

Overall, Meisels's conclusion, that killing terrorists with drones is permissible, seems sound. There is no easy way to reject just the use of drones without challenging the use of other weapons, or even some general assumptions of traditionalist just war theory. At best, it defends a convincing argument, at worst, an invitation to radically challenge its assumptions.

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Your general argument is that the use of drones does not pose particular moral controversies which do not apply to the use of other weapons, such as long-range artillery or high-flying military jets, where the operators also work in a relatively 'risk-less' environment when fighting a technologically inferior adversary. You further argue that the use of drones is in fact less morally challenging than the use of more basic weapons, because drones are not suitable for terrorist use, they are highly selective and particularly well adapted to scrupulous use by 'good states'.

How does this type of argument apply to the moral psychology of war, specifically to the ethics and mindset of specific soldiers who operate drones? While it may be true that a pilot flying at a high altitude and releasing guided missiles is not really at any kind of direct risk from an adversary equipped with anti-aircraft cannons with limited range, the pilot still has to be able to fly the plane, to operate the missiles, he or she has to be there, experience the environment. The same, even more, is the case with the operators of long range artillery pieces: they hear the noise, the firing, smell the explosives, they have an experience of war, even from a relatively long distance. However, drone operators have no experience of war at all: they drive to work in the morning, stop by to buy a burger, operate drones from an office-like environment, and then drive back home for supper and to watch their favorite soap opera. There is a very tangible sense in which this is not a 'normal' situation for a soldier, and this casts all kinds of moral issues: how does one judge one's actions, and how are one's actions judged by others, if one is not really a soldier, but a bureaucrat with relatively limited skills, operating a drone from an office? How does that impact the values of the military profession? Perhaps most importantly, what kind of soldiers will we get if the armies start relying on drones progressively (and they are on the way to do so)? Does this mean that anyone could be a drone operator, even those people who could never withstand the rigors of the battlefield? How can we count on their integrity, toughness and firmness of moral values? And in what sense do they share the military ethos, or do they undermine it?

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Thank you for the inspiring lecture. I believe that you have convincingly shown that all objections regarding the use of drones are groundless if we seriously take into account the profits they provide and – if we accept this kind of budgeting. I

will focus here only on one argument, because it presents a unique opportunity to confront views. Namely, when you consider the claim according to which “riskless warfare is a bad one in itself, either because it makes one’s opponent non-threatening and therefore non-liable to attack in self-defense, or else because it is dishonorable, unfair, and lacking in military valor” (23), you rightly observe that such claims usually exclude the historical dimension which would reveal that hurling, flying cannon, long range missiles, and even aerial bombardment by manned aircrafts, must have also seemed like terrifying remote control weapons at the time they appeared. This is the case because throughout history we had various degrees of “asymmetrical warfare, distant engagement, the loss of old-fashioned military virtues and defenseless targets facing a faceless death.” (23) If I reconstruct the position correctly, this type of critique of riskless warfare basically holds that the main advantage of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, namely the risk-free combat, is in fact the weakest point of the pro-UAV argument. To a lesser degree, this type of reasoning can also be found in Walzer: he worries about the easiness of killing enemies without risking our soldiers, about the dangerous temptation of riskless warfare that relaxes the targeting rules and actually increases general unfocused warfare (Walzer 2016), or, as you wittily summarize: “zero risk warfare encourages trigger happiness” (24). It seems that your answer here is also quite sufficient: using drone capacity to focus on the goal as narrowly, humanely and technically as possible, trying to hit the enemy target and preferably none else, and any other use of drones is clearly unacceptable, as is any other use of a sling shot, or a bow and arrow. Therefore, complaints about misuse and over-use of drones, intentionally or negligently terrorizing populations, should be aimed at specific policies and policy makers, rather than at the technology (25).

However, Aleksandar Fatić has a different position: the use of drones fails to satisfy any of the four conditions for the justified use of military – the drone operator needs no courage whatsoever; in riskless and costless drone attacks there is no willingness to make sacrifices for the cause soldiers fight for; there are no questions of justice, but only a technological task for the drone operator, like a computer game where there is no immediate awareness of justice or injustice as a factor of decision-making; finally, to conduct offensive military operations by the drones, one needs no virtues, no humility, and one does not have a sense of oneself as a part of the military moral community (Fatić 2017: 352-353). In response to similar objections, you refer to B. J. Strawser and Danny Statman (Statman 2015) and point out that, morally, drones have the capacity to minimize casualties among civilians and combatants, and financially, they are relatively cost-effective for states to produce and deploy in a relationship that is inhabited for the implementation of similar missions, freeing up shared resources for welfare expenditures (25). Therefore, according to Strawser’s argument, it is necessary to employ UAVs as opposed to exposing soldiers to unnecessary risk, that is, “in certain contexts UAV employment is not only ethically permissible, but is, in fact, ethically obligatory.” (Strawser 2010: 344). Do you think we are dealing here with a different understanding of morals? Fatić insists on the applied military ethics - which is corrupted by the corporatization of warfare. Do you find such account of the moral cost of deploying drones wrong? Or inappropriate? Or just obsolete?