

The US Congress should not ban the private ownership and usage of remotely piloted vehicles or drones

- Remotely piloted vehicles provide more benefit than harm
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Introduction and thesis statement/question/the problem to solve

I am in opposition to the proposition that the United States Congress should ban all privately owned “remotely piloted vehicles” or drones.

Definitions and historical context research and citation

Drone: an unarmed, remote-controlled pilotless aircraft or missile

“Privately owned drones”: a small, remote controlled vehicle that has a recording device attached to it

FAR 91.13: “No person may operate an aircraft in a careless or reckless manner so as to endanger the life or property of another.” ([Sachs](#), 2013)

14 CFR PART 48: “Effective December 21, 2015, all persons 13-years of age and older, who operate drones for hobby or recreation, must register themselves with the FAA, if any of the drones they operate outdoors weigh more than .55 pounds and less than 55 pounds.” ([Sachs](#), 2013)

Social Contract Theory: “Social contract theory, nearly as old as philosophy itself, is the view that persons' moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live.” ([Friend](#), Unknown)

Act Utilitarianism: “Act utilitarian’s believe that whenever we are deciding what to do, we should perform the action that will create the greatest net utility. In their view, the principle of utility—do whatever will produce the best overall results—should be applied on a case-

by-case basis. The right action in any situation is the one that yields more utility (i.e. creates more well-being) than other available actions.” ([Nathanson](#), Unknown)

Argument 1: *Remotely controlled vehicles lead to more benefits than they do harm.*

One of the advents of the 21st Century has been an increased use of technology to help subsidize human involvement in both military and commercial use. Few technological changes have proven more prevalent in the public eye than the use of drone and with expanding commercial and private use of drones this topic is only gaining more traction in the national media. Perhaps the

most well known instance of commercial drone use, is the reinvention of delivery services offered by Amazon.com, the popular shopping website. Amazon’s drone service, better known as “Amazon Prime Air,”



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promises delivery times of thirty minutes or less, far shorter than the currently promised next day shipping. Not only is this an innovative idea to separate Amazon’s services from their competitors, but also a potentially revolutionary change in the delivery service market. Just as cargo ships and planes were able to expand global trade, so to do drones have the potential to usher in a new era of world trade. As electrical and rechargeable devices they offer a lower carbon footprint than the trucks currently used for local delivery, while simultaneously creating more high tech jobs and lowering delivery costs ([Juliano](#), 2013). In addition drones have become increasingly popular on both movie sets and construction sites as way to mitigate human risk. Take the movie *Skyfall*, a film praised on its cinematography were many of the memorable scenes are sweeping high altitude shots. Were a traditional

camera used it would either take towering cranes or filming from a helicopter to achieve the same effect, both more dangerous and expensive options. Similarly drones on the construction site enable inspection of construction in dangerous areas without human risk. Social Contract Theory backs up the usage of drones for commercial usage such as these as we live in a society that promotes worker safety, efficiency and environmental consciousness. These particular impacts of drones, directly reflect the values set by the Social Contract of the United States in particular as they generally improve utility across the board, while the obligation to adhere to this social contract serves to protect against misuse drones, an aspect of the technology that is additionally enforced by FAA with their guidelines of regulation and use.

Argument 2: Drones can be used for surveillance and law enforcement by the police force.

Drones have been most popularized by their military counterparts, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAV's for short and while there are many differences between the militarized models and those designed for commercial and private use, there is still a use for domestic security drones. Though any domestic drone will first and foremost be an unarmed vehicle, the potential for surveillance is exceptional. Drones offer the same set of tools already in place with current surveillance technology such as security and traffic cameras with the added caveat that they are mobile. Current mobile surveillance relies on unmarked vans and cars, which while proven effective do not offer the same of amount of stealth and tracking ability of a drone 500 feet in the air. The mobility of drones also allows them to patrol high crime areas with more coverage than is possible from patrol cars and security cameras alone. First, the height at which drones fly allows for a much greater line of sight than ground patrol while the technology enables 360 degree surveillance of the world below. Once a potential crime or violation has been spotted the drone is able to track the perpetrator until police forces are able to arrive on the scene. This tracking potential allows for police forces

to focus on apprehending the subject while being supplied with a real time feed on the suspect's route. Not only are drones able to assist the police in finding and apprehending criminals but the addition of observational units in the sky could help prevent crime as well. Having visible drones around adds the element of an eye in the sky, which could help to deter criminal activity especially in the aforementioned high crime areas and while many might have issues with mobile surveillance there truly is very little difference between established misuse of surveillance technology and the potential for misuse of police drones.

Argument 3: The fear is just in the name; a RC Plane with a camera attached to it could perform the same.

The term drone itself carries a negative connotation that is related to much of the backlash in the media regarding personal drone use. When one hears the term drone it is more likely to conjure up images militarized vehicles of subterfuge and destruction than recreational toys or the commercialized vehicles under development for Amazon. However the definition of drone is simply an unmanned aerial vehicle up to 55lbs, a definition that includes RC planes, model helicopters and many other recreational toys that are considered harmless ([Sachs](#), 2013). With such a stigma against the term drone, a RC Plane with a camera attached could do just as much if not more when it come to violating a person's privacy. One step forward that could be made to both fight the stigma against drones as well as to improve the clarification between different classes of unmanned aircraft is to have distinguishing names for the different classes. For example there are model drones, surveillance drones, delivery drones and endless other possibilities, each one built for a specific purpose. This idea of distinguishing drones by purpose is quite utilitarian as well, as Act Utilitarian principles state that any action must be whatever will net the most utility. Therefore each type of drone would have a mandated use in which society's utility could be

maximized. As stated earlier the fear of drones is based on the perception of their effect on society, not the utility that they may actually bring.

Counter Arguments: *The use of remotely piloted vehicles is a direct invasion of privacy, as anyone could acquire one and gather information through it.*

A leading argument for the ban of all privately owned drones is that they offer the threat of a direct invasion of privacy. The flagship case for this movement may very well be “The Drone Slayer” a Kentucky man who, using his shotgun, shot down a drone hovering



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some 200 feet above his house ([Gershman, 2015](#)). Originally charged with criminal mischief in the first degree, William H. Meredith also known as “The Drone Slayer” had his case dismissed by the presiding judge. This event in many ways culminates the argument between pro-drone and anti-drone advocates, where what constitutes an invasion of privacy is often the

tipping point between the two sides. Most importantly this case sets a future precedent for drone related invasion of privacy cases. Central to fear of an invasion of privacy is the ability for a drone to gather information remotely especially in places of private residence. While a utilitarian society is ideal, especially with a strongly mandated social contract, there will always be individuals who don’t act with regard to such a contract or the utility of society. It is to prevent such a misuse of drones that people clamor for regulation and reform of private and personal usage. With wiretapping and the Patriot Act still in recent memory, the American population has little patience for any further violation of privacy and drones is just the most recent manifestation of that threat.

Rebuttal to counter arguments

In the words of “The Drone Slayer” himself, “It’s not the drone. It’s the person operating them,” he said, saying he doesn’t think people should shoot at drones without good cause. ‘A lot of people are going to see a drone...and they’re just going to shoot at it. I don’t condone that,’ he said.” ([Gershman](#), 2015). This statement is indicative of the argument for and against drones, it’s less about the technology itself and more about those who will misuse it. Unfortunately this goes for all forms of technology, and happens to the stance of pro gun-rights advocates as well. Furthermore should drones be banned, the only impairment comes to those who were using them for their intended purpose, those who broke the social contract would likely still continue to use drones for their own personal gain, just as with other banned or regulated technologies. Act Utilitarianism addresses this concern by emphasizing the net utility, realizing that while not all will act in the best interest of society the overall results may very well prove to be a net positive. There is also regulation already in place and being discussed to both controls the usage of drones as well as to establish guidelines for invasion of privacy. Two of these relevant regulations from the Federal Aviation Administration are FAR 91.13 and 14 CFR PART 48, which serve to identify and monitor drone operators and to establish guidelines for safe usage with consideration of others. While this only a start for regulating the invasion of privacy that is possible through the usage of drone (or other methods of surveillance for that matter) it does give the courts two significant tools in future case rulings. Being able to seize and identify a drone in the act of a direct invasion of privacy give the police a method of identifying the operator a rogue drone reduces the anonymity of the crime while 14 CFR PART 48 creates guidelines for drones on private property.

Conclusion

In light of recent controversy and conflict The United States should not consider banning the private ownership of “Remotely piloted vehicles” or drones. With the utility that

drones bring, both in commercial and recreational aspects, much more good than harm could come with private ownership of drones and other remotely piloted vehicles being upheld. The efficiency in delivery, especially in terms of the carbon footprint of large companies is a significant aspect of society that drones can serve to improve on. Law enforcement too can greatly benefit from increased surveillance that drones provide, they would be able to increase safety in less patrolled or high crime areas, assist in the tracking down and apprehending of criminals and serve to keep a record any crime in their patrolled area. Much of the fear surrounding drones lies in the name, with toy's mounted with a camera being capable of the same invasion of privacy that has led to so much distress. Though the vehicles themselves may be innocent, those that use them will not always be and that remains the most significant issue when establishing regulation or discussing the prohibition of drones. The ban or legalization of drones serves very little purpose either way in affecting the misuse of drones and for that reason the utility brought by their personal and commercial use far outweighs any misuse that can come from an unethical misuse of this technology.

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