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Dilemma of Life

After watching the movie *Eye in the Sky*, I have determined that the best possible choice to make regarding a suicide bombing scenario is to contain the threat before it occurs. The movie starts off with the US, UK, and Kenya working together in an effort to capture three of the ten highest-level Al-Shabaab leaders. Intelligence has led them to a house in a neighborhood controlled by paranoid terrorists, whom they will be spying on to assess engagement. The officials use sophisticated technology to spy on their targets, like drones, manned ornithopters (aircraft that fly by flapping wings like a bird), and insectothopters (aircraft that look and behave like flying insects). Eventually, those in charge of dealing with the terrorists are obligated in killing them and face a dilemma. To kill the terrorists, they risk the life of a beautiful little Kenyan girl.

At first, there was a need to confirm the IDs of the suspects before taking any action. Following target confirmation, there was a debate regarding the change of mission from capture to shoot to kill. An agent was sent in to spy on the targets through the use of a remote-controlled flying bug. The bug reveals the terrorists have suicide vests and thus pose a significant threat to as many as eighty lives once they leave the house. This led to discussions regarding whether or not one of the suspects was protected by their citizenship and whether or not their decision to fire missiles into the house would have full support. CDEs (Collateral Damage Estimates) were taken to keep the amount of damage caused by the rockets to a minimum and to preserve the lives of those who weren’t involved. The mission gets put on hold as a girl unexpectedly comes nearby to sell loaves of bread. Although the missiles can now technically be fired, the girl’s presence leads to another heated debate and some mission adjustments.

One of the few reasons why the US and the UK are conducting a drone campaign comes from the risk of the media making both nations look bad. Another reason would be to avoid direct military confrontation, as the Al-Shabaab militant group could go wild and start using civilians as hostages to defend themselves. The drone campaign was an expression of the Bush Doctrine in that the US is responsible for its own protection by promoting democracy wherever terrorists may be located in order to undermine the basis for terrorist activities. Obama had a list of targets in his desk of the people who posed the most risk for committing terrorist acts, like 9/11 (it doesn’t have to be as serious, but it can still be terrible). The due process of using a drone involves consideration of whether or not a violent attack is imminent, if capture is feasible or not, and if the operation follows the rules of war, international and domestic laws. The risk of a drone strike (not including the consciousness of the drone pilot’s peace of mind) involves losing innocent civilian lives and damage to the private property of others. In terms of collateral damage, there is always a risk for the loss of innocent lives and property, so it is up to the attacking party to try and reduce the collateral damage to a minimum, which could mean anything based on the situation.

Now, we return to the scenario by which three of the most wanted terrorists on the president’s list are gathered together in a house within a neighborhood that is controlled by them. Again, there is a girl right outside their house. The people inside do in fact pose a risk towards the lives of many others once they leave. In that scenario, I would not hesitate in firing the drone once. In terms of morals and beliefs, I would consider myself somewhere between a realist and a pragmatist (also predominantly a nihilist). I believe there is no meaning to one’s existence in that everything you do will be forgotten and lost to time. This isn’t entirely a bad thing as it means that every humiliation you have suffered, every malfortune you have experienced, and that every terrible action you have committed will be voided upon your death. Because all of your subjectively terrible actions will be voided upon death, you shouldn’t always get too hung up on them, even things like unintended murder. Also, the consequence of one’s actions do not always mean that there is no room for improvement or growth. Because there is no universal meaning to our existence, the only principles relevant in our existence are the ones we choose to live on. Because we have no inherent purpose, we are free to dictate what our purpose is and what it is that we want to do. Since nothing matters, you're free to assign value to whatever you want. You don't have to feel like you've wasted your life playing video games and reading comic books. It made you happy, so it mattered. And if it mattered to you, in a way, you mattered too. It doesn’t matter if there is any meaning because the universe is under no obligation to make sense to you and the only verifiable reality that we truly have is that right now, you and I are here (this is basically what optimistic nihilism is).

Coming from nihilism, one could also determine that one’s talents, skills, and contributions to this world are meaningless as there is always someone else in the world who is better than you at whatever it is you do. What this implies is that anyone is replaceable, including the girl who was in the zone of the drone strike. As for the girl, she won’t suffer as there is no suffering to be done from existence. We, as living beings, must accept that all things come to an end. The girl’s death is a mere expression of the intricacies of reality. She had no control over fate. No one wanted her dead. She just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is hard to think about nonexistence or death because we can’t comprehend the notion of a world without color, without thoughts, without sensation, or an end to time and reality. It is important that we acknowledge our mortality, because if we don’t, we risk wasting our precious and finite lives. We will all die. There is nothing we can do about that. To even exist, life and death are both needed. How can life start from nothing and not lead to an end? Infinite things have no end, but can they have a beginning? Life starts, sometimes feels right, sometimes feels wrong, and then it ends. We may be gone, but what is left of us doesn’t have to be. We are as much a part of this universe as this universe is of us. Dying isn’t as scary as it sounds. If you don’t remember the trillions of years that have passed before your existence, the trillions of years that follow your death will pass in no time. As a matter of fact, if you close your eyes and count to one, that is how long eternity feels (many people have experienced eternity before they were born and upon their death).

Now, if the drone needs to be fired a second time, because the damage is done and because there is no undoing the first strike, the second time may not be as big of a deal. It is possible that despite the power of the first strike, there may be a survivor. Based on what just happened, the US can no longer afford to let the person live, nor does it intend to try again and risk even more lives elsewhere. The US has in many ways, a right to conduct a drone campaign. Drones help preserve the lives of those who don’t want to engage in physical combat. As long as all the legal parameters have been pre-determined, and it has been officially determined that at that moment, a drone strike is the best possible solution, there is no need to hold back. There are some collateral damage risks associated with the use of a drone, but those risks are fewer and typically less impactful than a full-on gunfight. Also, the destruction of property is usually negligible as land can always be rebuilt, whereas human lives can’t be restored. Drone strikes can also be cheaper and more efficient than gunfights under certain circumstances. Under Obama, a set of five criteria were established as a review process and form of congressional oversight to confirm that the attack is a valid action. These five criteria are near certainty that the target is present, near certainty that non-combatants or non-targets will not be injured or killed, an assessment that determines that capture is not feasible, an assessment that the strike cannot be linked to the US, and an assessment that there is no other logical path or action to take during that time. Regarding Obama’s criteria, I believe they can be improved, but they are the best we have currently. Eventually, as we face new scenarios and dilemmas (or as we improve what our drones can do), we will have to add in more criteria or change them. It is still impossible to account for everything as everything consists of what we have experienced and not what we could experience. We also can’t predict the future (keep in mind that the atomic bomb was once considered science fiction, so were drones).

To conclude, the US was completely justified in the strike, even if it meant the sacrifice of a little girl. Their basis for action was made on the assumption that even more lives were at risk and that there may not be another opportunity or an even better opportunity to strike in the future. The US has also worked alongside the UK and some Kenyan officials in this operation in order to ensure that their actions have full support. They have even tried to preserve the girl’s life by buying out all of her bread in order to get her to move from the strike zone and adjusted the drone strike to increase her chance of survival. Under those conditions, it can be justifiably be said that the officials have made every effort to keep collateral damage to a minimum.