

What Challenges Does Drone Warfare Pose To International Peace?

Drones have seen an unprecedented rise as a form of warfare throughout the 21st century, having been adopted by major world powers as their go-to means of fighting international battles. Originally started as a 'cure for terrorism' during the 'War Against Terrorism' under the G.W. Bush administration, drone warfare has evolved into something far greater than a cure for terrorism overseas, also being used in inter-state warfare, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War. Drones, simply put, are 'Unmanned Aerial Vehicles', which at face value seem nothing more than reconnaissance technology; however, these vehicles can be weaponised to wreak havoc without requiring a manned pilot. While major powers have had access to satellite technology, as well as piloted weaponised aircraft, for a large part of the 20th century, the combination of the two while being controlled by an operative within the confines of allied territory has resulted in an extremely convenient method of warfare. Logically, this weapon must pose some sort of threat to international peace, which has become entirely apparent when considering three major factors: their accessibility, civilian casualties, and their implications for oppressed regions. As a whole, drones are the biggest threat to international peace in the years to come, with compelling evidence that their use will continually grow.

Previously, states would have to weigh up whether a war would be worth the casualties of its soldiers as a deterrent to participating in said war; drones have diminished this apprehension. Wars have always had an accessibility aspect; questions arise before warfare begins, such as 'Do we have the manpower?', 'How many will die?', 'Can we transport resources effectively?'. Drone warfare only asks one question - 'Can we afford enough drones?'. Drone warfare has become only a financial apprehension for states as they are such a convenient method of participating in conflict, so why would states not use them? The US has the most dominant drone fleet, with over [11,000 drones](#) of varying lethality. Having initially used this fleet to participate in overseas counter-terrorist missions, their accessibility is best shown in the context of the Obama administration, in which over [400 drone strikes](#) were approved within the first 4 years of his presidency, in comparison to Bush's 50 beforehand. During these 4 years of the Obama administration, over 3,300 terrorists among different hostile groups were eliminated by drones alone in Pakistan and Yemen. Specifically, the effectiveness of drone warfare is shown by the Datta Khel Airstrike that amassed 44 casualties, the majority of which were Taliban members, including a top [Taliban commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur](#). Seeing as the

US did not lose a single soldier or face many consequences to their resources, yet managed to eliminate a significant number of high-ranking targets within a single day, it is unquestionable that drones are the most accessible method of international warfare with the least consequential strain on resources, therefore making an ideal weapon. Furthermore, despite the cost of the Reaper Drone being [\\$34 million](#), the US military was able to use this drone multiple times at very low risk of it being damaged in the slightest, in turn answering the question of 'Can we afford enough drones?' with a yes. To conclude, the threat of drone warfare to international peace is overwhelmingly destructive due to their extremely accessible nature as a means of effectively targeting an enemy without receiving any substantial consequences in comparison to conventional warfare.

However, one way in which drone strikes are objectively detrimental is when concerning civilian casualties. The harm of drone strikes on civilian populations largely concerns the morality of the question 'How many civilian casualties are too many?'. Some may say one is too many, an example being Obama during his speech that stated '[There must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured.](#)'. Despite this, all drone strikes authorised by Obama resulted in approximately [800 civilians dead](#). On the other hand, an argument can be made that there is a certain threshold of casualties harmed which may be deemed necessary for the success of a mission. A scenario may be presented where 200 civilians may be killed, however, the success of this operation would save the lives of 10,000 people. Can this sacrifice then be deemed ethical? Drone strikes are regularly approved without enough intelligence to know whether civilians may be injured, one reason for this is the fact that the software implemented in [drones can identify targets simply by their movement, rather than through facial recognition](#), resulting in some drone strikes being authorised based on false information. Russia has become a major threat to civilians in this respect, with urban residential buildings being targeted the most out of any other type of infrastructure, resulting in over 7000 civilian casualties since 2022, with one instance where an attack on an apartment building in Odesa killed [5 children and 12 civilians](#). Attacking civilians is in no way advantageous to win a war, therefore targeting civilians is and will continue to be a major challenge to world peace as it has become too easy for states to kill civilians in such a convenient and unpredictable way, furthermore giving states the capacity to cause mass casualties if they turn their back on ethical warfare, which may already be happening. Furthermore, drone warfare poses a major challenge to international peace as the death of civilians for the 'greater good' of an operation may become more widely accepted as a necessary evil, in turn, encouraging states to have a less critical analysis of the risks and casualties when authorising a drone strike.

The continual buildup of drone arsenals by economic superpowers, as well as their effectiveness on enemies and civilians, create a recipe that can surely oppress regions and states effectively. Drones are still in their early development within military arsenals, such as the UK only owning [10 Reaper](#)

[drones](#). However, as these drones become mass-produced more efficiently, they will be the go-to piece of weaponry within state defence spending worldwide. With this rise comes the real possibility that states can oppress regions through the constant deployment of drones as a form of policing. One scenario in which this could happen is in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. This region in western China holds a large ethnic population of Turkic Uyghurs. Xinjiang is a hotspot for Chinese officials due to the government's forceful oppression of their culture, with many [Uyghurs condemned in internment camps without due process](#). There are already ['Strict security measures and mass surveillance tactics.'](#) being used to oppress the region from further unrest, yet it is not a question of 'Should China use drones?', but instead 'Why wouldn't they?'. There is little ethical consideration for Uyghurs when being suppressed, so the use of drones to target those who do not comply with the government would not go against the state agenda. With the goal of the government in mind, drones would be an extremely effective way of maintaining control in Xinjiang, furthermore being a strong deterrent to Uyghur resistance. Because of this, entire regions could easily be surveillance and oppressed through violent means, in turn giving the state free reign of the region as a whole to oppress it. This could result in mass civilian casualties if ethical considerations are put aside, as well as an accessible means of policing that doesn't put the same strain on the state as a funded police force. Undoubtedly, oppressing civilian areas poses a massive threat to international peace even outside the scope of inter-state warfare or counter-terrorism, but also as a form of policing due to their implication of forming a violent surveillance state using drones.

Drones can be a genuinely effective tool when used in ethical situations, such as to curb the threat of terrorism, however, their accessibility is a convenient way of participating in conflicts without having to weigh up physical challenges, previously being soldiers, logistics or money. As stated above, drone warfare is an entirely financial dilemma, where the ethics of sending troops to war is now gone and the logistical issues of getting to the battlefield no longer restrict governments from engaging in warfare. From this accessibility threat comes the moral problem of civilian casualties. As drone operations become more normalized in the future, the deaths of civilians to complete an operation may be seen as a necessary sacrifice, rather than an unethical tragedy, therefore posing a risk to not only militias or armies, but also civilians caught in the crossfire. Because of these two factors, the oppression of regions is possible as military arsenals become bulked with drones, in turn certainly creating a humanitarian challenge in the future due to the creation of lethal surveillance states through the use of weaponised drones. As modern militaries develop, the threat of drone warfare will most definitely pose the biggest threat to international peace in the 21st century.