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Values in the Workplace

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Ethical Issues surrounding the usage of drones in warfare

In the earliest recorded human warfare, people waged wars with spears, bows and knives, eventually becoming swords, then evolving into guns, ships, cannons, planes, bombs, missiles and now drones. Drones are a natural evolution of warfare since people have typically always preferred to fight at a longer range, making themselves as safe as possible. Today, drones are a large part of warfare, being used largely in part by the US Air Force.

The USAF currently owns and operates several thousand drones. They’ve been deployed around the world for various uses in wars. In Iraq, the USAF conducted about 30-40 missions daily with their predator drones in 2014. These ranged through various uses of the drones, some missions were reconnaissance, others launching strikes on suspected terrorist groups.

These drones are of massive value to the military for dozens of different reasons. One of the big reason for them is the cost, drones are much cheaper to purchase and operate. An F-35 fighter costs the military around $85 million just to purchase it, while a reaper drone is only $14 million. The F-35 also cost around $40,000 to operate per hour of flight, while a predator costs less than $4,000. For these reasons alone, we can see that operating drones is massively beneficial to the military. Drones are also much safer to fly, since there’s no pilot. You’re never putting one of your pilot’s lives at risk to run a mission. Drones can also operate for much longer periods of time, being able to remain air born for up to 30 hours with some of the longer-range models. This is way longer than any human pilot would be able to fly for, with most missions lasting less than 4 hours.

While drones are massively beneficial to the military, they do bring up some controversial topic for many different reasons. One issue with drones is that a lot of attacks end up having civilian casualties. In Pakistan, the USAF claimed that only 5% of those killed in drone strikes were civilians, however the Pakistani military estimated the number to be closer to 20%. Regardless of whether it’s 5% or 20% though, that’s far too many civilian casualties.

In terms of just war principles, drones do not meet the standard that should be met. Drones have been used in the \_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_ wars, wars that we’re officially declared and waged against a nation state. I’m excluding war on terror, such as for use against the Al-Qaida or the Islamic State, since those are against organizations and not nations - war on terror is much more complicated. In all of the listed wars, drones were used against countries that simply didn’t have the ability to have the same technology as the USAF.

In my opinion, drones could be used by the military, but with restrictions. I don’t think that drones should be used to attack a target located within a certain distance of residential area. I don’t think that it’s ethical to be risking the lives of civilians for the potential to take out a single threat.