

“Our concerns center on the nature of lethal drones as a weapon, namely their use in targeted killings of specific individuals most of whom are Muslims, their impact upon targeted communities, their operation by remote control, and the consequences that drones increase hostilities. As people of faith, we advocate the rigorous pursuit of Just Peace, based on upholding dignity and human rights for all, with resources dedicated to this alternative at a level matching that spent on the current drone warfare program.”

–The Interfaith Conference on Drone Warfare, January 2015 Princeton, NJ

Following the historic January 2015 Interfaith Conference on Drone Warfare, regional conferences and briefings are being planned and held in 2015 and 2016.

A briefing was held in the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington DC which was attended by many staff members for Senate & House offices as well as members of various DC based faith offices. This briefing was co-sponsored by the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare, the Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare and the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC).

Aundreia Alexander, Associate General Secretary of the NCCC for Action & Advocacy for Justice & Peace welcomed the attendees. Rev. Alexander noted that although there may be challenges working together across faith traditions, at the core of all of them is the belief in the intrinsic value of all humanity and creation. All faith traditions hold firm to the belief that love, mercy, just peace, and human dignity should be afforded to everyone. Rev. Alexander concluded, “The targeted lethal drone program goes against our core values and we stand in solidarity with our interfaith partners today calling for accountability in the United States and Internationally for the unjust use of such tactics.”

Wendy Patten, Senior Policy Analyst, Open Society Foundations, opened the briefing with a presentation on the President Policy Guidance (PPG) issued in 2013, a classified document that sets out guidelines on how lethal drone strikes can be conducted. According to a summary sheet which was issued to the public, the PPG gives guidance on how force can be used outside of the U.S. and outside of areas of active hostility. The summary says lethal drone strikes should be used only when there is a legal basis for lethal force, when the target is a continuing and imminent threat, when there is near certainty the target is present and when there is near certainty no civilians will be hurt. In addition, the PPG summary says that the preference is for capture and that lethal drones strikes should not be used unless the government of the country won’t address the issue effectively.

Ms. Patton pointed out, however, there is no clear information about what the U.S. considers to be “areas of active hostility” so we don’t know where the PPG applies. The meaning of key terms, such as “continuing imminent threat” and “feasibility of capture” are not clear. Secrecy is a major problem since we don’t know the number of civilians killed. Finally, we cannot judge the PPG since there is no information about any post-strike investigations to ascertain if any civilians were killed or if the targeted individual was killed. The government has not released information about post-strike assessments and if any redress for harm has been provided. She stated that the U.S. military makes condolence payments in armed conflicts for civilian casualties, and she contended that such practice could be extended to drone strikes. Ms. Patten concluded that greater transparency about this program is needed.

Daniel L. Davis, Lt. Col., US Army (Ret.) opened his remarks by noting that concern for human rights and military policy need to be held closely together for our policy to be consistent with our core values as the United States of America. He added that if a policy is not working, it needs to be stopped or

curtailed. The US drone policy includes no due process since people are often targeted with minimal information. Lt. Col. Davis stated we often don't know why someone is talking to someone else. There is no opportunity for a potential target to explain that for instance, "they have my wife and children, they want me to move these items, I am only doing this under pressure". There is no accountability after an attack to validate that a legitimate target was identified. Finally, Lt. Col. Davis argued the targeted lethal drone program is not consistent with US values because it uses the death penalty for all crimes. Lt. Col. Davis also spoke about the problems he has witnessed as a result of drone attacks. In rural Pakistan, people were traumatized by drone attacks that too often caused significant death and destruction outside the intended target. These attacks caused hate of the U.S. to grow, as has been validated by numerous studies. Lt. Col. Davis argued that it is unsurprising that these attacks increase U.S. resentment since they do not reduce the terrorist threat, but rather increase it. Lt. Col. Davis concluded, "We can't keep following a policy that is counter-productive and counter to U.S. values, so my recommendation is to stop the program."

Naureen Shah, Director, National Security & Human Rights Program, Amnesty USA, began by agreeing that governments must counter terrorism but in a way that protects human rights. The rhetoric around drone strikes is that they are a surgical, clean and humane way to attack armed groups. In reality, however, there is no information being gathered about how to avoid civilian casualties. The U.S. assumes that everyone killed in an attack is an enemy combatant, and there is a lack of response by the U.S. when civilians are killed. Ms. Shah discussed several particular events when civilians were killed. In these cases, these deaths were not acknowledged, which takes away the humanity of the innocent individuals who suffered and died. Ms. Shah concluded that the administration needs to examine closely the policies behind these attacks and particularly the policy of secrecy about the targeted lethal drone strikes.

Yasmine Taeb, Legislative Representative for Human Rights & Civil Liberties, Friends Committee on National Legislation, noted that while the Bush's administration conducted 52 lethal drone strikes, the Obama administration has conducted over 500 lethal drone strikes. Ms. Taeb noted that although President Obama promised more transparency, the targeted lethal drone program does not identify the people who are killed, lawfully or unlawfully, and does not describe the criteria used to choose targets. Ms. Taeb urged the staffers present to encourage their members of Congress to support the Targeted Lethal Force Transparency Act which would clarify and define who is a combatant and who is a non-combatant. She noted the recent Intercept papers revealed that out of 155 targeted attacks; only 19 hit the intended targets: a 12% accuracy rate. Ms. Taeb encouraged the staffers to support a move of this program from the CIA to the JSOC. Ms. Taeb concluded that we need Congress to play a role in oversight and hold a hearing on this program that has caused such high civilian casualty rates.

In the question & answer period that followed, speakers noted we do not know the true cost of this program and are not examining how this short-term tactic affects our longer term strategic interests. Lt. Col. Davis noted again that this program exists because it can, but he questions whether this drones program truly makes the U.S. safer. Other speakers noted that 86 countries have this technology and that the U.S. should worry that these countries will conclude, following the U.S. actions, that accountability is unimportant. The speakers concluded we need greater transparency, accountability and restraint in the US drones program.

Nate Hosler, Director, Office of Public Witness, Church of the Brethren, moderated the panel presentation and led a discussion following the panel about what the interfaith community can do. **Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love** spoke and noted we are in solidarity with communities that have been harmed

and yet we are citizens of the communities that are sending the drones. She noted that the physical cost of the program has been outsourced to Pakistan, Yemen, and other countries where the attacks occur. Dr. Love talked about the restoration of the relationships needed to make wars end “better” and cited the rebuilding that occurred after World War II. If we reframe this debate about lethal drone strikes in moral language, Dr. Love hopes that we may help change the discussion to examine the true costs of the program.

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