities are unlikely to see U.S. standards as a floor, but will instead see them as a ceiling. As such, we believe the U.S. should act now to adopt and internationalize strong standards, such as those recommended above, before the use of lethal drones by many nations spirals out of control.

As members of the faith community, we encourage the next Administration to uplift the importance of human life and human dignity by adopting the above recommendations for limiting the use of lethal drone strike.

**Signatories of Transition Statement:**

**Dr. Stephen Colecchi**

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Office of International Peace and Justice, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

**Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie**

General Secretary  
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**Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Sealy**

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