

US rules for targeted killing using drones need clarifying, RAND report asserts

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Current U.S. policies on using drones for targeted killing are characterized by ambiguities in interpretations of international law and too many generalities, despite recent efforts by the Obama administration to clarify the policies, a new RAND Corporation report finds.

The report outlines an approach that would provide greater clarity, specificity and consistency in U.S. international legal policies involving the use of long-range armed [drones](#) in targeted killing.

"Policymakers in the United States and other countries need to define an overall approach to targeted killing using long-range armed drones that protects civilians and [human rights](#), while also allowing reasonable latitude in the fight against terrorism," said Lynn Davis, the study's lead author and a senior fellow at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Adopting such an approach would provide a basis for building public support at home and abroad for U.S. policies."

Since the beginning of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has dramatically increased use of unmanned drones, developing technology to target and kill those identified as being terrorist leaders.

The strategy has proven to be controversial, with some domestic and international groups saying the approach sidesteps due process and is done in violation of international law. Foreign governments have criticized the accuracy of U.S. drone strikes when civilians mistakenly

have been killed during operations carried out against terrorist cells. Such collateral damage has tarnished the purpose and efficacy of using [unmanned drones](#), according to the RAND report.

The report's proposed framework for a new drone policy is built on critical elements of [international law](#) related to the use of drones, and incorporates alternative legal policy interpretations drawn from administration officials as well as those critical of U.S. policies.

"The United States has an opportunity to take a leadership role in designing international norms for the use of drones in targeted killing that would be accepted and followed by the international community," said Michael McNerney, an author of the report and a senior defense research analyst at RAND.

According to the report, the Obama administration's reluctance to pursue international norms has created an environment where countries could employ long-range armed drones in ways that could harm U.S. interests by exacerbating regional tensions and violating human rights through the illegal use of drones to further the agendas of anti-American groups

More information:

www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1610.html

Provided by RAND Corporation

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