Drone Flight Controller, Project 9 - MLiS Part I

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(Dated: January 19, 2023)

This paper outlines the process and intricacies that were explored with creating a drone that is controlled autonomously through reinforcement methods. The method implemented is a state-action value algorithm with a soft policy to ensure all states have a non-zero probability of being taken. This is kept to the bounds of a defined space and set of targets and a specified amount of timesteps. [RESULT] [CONCLUSION]

I. INTRODUCTION

Drones in the current age are becoming more and more popular making the public build their own versions of these drones from their homes. Usually drones are programmed with a flight controller to define how it moves for the task. While there are many ways to control a drone such as user controlled, this project focuses on implementing autonomous flight in which the drone will fly within a defined space to hit a number of targets. The drone that is to be controlled uses two motors which define the thrust independently allowing for navigation within the defined space. The task is to write a flight controller which uses reinforcement learning to have the drone traverse the space to hit as many targets as it can within a specified amount of time.

II. IMPLEMENTATION

For the implementation for this project we used a Soft policy Monti Carlo algorithm implementing a state-action value function ensuring that all actions can be taken with a non-zero probability.

A. States

The states for this model uses the pitch of the drone, distance from the target both x and y, and velocity. All these values are scaled to be integers within certain bounds and rounded down to fit within a grid which is used for action selection.

B. Actions

There are 6 actions used within this program to define what movement the drone does.

The first action is used to counteract the drones current pitch if it is facing the wrong direction from the target.

The second action adjusts the thrusts based on where the target is in the space and the angle of change that the drone will need to adjust to be directed at the target multiplied by 2. If the target is to the left of the drone it will have a lower left thrust than right thrust and vice versa.

The third action gets the thrust based on the velocity of the drone's pitch to adjust which thrust it needs to be more to counteract the current rotation when it's not rotating towards the target. This action is unstable compared to another action which does the same thing just at a slower rate.

The fourth action changes the thrust depending on the current pitch velocity of the drone. If the pitch velocity is in the direction of the target then the thrusts will more equal to slow down how much it spins, however if the pitch velocity is going in the opposite direction of the target then it strongly sets the thrusts to alter the pitch velocity to be towards the target, spinning it into the correct direction.

The fifth action adjusts the thrusts based on where the target is in the space and the angle of change that the drone will need to adjust to be directed at the target. If the target is to the left of the drone it will have a lower left thrust than right thrust and vice versa.

The final action is used to adjust the drones y value. If the drones y value is lower than the target's y value then the drone will ascend and if the drones y value is above the target's y value then the drone will descend.

The actions seem to be in a random order, this is due to a bug in which having a certain section of code in the final action, it would increment the pitch of the drone object exponentially even though there was no part of the code that would change that variable.

C. Rewards

We use the following reward function

$\frac{(-3a+0.1b-c+2d^3)}{100}$

$a = \|TargetDistance\|$

$b = abs(DroneVelocity)$

$c = \lfloor abs(DronePitch) \rfloor$

$d = 1 + TargetsHit$

If the drone is on the target then the

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III. EVALUATION

Each assessment was done with the following target coordinates. (0.35, 0.3), (-0.35, 0.4), (0.5, -0.4), (-0.35, 0), (0.35, 0.4), (-0.15, -0.1), (-0.35, -0.3), (0.35, -0.4), (-0.5, 0.4), (0.35, 0).

Each simulation was also run for 3000 simulation steps.

In this simulation, the heuristic algorithm hit 5 targets and achieved a value for the sum of rewards as 4894.42, against our chosen reward function. The following graph shows an example of the Soft state Monti-Carlo state machine algorithm's results, under the same conditions. This is not a deterministic algorithm and therefore there is some variance between iterations.

We modelled the results for the sum of the reward function for any given epoch through minimising the error with a log function.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Write your conclusions here.