The Issue of Drone Warfare

Almost two decades ago, the first armed drone strikes in Afghanistan (October 2001) and Yemen (November 2002) made headlines. Far from their origins as isolated newsworthy attacks, drone strikes have become a regular feature of military operations since then. Drone warfare is a form of aerial warfare using unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) or weaponized commercial unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The United States, United Kingdom, China, South Korea, Israel, Italy, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, France, India, and Poland are known to have manufactured operational UCAVs as of 2019. As of 2022, the Ukrainian enterprise Ukroboronprom and NGO group Aerorozvidka have built strike-capable drones and used them in combat.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, most drone strikes have been carried out by the US military in counties such as Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen and Libya. The impact on the population is a massive issue. For example, as the result of a minimum of 13,072 confirmed drone strikes by the US on Afghanistan between 2004 and 2020, over 4 million have been killed, up to 909 of them being civilians (up to 184 of these being children). In 2020, a Turkish-made UAV loaded with explosives detected and attacked the Libyan army through use of its artificial intelligence without command, according to a report from the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts on Libya, published in March 2021. It was considered the first attack carried out by the UAVs on their own initiative.

While the use of armed drones reduces risks for their users, drone strikes increase the risk to the security of affected communities. The increasing use of weaponised civilian drones further compounds these threats to civilians; weaponized civilian drones increase capacity to undertake attacks. In his 2013 report on the protection of civilians, the United Nations Secretary General noted, in relation to the proliferation of the use of armed drones by all parties, to the fact that 'as the ability to conduct attacks increases, so too does the threat posed to civilians'. An increasing amount of counter measures against such drones have been put in place to deal with this new threat, ranging from identification and tracking systems to various kinds of interdiction measures, which in turn lead to further humanitarian challenges.

The growing use of armed drones (by both states and armed non-state actors) is a developing expansion which is likely to continue and poses significant humanitarian concerns that need to be addressed. Whilst armed drones are not specifically regulated by international law, their use is governed by general rules of international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL).

Points to consider:

- *What are your country's views on the legislation of drone warfare?*

- *What is the most appropriate way to approach the issue without leaving nations at war in a vulnerable position?*

- *What can be done to regulate the purchase of drones by non-state actors?*

- *Should certain restrictions be placed on the usage of drones by the military?*

- *What can be done in order to reduce and address civilian deaths caused by drone warfare?*

Useful links:

https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/international-security-programme/policy-implications-armed-drone-use

https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/drones-wolff.aspx

https://www.satp.org/Docs/Faultline/25_The%20Ethics%20of%20Drone%20Warfare.pdf