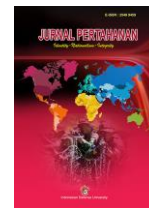




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THE US STRATEGY OF ARMED DRONE USAGE IN FIGHTING THE TALIBAN ELEMENTS IN PAKISTAN (2004-2016)

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Abstract

Prior to the Trump's presidency the US have performed as many as 400 armed drone strikes in Pakistan, killing approximately 3.000 terrorist targets including key leaders that hold important value to the organizations. More than a decade these attacks were performed, yet we have not seen the end of the terrorist and insurgent's presence in Pakistan. This leads into a thought whether the attacks were effective or not. Therefore, this study aims to analyze, predominantly evaluating the use of the targeted killing strategy in this US counterterrorism effort. The study uses qualitative research method by using Robert A. Pape's perspective in strategic effectiveness and David Galula's counterinsurgency perspective. Those perspectives pointed out the cause of this situation is due to the inability of the attacked target set to trigger the destruction of the movement, the inability of the US to secure the ends, ways, and means of the operation which involve the dissociation between the population and the insurgents, their ability to forge proper cooperation with its local ally, and the un-favoring view of the local population toward its targeted killings practice has resulted in the ineffectivity of the strategy and a prolonged fight between the US and its opponent. In sum, it can be inferred that despite capable of eliminating numerous high-value targets the targeted killing strategy is deemed ineffective due to its inability to procure full destruction of its opponent and due to the inability of the US to secure the ends, ways, and means of the operation which would have increase the success of the strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of September 11, 2001 four airliners were hijacked and utilized as twisted 21st century kamikaze. Here, President George W. Bush and his administration concluded that the nation would undertake retaliatory action in addressing the threat posed by Al-Qaeda and other global terrorist organization which gave rise to the War on Terror (WOT). The WOT officially begins on October 7, 2001 with the invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion ended the reign of Taliban – as on November 24, 2001 the Taliban yield to the US forces. However, the majority of prominent Taliban fighters and its Al-Qaeda allies were able to escape and find safe-haven in Pakistan's Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA).

“These fighters were allowed to build out a sanctuary by Pakistani officials who arrested Al-Qaeda terrorists in the cities, yet, generally left the Taliban (whom they had previously supported) untouched in the Pashtun tribal areas, thus, the Taliban took advantage of the situation to construct a state-within-state in FATA” (Williams, 2010). This made the US National Intelligence to put FATA as “an important focus for the US national security”, a position that only few places on earth could gain (Markey, 2008).

Addressing the situation in FATA becomes an important aspect to the US national interest. One, terrorist organizations that are nesting in FATA are a threat to the national security. Second, disintegrating these terrorist organizations, particularly the Taliban would bring a success to its nation building effort in Afghanistan – something that is threaten to fail with the Taliban's continuous effort to send back fighters into the region. As Washington knew, it cannot trust Islamabad to deal with the militancy and infesting terrorist in FATA (due to its relationship with the Taliban), it decided to take the wheel. Therefore, “[since] June 19, 2004 through the CIA, the nation launched what amounts to an all-out air borne wars against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces hiding out

in FATA, it indisputably killed hundreds of Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders who are actively planning new terrorist attacks on the American homeland and or on the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan” (Williams, 2010). From 2004 to until 2016, up to 400 strikes have occurred in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, the strikes soon fueled the conflicting debate between the proponents and the skeptics of the strikes. As the primary proponents of the strikes US officials continue to vigorously defended its utilization – crediting those targeted killings strikes to be “surgically precise and actually helping Pakistan” (Aslam, 2013). Likewise, the government and CIA officials characterized the armed drone's targeted killings as major success, as it reduces the ability of “[terrorist] to carry out terrorism on American soil and against American (and British) aviation” (Coll, 2014).

The skepticism of the strikes is commonly thrown by legal observers, academics, and humanitarian activists who viewed the effectiveness of the strategy as some total nonsense, generally due to subsequent collateral civilian casualties induce by the strikes, its impact to the life of the Pakistani population, and propelling the retaliation and reprisal of the terrorist movements, and the possible blowback effect caused by the increasing anti-American view in Pakistan. For instance, “Living Under Drones” (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School) and Global Justice Clinic (NYU School of Law), 2012)– a report constructed from a nine-months data analysis and interviews performed by a team of law students from Stanford and New York University, discovers that armed drones “were nowhere near as discriminating toward non-combatants as the agency leaders have claimed” (Coll, 2014).

These conflicting arguments on armed drone usage raises the interest of this study that is to analyze, predominantly the in evaluating the use of the targeted killing strategy in this US counterterrorism effort.

In this matter, the study intended to view the use of the strategy by answering a simple question, did the armed drone's targeted killing strategy effective in the fight against terrorist and insurgents in Pakistan?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In "Bombing to Win" (1996), Robert A. Pape, describes the effectiveness of military operations can be measured as either combat effectiveness or strategic effectiveness. Combat effectiveness "focuses on the idea of how efficiently a given force destroy a given target set, that is, how well bombs destroy its target", while on the contrary, strategic effectiveness "focuses on whether the destruction of certain target set attains the intended political goal" (Pape, 1996). As this study intend to evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of the armed drone's targeted killing strategy in counterinsurgency, hence, it will focus on the strategic effectiveness rather than combat effectiveness.

Yet, as Pape did not further detail the aspects on how strategic effectiveness can be determine aside from hinting on the destruction of certain target set, another theory that can further help in analyzing targeted killing's effectiveness is expressed by David Galula in his book "Counterinsurgency Warfare" (1964). Here, Galula discussed that certain aspects in counterinsurgency, like reviewing the ends, ways, and means of counterinsurgency operation. The ends define the objective of counterinsurgency, in this case is the population. Battle for the population is a major characteristic of the operation considering that insurgents (with their congenital weakness) sought to dissociate the population from counterinsurgent in order to balance the physical odds against them (Galula, 1964). For counterinsurgents the population serves to provide active support to the operation. According to Galula "if properly made and exploited [the population] is a basic source of intelligence" (Galula, 1964). Likewise,

the exercise of political power also greatly affected by the tacit or explicit agreement of the population, or at worst on its submissiveness (Galula, 1964). Therefore, to dissociate the population from the insurgence and gain its support becomes an essential aspect to gain victory in counterinsurgency and in the fight against terrorism.

Next is the ways. It describes the combination between political, economic, and information that is utilized a way to dissociates the population from the insurgents. Politic serves as an instrument of war and in counterinsurgency, considering that the objective is population itself politics becomes an active instrument of the operation – it is not enough for the government to set political goals, to determine how much military force is applicable, to enter or to break alliance – political actions remain foremost throughout the war (Galula, 1964). On the other hand, the term economic here correlates with the context of governance of the force. In simple, considering the spread of time and space in counterinsurgency, the use of force must be applied successfully area by area – to do so a degree of governance in ones use of force is necessary as to achieve victory. Subsequently, information plays an essential role in the course of the war. In counterinsurgency information obtained through the control of the population is utilized to identify insurgents, their locations, and even use a means of propaganda.

Last is the means, this describes the human factor that is use to execute the ends and the ways of counterinsurgency operation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method. The data is obtained from attentive review of relevant theories, literature, and previous research findings of the discussed topic. Then it translates both primary and secondary sources as the constituent of data in evaluating the issue of the discussed

topic. Likewise, the data obtained from both primary and secondary sources serves to validate the findings of this study.

DISCUSSION

According to Pape's perspective, strategic effectiveness can be determined by focusing on the destruction of the target set attains the intended political goal. So, what is the target set? And what is the intended political goal of armed drone's targeted killing strategy?

Based on the post 9/11 national security policy it is indicated the US has identified leadership as the opponent's target set or center of gravity. The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT) considers targeting terrorist leadership to be its first priority of actions and it act to support the principle and goal of the National Security Strategy (NSS), which serves as the US general security guideline and response in addressing the threat of global terrorist organizations (Jordan, 2009). In the NSCT, regardless of the diversity of their motives, sophistication, and strength, terrorist organizations all but share a basic structure with its leadership being the catalyst for terror action (CIA, 2003). Based on the NSCT and the NSS, the US saw the leadership of terrorist organization to be the catalyst for terror action – they provide the overall direction and strategy that linked all of the structure below them. Thus, their absence or sudden changes would disrupt the organization's ability to operate, weakening it, and depriving the members of strategic direction and ideological appeal. In sum, leadership becomes the target set of the fight against terrorism – where armed drones are utilized to performed the attacks.

Subsequently, based on the target set, it can be argued that the purpose or the goal that is pursued by the strategy is to bring about the collapse or disintegration of global terrorist organizations. Based upon the context presented within the NSCT, it is considered that prioritizing one's attacks on the leadership of terrorist organizations should led to the collapse or disintegration

of the organization as leadership presents itself as an essential aspect to the preservation of the organization and an absence of leadership or its changes would disrupt the organization's ability to operate – weaken their organizations, depriving the members of strategic direction and ideological appeal (Fisher, 2016).

Nevertheless, targeting leadership as means to disintegrate the organization has its own issue. Though the elimination of leaders or leadership decapitation could cause leadership change of certain organization or disrupt their capability to operate, nonetheless, such has not always ultimately resulted with the collapse or disintegration of the terror organizations. Example, the killing of the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in 2016 at Pakistan's Baluchistan province, though it brought a positive development to the US counterterrorism operation as it opens the opportunity for the Taliban and its members "to embrace peace talks with the Afghan government", nonetheless, the impact of his death simply becomes "a minor setback to the organization capability to operate and constitute little battlefield impact" instead of resulting to the organization's collapse (Seldin, 2016). Another example is the killing of the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan/Taliban Movement of Pakistan (TTP), Baitullah Mehsud in 2009 which did not disintegrate the organization as it continues to operate up to this day, despite having another of its leader killed.

So, what causes this? Studies on the topic of leadership elimination/decapitation suggest that it has something to do with the nature of the terrorist organizations. Here, Jenna Jordan argues that factor such as size, age, and structure of the organization influences their susceptibility against decapitation. According to Jordan, "going after the leadership of older and large organization would be counterproductive" (Jordan, 2009). As an organization grew older it becomes less susceptible to leadership decapitation. On this context, Martha

Crenshaw, an expert on terrorism studies, also argues that “there is a threshold point, beyond which extremist organization becomes self-sustaining – the younger the organization, the greater the likelihood of its ending” (Crenshaw, 1991). Older organizations would have had more time to develop complex structures and should be more likely to withstand leadership decapitation than the younger ones (Jordan, 2009).

Moreover, Jordan stated that the type of the organization also affects the effectiveness of decapitation – “the susceptibility of organizations to decapitation should vary based on the organizational type” (Jordan, 2009). Here, Jordan predicts that ideological organizations or groups will be most susceptible to leadership decapitation based on the context that these type of organizations or groups are likely to be dominated by an influential figure whose removal would weaken the focus and the purpose of the organization. Subsequently, Jordan argues, “religious organizations or groups should be most difficult to destabilize after the removal of a leader” (Jordan, 2009). Based on network analysis study it is determined that “religious organizations tend to be more decentralized”, therefore are harder to be weakened by leadership decapitation. Likewise, “religious organizations tend to have a sacred element, like martyrdom or divine conquest that inspires a level of dedication not seen in other movements, resulting in greater resilient and longer lifespan” (Jordan, 2009). Additionally, religious organizations or groups as an identity based organization are more resilient to decapitation, moreover, this particular type of organization tends to have a strong base of community support and hard to penetrate.

In sum, ideological organizations are most likely to fall apart after a decapitation, while religious organizations are highly resilient.

Additionally, scholar Kent Lyne Oots also argues on the effectiveness of decapitation. Oots, mentioned that although “terrorist organizations will not form without leadership – the organization depends on the leadership capability to recruit and maintain its committed members, nevertheless, a loss of leadership may not end terrorist activity, even if the cease to function as a unified organization” (Oots, 1989). This because “the end of the organization as a unified political movement does not necessarily the end of terrorist activity by its members – hence, a distinction must be drawn between the ends of organization the end of terrorist activity by its members” (Oots, 1989). Furthermore, it is possible that the loss of the organization’s leadership simply resulted with the organization splintering into smaller factions with new leaders. Based on such, it can be concluded that the nature of the targeted organizations would influence the end result of decapitation. Thus, an older, religious, and decentralized structured terrorist organization would be more resilient against decapitation. Likewise, it is also possible that leadership loss would cause the organization to splinter into smaller factions instead of collapsing or disintegrating, where they would then continue their operation under a new leadership.

From Pape’s perspective it can be inferred that the targeted killing strategy is ineffective since attacks on the designated target set was unable to produce the intended result, that is the target’s disintegration. Nevertheless, based on this perspective the effectiveness of the strategy itself is simply confined to its capability in bringing destruction of its target. In evaluating the effectiveness of certain strategy used in counterterrorism effort it would not suffice to do so by solely looking at how well it destroys its target. There are other aspects that need to be taken into account. Here, Galula’s perspective could serve in expanding the analysis and to further understand the failure of the

strategy. In his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, he explains that in the war against insurgents there are some aspects that need to be taken into account, such involves the ends, ways, and means of the operation itself.

As mentioned above, the ends describe the control of the population, particularly the locals and how such control could constitute to the success of the operation and therefore it is important to dissociate the population from the insurgents. The ways discussed the combination of politic, economic, and information utilize to ensure the dissociation between the population and the insurgents. While the means describes the human factor that is use to execute the ends and the ways of counterinsurgency operation. So how does all of these translate into determining the effectiveness of the targeted killing strategy? Through this perspective the effectiveness of the targeted killing strategy can be determine by evaluating whether in its practice, the strategy was able to cause the dissociation between the population and the insurgents in which the population supported the counterinsurgency itself.

First, the ends which referred toward the control of the population. In its operation Pakistan however, the US may have failed in controlling the population. From the very first the Pakistani government was forced into supporting the US. As it is known Islamabad, particularly its Inter-Service-Intelligence (ISI) had a long history with the Taliban movement and it was fairly difficult for them to detached themselves from the Taliban considering its significance to Pakistan's Afghan policy. Likewise, the US themselves failed to maintain the government's approval of its armed drone targeted killing practice in the region. While at first the government approved the strategy for its effort to stabilize the condition in its tribal area, nonetheless, such approval soon decreased mainly due to the collateral damage that that it caused and the US decision to no longer seek Pakistan's approval in conducting the attacks. This in

term made the government see the action as a violation of the nation's sovereignty, although other aspect such as the support of some government structure (the intelligence and military) also influence the situation (Aslam, 2013).

On the other hand, dissociating the local population from insurgents has already been a tough job from the beginning. In FATA, which is the epicenter of the operation, has often dubbed as Pakistan's lawless frontier due to a multitude of militants, insurgents, or extremist groups which resides in the area (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2016). As such following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, some of its surviving member and Al-Qaeda allies were able to escape into Pakistan where due to FATA tribal group's *Pashtunwali* principle of hospitality, they were able to carved out a new safe-haven for them to train, recruit, and plot subsequent global terror attacks. Hence, it can be concluded that the US were not able to properly dissociate the population from the insurgents made the targeted killing strategy grew to be greatly disapproved by the population.

Second, the ways discussed the combination of politic, economy, and information to dissociate the population and the insurgents. Necessarily, the operation in Pakistan involves this combination of politic, economy, and information. In politic, one can point out that the US decision to utilized the armed drone was generally due to the failure of the alliance between Washington and Islamabad. Despite having pledge themselves to support America's WOT in truth Islamabad is playing a double game by still harboring support toward the Taliban. This inability to trust its own ally force the US to matters into its own hands. In economy, one can consider both the US economical support and pressure to Islamabad as part of the ways that it uses to cement Islamabad's full cooperation to the cause. This part is true considering that since 2002 the US has given over \$14 billion in aid to combat

terrorism and insurgents in the region (Ward, 2018). Likewise, withholding aid also becomes a way that the US use to pressure Pakistan into abandoning its relationship with the Taliban, for instance the Obama administration suspended \$800 million in aid in 2011 and withheld \$350 million in military in 2016 (Aleem, 2018). But so far this tactic has not work. Subsequently, economic also concerns with the utilization of the force itself – how it will be use in the wide are of the operation. This explains the use of the armed drones in the operation since the weapon itself is able to travel large distance and perform attack at moment's notice. It has also been noted that considering the danger of the location and the difficulty of the terrain which the operation take place, the armed drone has provided the US with access to the location (Kreps, 2016). Thus, it can be inferred that the use of the armed drones has becomes a way for the US in accommodating the vast movement of the force that is less costly than deploying troops to the locations. Additionally, information plays a crucial role in the operation. In this matter, the US has been keen in sharing the success of its armed drone attacks in eliminating high-value targets. This is done to show progress and build an image of success of the operation. Yet, the US has also be suggested to be reluctant in openly acknowledging the presence of casualties and damages to cause by each attacks despite countless media reports(Coll, 2014). This in term provoke anti-American view in Pakistan and also becomes a propaganda tool for the terrorist, insurgents, and even the ISI who sees these behavior as an epitome of American arrogance.

Lastly, the means. This concerns with the human factor that is use to execute the ends and the ways of counterinsurgency operation, in particular their capability to fight and communicate with the locals. Here, the US counterterrorism operation and its use of the armed drones has not been gaining much favor of the local despite having eliminated numerous terrorists or

insurgent leaders, commander, and key individual in the process. In truth the damage that the operation causes in the process and the reluctant of the US to fully acknowledge the (physical and mental) damage that its armed drone caused to the local population has becomes an obstacle for the locals to accept and fully supported the operation. They in term, sees this action as merely the lesser evil of what the terrorists or insurgents inflicted to them (Coll, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the targeted killing strategy performed by the US armed drones is ineffective. From Pape's perspective we learned that the cause of the ineffectiveness is due to the attacks and elimination of the identified target set/center of gravity, that is the leadership of terrorist organization, is unable to result in the collapse/disintegration of terrorist organization. The reason for this is not because the armed drones inability to hit the intended target, though acknowledging that the weapon is not immune to the presence of targeting error, yet, overall it was able to do its job in eliminating the leadership and key individuals from terrorist organizations such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, TTP, Haqqani Network, etc. Rather the reason for its ineffectiveness is due to impact of leadership decapitation does not always resulted in the organization's collapse or disintegration. Some organization can be more resilient to decapitation, while other are more susceptible. This condition occurs based on the nature of the organization itself. Here, past studies on the subject of leadership decapitation indicate that an older, religious, and decentralized tends to be more resilient toward this particular strategy. Therefore, the need for further organizational profiling and the understanding toward the source of organizational decline would come handy in the application of the strategy.

On the other hand, Galula's perspective provided a deeper understanding of the

strategy's failure under the context of counterinsurgency. Here, the failure of the US to secure the ends, ways, and means of the operation which involve the dissociation between the population and the insurgents, their ability to forge proper cooperation with its local ally, and the un-favoring view of the local population toward its targeted killings practice has resulted in the ineffectivity of the strategy and a prolonged fight between the US and its opponent.

It is recognized that the armed drone is a necessary element for the US counterterrorism effort. For what is worth, the armed drone can be viewed as the least costly solution to the prolonged war against terrorism that the US had chosen to undergo. They lower the cost of using force by eliminating the risk of pilot being killed or captured; they can carry out targeted killing or supported the ground troops; they have operational advantage that conventional fighter jets lack that is it allowed for sustained and persistent flights (loiter) over potential targets; and in addition, even though armed drones usage may violate the sovereignty of a nation, yet, it reduce the diplomatic fallout that associated with the use of force to a lesser degree that putting the American troop on the territory or conducting a large-scale air campaign.

Further evaluation of past studies also indicates that the criticism or review of the US armed drone usage oftentimes failed to take into account the fact that the alternatives are either too risky or unrealistic – to be sure, in an ideal world terrorist targets or militants would be captured alive, allowing authorities to interrogate them for vital intelligence and comb their compounds for useful information. But in reality war zones or unstable nations, like Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, arresting terrorist targets or militant are highly dangerous and risky, even if successful, often inefficient. As such, within nations where the government held little or no control over remote areas,

going after these targets hiding within the areas can be highly dangerous.

For now, the armed drone remains as the best solution for the US in addressing the threat presented by global terrorist organizations and militancy. Additioanlly, relying on the armed drones alone would not be appropriate in winning the war. Nonetheless, without them it would also be difficult to win the war. So far armed drones have help the US counterterrorism operation against global terrorist organization but they have yet help the US to accomplish a decisive victory. Combating terrorism would require corresponding effort of military platform, strategy, intelligence, and diplomatic alliance of the involved actors, while keeping in mind that the opponent is not something that even a great power should diminish.

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