



The 2016 Presidential

Candidates on Drones

By Arthur Holland Michel and Dan Gettinger

The current U.S. administration's use of armed surveillance drones for military operations—in particular the hundreds of covert targeted killings that have been conducted outside of declared war zones—is a defining dimension of Barack Obama's presidency. Since 2009, drones have served as the primary tool in the U.S. war against al-Qaeda and affiliated groups in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere, a sharp break from the previous administration of George W. Bush, which placed greater emphasis on capture, rendition, and interrogation of terror suspects. The current administration has also expanded investment in military drone development and procurement programs, and has overseen the reform of policies regulating the export of drones to foreign countries. The executive branch therefore plays a decisive role in determining how the U.S. uses and develops its strike-capable military drones such as the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper.

The next president will inherit the counterterrorism policies of the current administration, which continues to carry out strikes on a weekly basis and has overseen growing investment in the development and acquisition of military unmanned systems technology; however, the next president is also likely to reform these programs according to his or her views on drones, as well as the views of their advisers. In order to help stakeholders determine what the next president's drone policies are likely to be, we have conducted an analysis of the presidential candidates and their advisers' views on military drone use. We have relied on transcripts from interviews, sound bites in news stories, and statements in debates and other events. Furthermore, we have reviewed the various government positions held by candidates and their advisers in order to identify those who have played a direct or indirect role in policies governing the use and development of military unmanned systems in the past. For those individuals who have made few or no comments specifically on drone use (such as Donald Trump),

we have searched for evidence of views on counterterrorism and military acquisition more broadly.

We note that not all campaign advisers have the same level of influence over the candidate and his or her likely planned policies; furthermore, just because an adviser has played a role in drone programs in the past, that doesn't necessarily mean that they are influencing the drone policies, specifically, of their candidate. That being said, all individuals covered herein do appear to play a role in their candidates' formulation of policy.

Our analysis of on-the-record comments appears to show that Hillary Clinton and her advisers' positions on drone use tack closely to those of the current administration. Clinton, who has acknowledged playing a role in the U.S. targeted killing program, and her advisers—many of whom also served in positions related to the use of drones in military operations, including targeted killing—are broadly supportive of the use of drones for targeted killing but have described the need for strict rules to regulate their use and prevent potential abuses. Meanwhile, Trump has made few public comments related specifically to drones, though he has advocated for a significant expansion of the air campaign against ISIS—a campaign that currently relies largely on drones. Trump's advisers have expressed a degree of opposition to drone strikes, and have commented that capturing and interrogating suspected terrorists would be a more effective counterterrorism strategy. Trump has indicated his support for capture and enhanced interrogation techniques such as waterboarding. Jill Stein and Gary Johnson oppose the use of drones in military operations, including targeted killings.

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Democratic Party

During Hillary Clinton's time as secretary of state, drones became a popular weapon for countering al-Qaeda. Over the course of her four year tenure, the U.S. conducted more than 350 drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen, according to data collected by the New America Foundation.¹ This experience shaped Clinton's perspective on drones, as well as that of the many national security advisors in her campaign who served in public office roles related to drones and counterterrorism during this same period. As secretary of state, and in the years since she stepped down, Clinton has repeatedly said that drone strikes are an effective means of killing terror suspects, but has also described the need for rules to govern the use of these weapons outside of declared combat zones. While Clinton's views on targeted killings appear to tack closely to those of President Obama, there are those within her national security circle who have voiced more divergent opinions. While some, such as former CIA deputy director Michael Morell, have actively and vocally defended drone strikes, others, like former McCain advisor Richard Fontaine, have spoken out against certain aspects of the drone program such as the so-called "signature strikes."

Hillary Clinton

Candidate for President



Relevant Positions:
Secretary of State
2009-2013

In a January 31, 2016 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Clinton emphasized that, if elected president, she would use all tools at her disposal to counter terrorism—including drones.² "At the end of the day, we still must be prepared to go after terrorists wherever they plot, using all the tools at our disposal," said Clinton. "That includes targeted strikes by U.S. military aircraft and drones, with proper safeguards, when there aren't any other viable options to deal with continuing imminent threats."

In the first presidential debate on September 26, Clinton advocated for a strategy that targets the leadership of the Islamic State, stating: "I would also do everything possible to take out their [ISIS's] leadership. I was involved in a number of efforts to take out Al Qaeda leadership when I was secretary of state,

including of course, taking out bin Laden. And I think we need to go after Baghdadi as well, make that one of our organizing principles because we've got to defeat ISIS."³ In the second presidential debate on October 9, Clinton reiterated this position in response to a question about her emails. Clinton referenced the U.S. targeted killing of al-Qaeda leaders as an example of how she would approach the ISIS issue as president, stating, "I would go after Baghdadi. I would specifically target Baghdadi, because I think our targeting of al-Qaeda leaders—and I was involved in a lot of those operations, highly classified ones—made a difference. So I think that could help."⁴ In a press conference in German Village, Ohio in August, Clinton's senior policy adviser Jake Sullivan explicitly stated that Clinton will consider the use of drones as an option in her counterterrorism strategy. "She's not taking the use of targeted strikes off the table," Sullivan said.⁵

Targeting
ISIS

As secretary of state, Clinton was tasked with maintaining and frequently repairing relationships with countries that often objected to the regular strikes that took place in their territory. On Clinton's first official visit to Pakistan in 2009, the new secretary faced intense public and private criticism from the Pakistani public over drone strikes and broader U.S. counterterrorism tactics.⁶ Without acknowledging the strikes, Clinton defended U.S. counterterrorism policy as a necessary recourse given the inability of the Pakistani military to pursue the members of terror groups in the country.⁷

Clinton describes her first visit to Pakistan in her autobiography *Hard Choices*: “I also heard a lot of questions about drones. The use of remotely piloted aircraft was fast becoming one of the most effective and controversial elements of the Obama administration’s strategy against al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists in hard to reach areas. President Obama would eventually declassify many of the details of the program and explain his policies to the world, but in 2009 all I could say was ‘No comment’ whenever the subject came up. Yet it was widely known that dozens of senior terrorists had been taken off the battlefield, and we later learned that bin Laden himself worried about the heavy losses that drones were inflicting.”⁸ Elsewhere in the book, Clinton describes how she felt that there was a need to develop robust rules to govern the use of drones, writing that she and her legal adviser Harold Koh agreed that “we needed to put in place transparent processes and standards governing their use, in accordance with domestic and international law and the interests of U.S. national security. That America is a nation of laws is one of our great strengths, and the Supreme Court has been clear that the fight against terrorism cannot occur in a ‘legal black hole.’”⁹

Pakistan and
Drone Strikes

While Clinton was likely an infrequent participant in targeting decisions for drone strikes, there were at least several occasions when she did weigh in on a decision. Clinton describes her role in the process in *Hard Choices*: “There were times when I supported a particular strike because I believed it was important to the national security of the United States and met the criteria the President set out. There were other times when I dissented; my good friend Leon Panetta, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and I had a shouting match over one proposed strike. But in every case I thought it was crucial that these strikes be part of a larger smart power counterterrorism strategy that included diplomacy, law enforcement, sanctions, and other tools.”¹⁰

Role
in Strikes

Clinton does not say what, specifically, her argument with Director of Central Intelligence Leon Panetta was about. A passage in Mark Mazzetti’s *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth* describes what is likely the same disagreement between Clinton and Panetta, about a decision by the CIA to launch a drone strike in Pakistan against the recommendation of the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan at the time. Mazzetti writes that, “[Clinton] turned to Panetta and told him that he was wrong to assume he could steamroll the ambassador and launch strikes against his approval. ‘No, Hillary,’ Panetta said, ‘it’s you who are flat wrong.’”¹¹ Following the disagreement, President Obama reportedly launched a review of the strikes, which led to the State Department playing a larger role in targeting decisions.¹²

By the end of her tenure as secretary, Clinton appeared to endorse the policy of targeted killings, while at the same time acknowledging that it was not the only possible solution to the ongoing threat of terrorism. “We will always maintain our right to use force against groups such as al-Qaeda that have attacked us and still threaten us with imminent attack,” Clinton said in a speech at the 2012 Global Counterterrorism Forum in Turkey. Clinton added that “We have learned that to defeat a terrorist network, we need to do more than remove terrorists from the battlefield. We need to attack finances, recruitment, and safe havens.”¹³



Hillary Clinton inspects an RQ-4 Global Hawk surveillance drone at Andersen Air Force base, Guam on Oct. 29, 2010. Credit: Senior Airman Nichelle Anderson/USAF

Tim Kaine

Candidate for Vice-President



Relevant Positions:
U.S. Senator (D-VA)
(2013 -)

Kaine has supported the use of drones as weapons platform, but has expressed concern about carrying out strikes outside of declared combat zones. In an interview with *Capital Download* in April 2015, Senator Kaine said, “A drone isn’t any different than a bomb; it’s not any different than other weapons that are used, where there is always a capacity for people to be killed who you wished were not. The real issue is, what’s the mission in which you’re using the platform? I think the reason that drones have become so controversial is because they’re used in Pakistan; they’re used in Yemen; they’ve been used in all kinds of places. When the original war against al-Qaeda started, people didn’t think it would be over such a large geographical expanse and they certainly didn’t think it would last this long.”¹⁴

Counter-
Terrorism

John Podesta

Chairman of the Campaign



Relevant Positions:
Counselor to the President
(2014 - 2015)

In a March 2013 op-ed in *The Washington Post*, Podesta argued that President Obama should lift the secrecy surrounding the targeted killing campaign by releasing key documents to the public. “In refusing to release to Congress the rules and justifications governing a program that has conducted nearly 400 unmanned drone strikes and killed at least three Americans in the past four years,” Podesta wrote, “President Obama is ignoring the system of checks and balances that has governed our country from its earliest days.”

Podesta added, “This level of transparency is important for our democracy and for governments around the globe. The United States is not the only country with drone technology. We are not the only country with the ability to deploy cyberweapons. We are not the only country grappling with how to apply the rule of law—and the laws of war—when the nature of conflict has changed dramatically, and in a short time.”¹⁵

Executive
Transparency

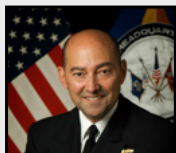
The Clinton Campaign National Security Working Group

On September 9, 2016, Hillary Clinton brought together a bipartisan group of national security policy veterans.¹⁶ The working group on national security is one of about a dozen such advisory councils the Clinton campaign has established to help guide the Democratic candidate through policy issues such as cybersecurity and human rights. The majority of the individuals who are believed be part of Clinton’s national security working group have publicly discussed drones, and some have had a role in carrying out counterterrorism policy.¹⁷

Defense



John Allen



James Stavridis

State



Daniel Benjamin

Intelligence



Michael Morell



Mike Vickers

Homeland



Rand Beers



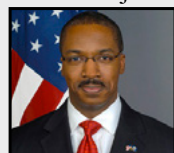
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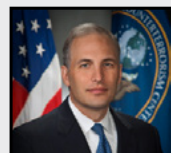
Kathleen Hicks



Vikram Singh



Reuben Brigety



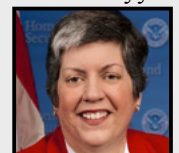
Matt Olsen



David Petraeus



Michael Chertoff



Janet Napolitano

Also in the Working Group: Chris Fussell (DoD) and Richard Fontaine. Organized according to last government post.

John Allen

Relevant Positions:
USMC General
(RET)

Working Group Participant

John Allen is a retired U.S. Marine Corps general who served as the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL between September 2014 and October 2015. During this time, Allen helped convince Turkey to allow armed U.S. drones to be based at Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey.¹⁸

Daniel Benjamin

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
C-Terrorism Chief at
State (2009 - 2012)

In a 2014 op-ed for *Politico*, Benjamin expressed concern that torture undermines what he regards to be the more legitimate U.S. counterterrorism practices like surveillance and the use of drones. “The U.S. does many things to advance its interests that arouse emotions ranging from concern to hatred around the world. These practices, which include the use of drones and aggressive surveillance, are justifiable in my view, but if they are seen as being part of package with torture, America’s ability to sustain them and preserve its partnerships will be undercut.”¹⁹

Counter-
Terrorism

Michael Chertoff

Working Group Participant



Secretary of DHS
(2005 - 2009)

During Chertoff’s tenure as secretary, the Department of Homeland Security acquired several General Atomics Predator B drones (also known as the Reaper) for border surveillance.²⁰ In testimony to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary on October 18, 2005, Chertoff outlined the parameters of the program. “This innovative technology enhances our ability to secure the southwest border,” he said. “In addition we continue to partner with the Department of Defense to take advantage of training opportunities. For the next month, as part of such training, the Defense Department is providing four UAVs in the El Paso sector.”²¹

Border
Drones

In testimony before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Homeland Security on March 4, 2008, Chertoff outlined a planned expansion of the CBP drone surveillance program: “CBP opened its fourth new air branch in North Dakota this past September and is on track to begin operations at the last northern border air branch in Michigan this spring. Delivery of a fourth DHS Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) will enable the Department to operate three UASs along the southwest border and to deploy one UAS to the northern border this spring. The FY 2009 request supports the hiring and training of 24 new UAS pilots and the establishment of a joint CBP/U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) UAS program office for the development of a maritime variant of the Predator B.”²²

In a March 2014 op-ed on *CNN*, Chertoff argued that existing technologies such as Google Glass pose a greater threat to personal privacy than drones. “The new data collection platforms right in front of us are much more likely to affect our lives than is the prospect of drones overhead surveilling American citizens.”²³

Surveillance

Richard Fointaine

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Foreign Policy Advisor to
John McCain (2008)

In a February 2016 event at the Open Society Foundations, Fontaine criticized an alleged practice known as “signature strikes,” which is the targeting of individuals whose actual identities are not known. “I don’t have a problem with drones in Western Pakistan taking out Al Qaeda leaders that are plotting attacks against the United States,” Fontaine explained. “I’m much more uncomfortable with signature strikes, which we don’t know who we’re actually targeting. But, you know, it’s kind of near a compound that has been suspected of doing bad—having bad people there in the past. And it’s someone who’s male in between the ages, as we can see through the feed, between 18 and 45.”

Signature
Strikes

In the same event, Fontaine said that drone strikes could end up hurting the United States due to the public perception of the strikes in some of the countries where they take place. “You know, that I think has the potential at an operational level to actually undermine what we’re trying to achieve,” Fontaine argued. “Because I think it does, that kind of thing does feed the sense of grievance among populations that think they’re being targeted by someone who’s not considering themselves a party to the conflict. And also has diplomatic problems. I mean, where we have run into problems with the Pakistanis is not when we’ve said, ‘There are these Al Qaeda guys and we want to kill ‘em.’ It’s when we’ve indiscriminate—not indiscriminately, but we have much more liberally—attacked people with signature strikes.”²⁴

Blowback

Chris Fussell

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Navy SEAL Officer

Image Source: Twitter

In a video on drones posted on the *Big Think*, Fussell considers the possible future development of the technology. “Is a completely robotic battlefield out of the question at some point? No, I think it’s out of the question not to think about that as a possible end state,” Fussell said. “Where the technology is pushing conflict is moving so much faster than our system’s ability to adapt and regulate it that it’s going to be a real challenge for us in the next 10 to 15 years.”²⁵

Future
Drones

Michael Morell

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Acting Dir. of CIA
(2012 - 2013)

In his 2015 book *The Great War of Our Time: The CIA’s Fight Against Terrorism—From Al Qaeda to ISIS*, Morell pushes back against critics of drone strikes who differentiate between drones and other weapons. “What is the difference between a drone pilot and a sniper looking through a scope and pulling a trigger a mile across the battlefield? What is the difference between a drone operator and a B-2 pilot dropping ordnance from fifty thousand feet?” Morell writes. “There is much hype around drones—almost none of it bearing any resemblance to reality.”²⁶

Drone
Technology

Morell argues that targeted strikes are a necessary response to individuals who would seek to harm the U.S., and challenges critics to find a suitable alternative to the strikes. “You must deal with the immediate threat in front of you—the

terrorist who is planning to attack the United States and kill our citizens—even as you work to deal over the longer term with the issues that created that threat in the first place.”

Morell adds, “Are we better off as a country dealing with that threat using unmanned aerial vehicles where no U.S. servicemen or servicewomen are put in peril, or by putting U.S. boots on the ground and therefore at risk? I think the answer is an easy one.”

However, in an interview for the 2015 documentary *The Spymasters: CIA in the Crosshairs*, Morell said that the U.S. counter-terrorism campaign has not been an unqualified success. “Our great victory has been the degradation, decimation, near-defeat of the Al Qaeda core that brought tragedy to our shores on 9/11,” Morell said. “But their great victory has been the spread of their ideology across a huge geographic area. What we haven’t done a good job of is stopping new terrorists from being created. And until we get our arms around that, this war is not going away.”²⁷

Effectiveness

Janet Napolitano

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Secretary of DHS
(2009 - 2013)

Secretary Napolitano’s tenure at DHS saw an increase in the number of Predator B drones tasked to conduct surveillance over the U.S. border with Mexico.²⁸ In August 2010, DHS announced that the Customs and Border Protection agency would be able to surveil the entire length of the border, thanks to acquisition of two additional drones.²⁹

At a event hosted by *Politico* in 2013, Secretary Napolitano expressed support for drone strikes, and said that the policy framework for targeted killings is narrower than the legal framework. “So, I think that is the framework that people should have confidence that is being exercised and know that these decisions are made very, very carefully,” Napolitano said.³⁰

Border UAVs
& Drone Strikes

Matt Olsen

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Director of NCTC
(2011 - 2014)

Following the drone strike that killed Somali al-Shabab leader Ahmed Godane, Olsen told reporters that the strike “demonstrates we’re able to be active on a number of fronts, whether we’re in Iraq or in Somalia.” Olsen said that defeating al-Shabab would require “consistent pressure” and “vigilance and time.”³¹

In a March 2016 interview with *PBS* about the film “Eye in the Sky,” Matt Olsen dismissed some of the public perceptions of U.S. drone strikes. “The president has been very clear where the types of strikes that have been approved, outside of areas of hostile battlefields, outside of areas of active hostility” Olsen said, “those have been approved under very circumscribed circumstances, where, again, we’re at war with al-Qaida and associated forces.”³²

Drone
Targeting

David Petraeus

Working Group Participant

Relevant Positions:
Director of the CIA
(2011 - 2012)

While at the CIA in 2012, Petraeus led an effort to acquire more unmanned aircraft for the agency and played a direct role in high value targeting decisions.³³

James Stavridis

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
United States Navy
Admiral (RET)

In a June 2013 essay at *Foreign Policy*, Admiral Stavridis argued that unmanned systems will form part of a new “triad” of technologies that would undergird U.S. national security strategy in the near future. “The second capability in the New Triad is unmanned vehicles and sensors. This branch of the triad includes not only the airborne attack “drones” that are endlessly debated at the moment, but unmanned surveillance vehicles in the air, on the ground, and on the ocean’s surface,” Stavridis wrote.

Future
Drones

In this same essay, Stavridis describes what he considers to be the various benefits to using unmanned systems, but also calls for further rules to govern the targeted killing campaign. “While expensive, such systems have the obvious advantage of not requiring the most costly component of all: people. Also,

without people operating them, they can perform in far harsher environments and hold a higher degree of political deniability for covert and clandestine operations.” At the same time, Stavridis acknowledged, “In the world of unmanned vehicles, the legalities and norms related to so-called ‘targeted killings’ will need to be established.”³⁴

Michael Vickers

Working Group Participant



Relevant Positions:
Undersecretary of
Defense for Intelligence

In a May 2015 story in *The New York Times*, Vickers approvingly described the role that the Predator has played in U.S. counterterrorism policy, but also said that drones are only part of the solution. “The combination of ‘armed,’ ‘precision,’ ‘reconnaissance’ has been one of the most dramatic innovations,” Vickers said. “It has been a critical operational instrument in the successes we have had against core Al Qaeda, in particular.” Vickers added, “as precise as this instrument is, as important as this instrument is, it is one tool and it is not enough to bring stability to an area.”³⁵

Drone
Strikes

Harold Koh



Relevant Positions:
Department of
State Legal Adviser
(2009-2013)

Harold Koh served as Hillary Clinton’s chief lawyer at State during her time as secretary. According to reporting by Daniel Klaidman in *Kill or Capture: The War on Terror and the Soul of the Obama Presidency*, Koh was instrumental in crafting policy around targeted killings in the early years of the Obama administration.³⁶ Koh supports the use of drones for high value target strikes, but has advocated for greater government transparency around the program. In a speech delivered at the American Society of International Law in 2010, Koh defended the program, which he said strictly conformed to both international and domestic law. “Some have challenged the very use of advanced weapons systems, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, for lethal operations,” said Koh. “But the rules that govern targeting do not turn on the type of weapon system used, and there is no prohibition under the laws of war on the use of technologically advanced weapons systems in armed

Laws
of War

conflict—such as pilotless aircraft or so-called smart bombs—so long as they are employed in conformity with applicable laws of war.” Koh continued, “Some have argued that the use of lethal force against specific individuals fails to provide adequate process and thus constitutes unlawful extrajudicial killing. But a state that is engaged in an armed conflict or in legitimate self-defense is not required to provide targets with legal process before the state may use lethal force. Our procedures and practices for identifying lawful targets are extremely robust, and advanced technologies have helped to make our targeting even more precise. In my experience, the principles of distinction and proportionality that the United States applies are not just recited at meetings. They are implemented rigorously throughout the planning and execution of lethal operations to ensure that such operations are conducted in accordance with all applicable law.”³⁷

In 2013, after leaving government, Koh called on the White House to make its drone program more transparent. “First, as President Obama has indicated he wants to do, the Administration should make public and transparent its legal standards and institutional processes for targeting and drone strikes,” Koh said at a speech delivered to the Oxford Political Union. “Second, it should make public its full legal explanation for why and when it is consistent with due process of law to target American citizens and residents. Third, it should clarify its method of counting civilian casualties, and why that method is consistent with international humanitarian law standards. Fourth, where factual disputes exist about the threat level against which past drone strikes were directed, the Administration should release the factual record.”³⁸

Transparency

It should be noted that Mr. Koh’s role in developing Hillary Clinton’s foreign policy positions is unclear. Koh is reportedly responsible for Clinton’s Human Rights Working, and is a member of the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Hillary Leadership Council, but he we have identified no recent on-the-record comments by Koh regarding the use of military drones.^{39 40}

Fast Facts: MQ-9 Reaper and MQ-1 Predator

General Atomics Predator B/ MQ-9 Reaper

Wingspan	66 ft	Max Alt.	50,000 ft
Length	36 ft	Endurance	27 hr
Int. Payload	850 lb	Max Speed	240 KTAS

Weapons: Hellfire, GBU-12, GBU-38, GBU-49

General Atomics Predator XP

Wingspan	55 ft	Max Alt.	25,000 ft
Length	27 ft	Endurance	35 hr
Int. Payload	325 lb	Max Speed	120 KTAS

Weapons: Hellfire

Source: General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc.



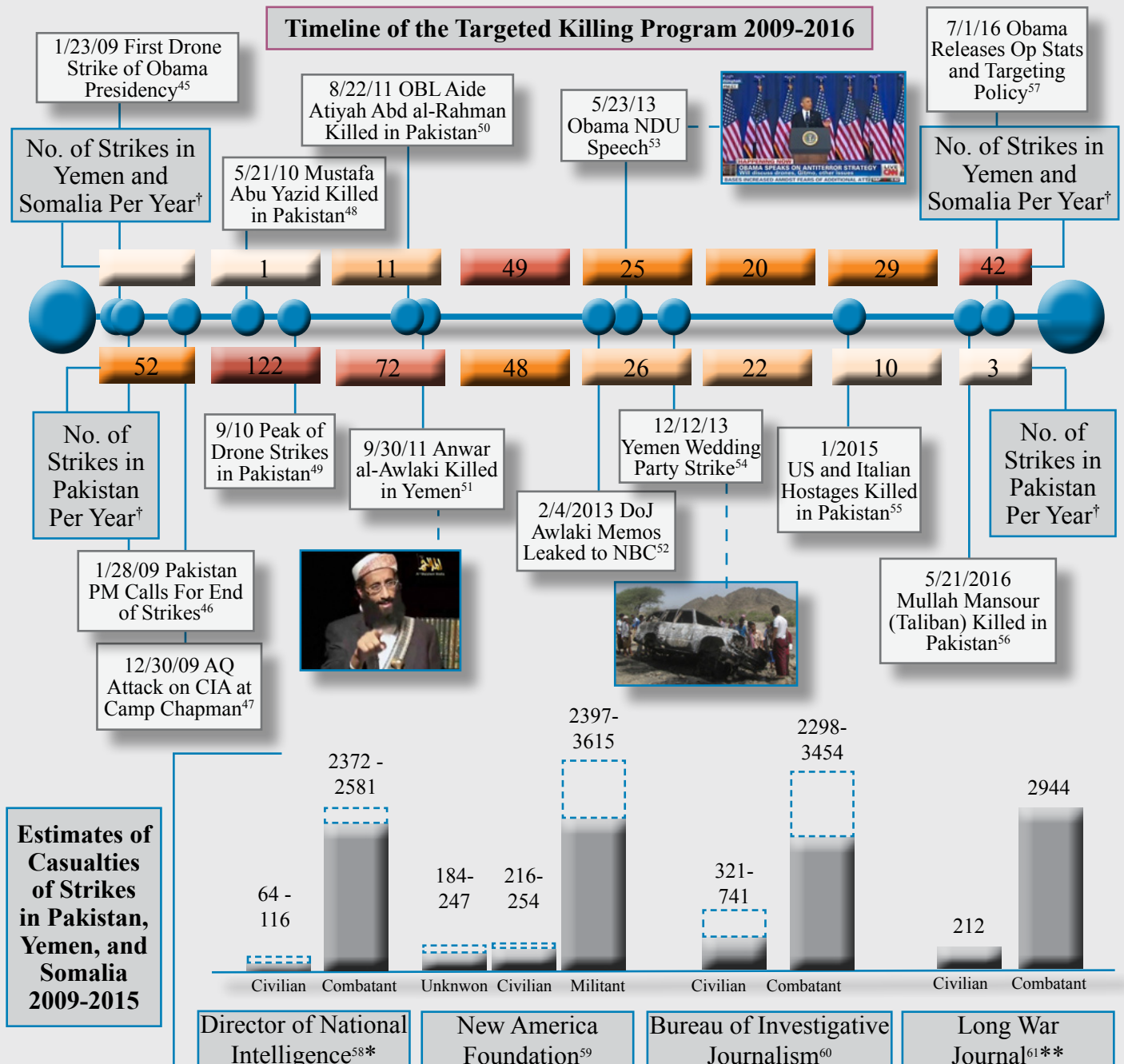
Credit: Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr.



Credit: OR4 Angelo Salzano

Targeting Al-Qaeda With Drones: A Snapshot

The first drone strike outside of a declared war zone during Obama's presidency was conducted on January 23, 2009, three days after his inauguration.⁴¹ In that first year of his term, the U.S. conducted more drone strikes than took place during the entirety of George W. Bush's two terms.⁴² All told, since 2009, the White House has conducted over 600 drone strikes outside of declared war zones, according to data published by the New America Foundation.⁴³ Notable strikes include the killing of Anwar Al-Awlaki, a U.S. born cleric who served as a leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as strikes against top Osama bin Laden aide Abd al-Rahman in 2011, and Taliban emir Mullah Mansour in 2016. In May 2013, amid mounting criticism of the drone strike policy from human rights groups, Obama announced that he was developing more stringent guidelines for strike decisions and was ordering a yearly review of civilian casualty estimates resulting from strikes. Since that time, the rate of strikes has decreased significantly in Pakistan. In August of this year, the White House released a document detailing these enhanced guidelines, and the Director of National Intelligence published estimates of the number of civilian deaths caused by strikes since 2009.⁴⁴ As of the time of publication, drone strikes in Pakistan appear to have decreased while the rate of drones strikes in Yemen has remained consistent and the rate of strikes in Somalia appears to have increased.



*All actions, including non-drone. **Yemen and Pakistan only.

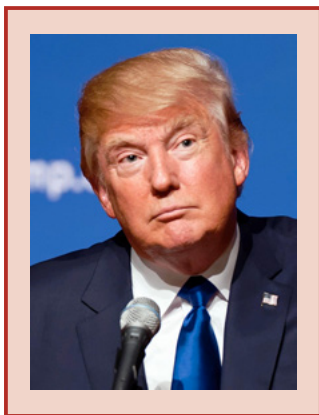
† Based on data collected by the New America Foundation.

Republican Party

Far less information is available on a Donald Trump administration's likely policies on drone use. The Republican candidate and his advisers have made fewer direct references to military drone use than the Clinton team. Unlike Clinton, Trump has had no direct experience in coordinating drone strikes. Furthermore, and also unlike Clinton, Trump has only one known adviser—Gen. Michael Flynn—who has played a direct role in U.S. military drone operations in the past two decades. That being said, it is possible to extrapolate the rough contours of a Trump administration's policies governing drone use. Generally speaking, Trump has advocated a broad aerial campaign against ISIS that contrasts with the precision-centric targeted killing operations conducted by the current administration and advocated for by Hillary Clinton and many of her advisers. Trump's advisers hold mixed views on drones. Three Trump advisers—Rudy Giuliani, James Woolsey, and Gen. Flynn—have publicly criticized the use of drones for targeted killing. Trump supports the expanded use of military drones to patrol U.S. land borders, and has called for an increase in military spending that would likely impact drone acquisition programs, though the plan largely focuses on the procurement of fighter jets and ships, and an increase in personnel.

Donald Trump

Candidate for President



Trump has described his plans to wage a broad and intensive aerial campaign against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. At a campaign rally in Fort Dodge, Iowa in November 2015, Trump said that he “would bomb the shit out of” ISIS.⁶² “ISIS is making a tremendous amount of money because they have certain oil camps, certain areas of oil that they took away,” Trump explained. “They have some in Syria, some in Iraq. I would bomb the shit out of ‘em. I would just bomb those suckers. That’s right. I’d blow up the pipes...I’d blow up every single inch. There would be nothing left.” In a radio ad that aired that same month, Trump reiterated that he “will quickly and decisively bomb the hell out of ISIS.”⁶³

Targeting
ISIS

Trump's intention to wage an intensive aerial bombardment campaign in Iraq and Syria stems from his position that the Obama administration's restraint in its military operations has enabled terrorist groups to survive and grow. In his book *Time to Get Tough*, Trump criticized President Obama for reportedly refusing to use drones to target members of the Haqqani network inside the city of Miram, calling the policy “absurd” and advocating for the use of force against forces inside Pakistan. “Right now we ban our forces from using Predator drones inside the city of Miram where the Haqqanis are headquartered,” Trump writes. “The reason? Obama didn’t want to ‘offend’ the Pakistanis. That’s absurd—they’re killing our soldiers! We need to get tough, give our troops permission to return fire, and tell Pakistan that we will sever all economic activity with them until they cut ties with the Haqqani network. If the Pakistani intelligence services work with terrorists, we should declare their military a terrorist organization.”⁶⁴

Drone
Strikes

In December 2015, in an interview with Fox and Friends, Trump called for a strategy to target the families of members of ISIS as part of his proposed military strategy for Iraq and Syria.⁶⁵ “The other thing with the terrorists is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families,” Trump said. “They care about their lives, don’t kid yourself. When they say they don’t care about their lives, you have to take out their families.” In an interview with *Fox News*’ Sean Hannity in August, Trump criticized president Obama’s campaign against ISIS for being “politically correct.”⁶⁶

Discussions around U.S. counterterrorism strategy of the past decade and a half have been largely defined by a debate around whether it is more effective to kill suspected terrorists through drone strikes, or to capture those individuals and potentially extract useful information from them through interrogation. The Obama administration has conducted fewer capture operations—which are riskier than drone strikes as they require U.S. raid forces on the ground—than drone strikes. Trump has indicated that he would restore some degree of capture doctrine, advocating for the use of waterboarding to extract information from suspects. “I like it a lot and I don’t think it’s tough enough,” Trump said at a rally in St. Clairsville, Ohio in June. “We have to fight so viciously and violently, because we’re dealing with violent people, vicious people.”⁶⁷

Counter-Terrorism

Trump has also advocated for the ongoing use of Predator B surveillance drones along U.S. borders. In *Time to Get Tough*, Trump suggests that Congress should order the Customs and Border Protection agency to deploy more surveillance drones along the U.S. borders.⁶⁸ In an interview with Syracuse.com in April, Trump stated that he supports the use of Customs and Border Protection Predator B long-endurance surveillance and reconnaissance drones to patrol U.S. land borders 24 hours per day. “They [drones] would work in conjunction with the Border Patrol, who are fantastic people who want to do their job,” Trump said. “I want surveillance for our borders, and the drone has great capabilities for surveillance.” “It’s amazing that you can do that from Syracuse,” the candidate said, adding, “I would absolutely keep and expand that capability in Syracuse” (Syracuse is home to the New York Air National Guard, which operates a fleet of Reaper drones.)⁶⁹

Border Drones

Trump has advocated for a significant boost in military spending. Trump’s plan for a spending increase focuses on boosting the number of fighter planes, ships, and troops, and does not directly address drones. Trump has criticized the budget sequester that has limited Pentagon budgets for the past several years, including budgets for unmanned systems technology programs. Speaking at the American Legion in Cincinnati, Ohio in September, Trump said, “We cannot impose arbitrary limits on something as important as our military. That makes no sense at all. The sequester makes our country less secure. Let’s end it and get a budget deal that supports America’s military, our families and our country. And let’s make reform a priority, so that the Defense Department spends its budget on the right things.”⁷⁰

Military Spending

Mike Pence

Candidate for Vice-President



Relevant Positions:
Gov. of Indiana
(2013 -)

We were unable to find any on-the-record comments by Mike Pence about military drone use or targeted killing operations.

Pence approves of the use of drones for border for border surveillance, and has promoted drone development programs in Indiana. In a speech at the Heritage Foundation in 2006, Pence described his approval of Customs and Border Protection’s use of drones to patrol U.S. borders. Speaking of drone patrols among other heightened security initiatives, Pence said, “These are the kind of actions that will bring about a new day on our border. Instead of ‘coyotes,’ drug-runners and criminals ruling the border, American law enforcement will rule the border. Instead of terrorists having the ability to sneak through a porous border, they will find a secure border hardened to prevent their illegal entry.”⁷¹ In 2013, Pence and Ohio Governor John Kasich announced the Ohio/Indiana Unmanned Aircraft Systems Center, a development and testing facility for unmanned aircraft technology programs.⁷² In 2014, as governor of Indiana, Pence signed into law House Bill 1009, which requires law enforcement agencies in the state to obtain a warrant before conducting any form of surveillance with a drone.⁷³

Domestic Drones

Chris Christie

Campaign Adviser

Relevant Positions:
Gov. of New Jersey
(2010 -)

Following the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in June, Christie advocated for increased foreign operations to combat terrorist groups, though he did not specifically mention drones. “You’ve got to get over there and you’ve got to start making them pay where they live,” said Christie on WFAN-660AM. “It’s an ugly, difficult thing, but if we don’t get over there, they’re coming here. And they showed it again this weekend.”⁷⁴

Michael Flynn

National Security Adviser



Relevant Positions:
Dir. of DIA
(2012 - 2014)

Trump adviser Gen. Michael Flynn has stated that he is opposed to drone use because he believes that it fuels further conflict. As the senior officer in the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command from 2004 to 2007, Flynn would have been involved in drone strike operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁵

In an interview with Al Jazeera in July 2015, Flynn agreed with his interviewer that the current administration should reduce the number of drones strikes, adding, “I believe there should be a different approach, absolutely.” Flynn said, “When you drop a bomb from a drone...you are going to cause more damage than you are going to cause good.” The retired general added, “I do believe that there are individuals, they believe in perpetual conflict on these Islamic radical fronts. And they’ve talked about perpetuating conflict for the rest of time... There are some that it’s okay for.” But “As an overarching strategy,” Flynn said, “it’s a failed strategy.”⁷⁶

Effectiveness

In May 2016, Flynn was named Vice Chairman of the Board of Drone Aviation Holding Corp, a contractor that develops tethered surveillance drones and aerostats. These unarmed unmanned systems are used for security and base protection, and play no role in targeted strike operations.⁷⁷

Rudy Giuliani

Campaign Adviser



Relevant Positions:
Mayor of NYC
(1994 - 2001)

Rudy Giuliani has criticized the targeted killing policy of the current administration, stating that he favors a policy of capture and interrogation. “Rather than capturing people, because Obama didn’t want to fill up Guantanamo, he used drones to kill them,” Giuliani said at the Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C. in September. “OK, some of them you had to do that way. I always prefer capturing, but I’m an investigator and a former prosecutor and I want to get their information. I also can’t figure out for the life of me what’s more humane, waterboarding or killing somebody with a drone.” The former New York City mayor added, “You think for yourself, what’s the moral difference between dropping a bomb on a man’s head who’s a terrorist, or grabbing the man, sitting him down, and telling him, ‘If you don’t tell me about all the other terrorists, I’m going to waterboard you.’ At least in the second situation he gets a chance to save his life.”⁷⁸

Counter-Terrorism

J.D. Gordon

Foreign Policy Adviser



Relevant Positions:
DoD Spokesperson
(2005 - 2009)

In a 2012 op-ed for *The Washington Times*, J.D. Gordon criticized the Obama administration's counterterrorism policy and suggested that the White House's drone strike policy is "bipolar" given the administration's opposition to capturing and interrogating suspected terrorists. "While Mr. Obama and his surrogates complained literally thousands of times about the grand total of three detainees who were waterboarded by the CIA under the Bush administration, then banned all coercive interrogations once in office, Mr. Obama has no problem killing U.S. citizens overseas via covert action, like New Mexico-born Anwar al-Awlaki," wrote Gordon. "Call me crazy, but I'd rather be waterboarded—like tens of thousands of military personnel who have been through Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape schools designed for pilots and aircrew—than blown up by a missile or taken out by a squad of commandos in the middle of the night."⁷⁹

Drone
Strikes

Gordon spoke approvingly of the Navy's X-47-B, an unmanned carrier-based strike drone prototype. Speaking to WJLA in July of 2013, Gordon said, "This is completely revolutionary. This drone doesn't need any assistance to land or take off from an aircraft carrier. Other drones need a remote control to fly, to land. This can take off and land by itself, so it's really revolutionary. I'd say that it is perhaps as revolutionary as the aircraft carrier itself." He added, "I think we'll see a lot of new capabilities come out of this. We'll see surveillance, we'll see the strike capability. And one of the best things is, this drone can stay on station for 30 hours or more, which is many more hours than a pilot can do."⁸⁰

Future Drones

James Woolsey

Campaign Adviser



Relevant Positions:
Dir. of CIA
(1993 - 1995)

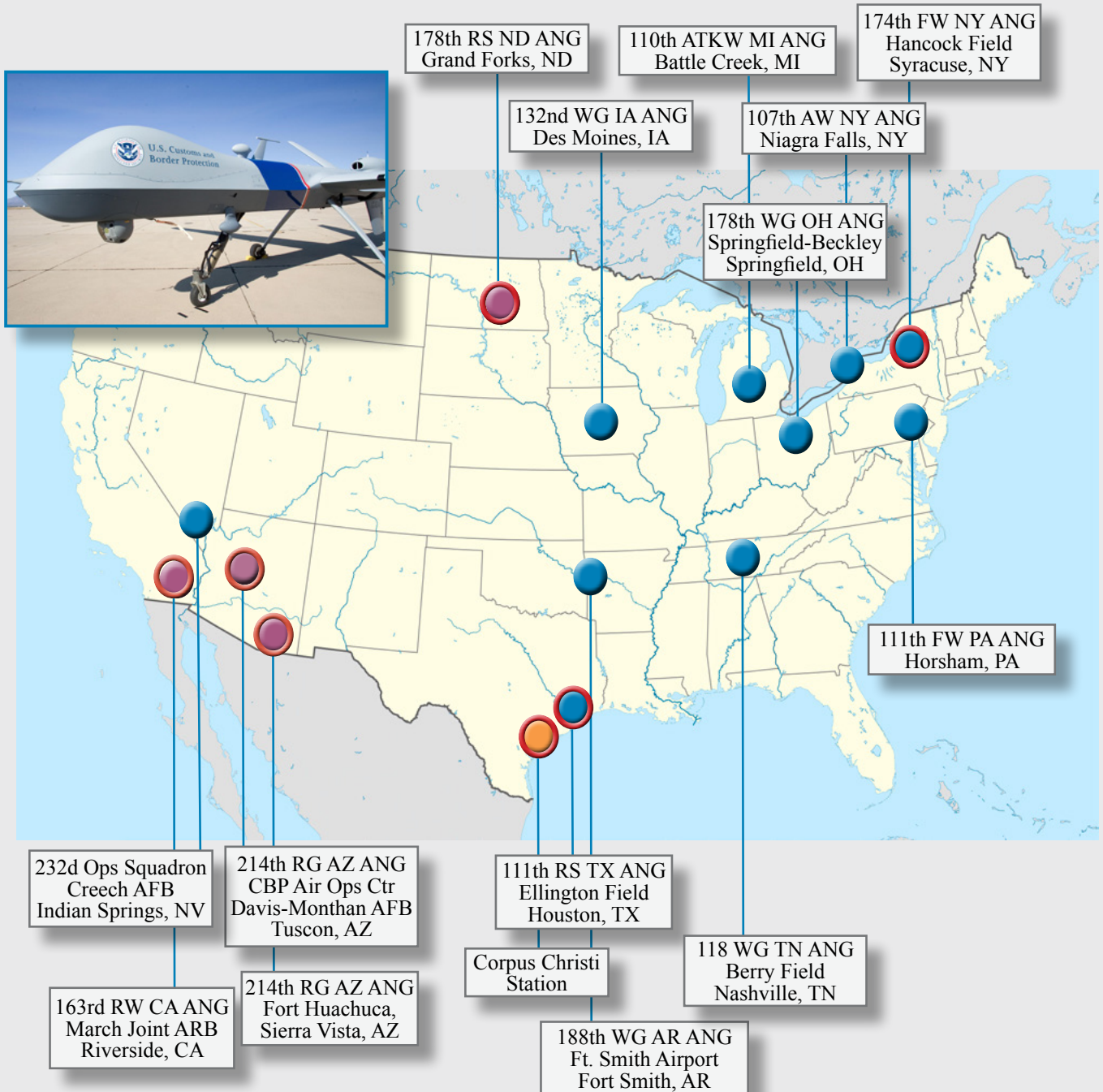
As the Director of Central Intelligence, Woolsey was an early advocate for long-endurance unmanned aircraft, particularly the Predator drone and the CIA's adoption of unmanned aircraft for surveillance.⁸¹

Like Giuliani, Woolsey appears to favor capturing suspected terrorists rather than conducting drone strikes. In an interview for the *CBS* documentary *The Spymasters*, which aired in May, Woolsey expressed concerns with the use of drones for targeted killing, suggesting that it would be more prudent to apprehend and interrogate suspects in order to acquire further intelligence. "They're killing a lot of people with, let's say, drone strikes that would better be captured and interrogated, that we—might have a chance of learning what the terrorist group is going to do next," Woolsey said. "You can't question somebody you've killed."⁸²

Drone
Strikes

More U.S. Drone Surveillance At Home?

Donald Trump has spoken of expanding the number of drones operating surveillance flights over the U.S. borders. But what would a policy like that look like? Trump could invest more in the aerospace program of the Customs and Border Protection agency at the Department of Homeland Security, enabling it to purchase and operate more drones. Another possibility is to allow the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, which currently fly around one third of all U.S. Air Force Predator and Reaper drone missions overseas, to conduct more missions in the United States. Although there are several political, legal, and technical roadblocks to this second option, it has not been uncommon for the National Guard to be called upon to help with border protection efforts.⁸³ As a 2015 RAND study pointed out, the Air National Guard has several bases along the northern and southern borders where there are already units operating drones.⁸⁴ Some of these bases have drones on station for training, while other bases are where ANG personnel operate drones flying overseas. In order to get a sense of what a more active domestic drone policy could look like, here's a map of the CBP and ANG drone bases.



Guide



Customs and Border Protection Drone Base



Air National Guard Drone Base



Shared CBP and ANG Drone Base



CBP or ANG Drones on Station

Source: *Air Force Magazine's Guide to Air Force Installations Worldwide*

Green Party

Jill Stein

Candidate for President



Among the 22 presidential primary candidates that we analyzed in October 2015, only Jill Stein had expressed an unequivocal opposition to the use of drones for military operations of any kind. Stein has stated that drone strikes are ineffective, counterproductive, and make the world less secure. She is the only presidential candidate to specifically address the use of drones on her campaign website; as part of her platform, she includes “End the wars and drone attacks, cut military spending by at least 50% and close the 700+ foreign military bases that are turning our republic into a bankrupt empire.”⁸⁵

Foreign Policy

Commenting on the first presidential debate between Trump and Clinton, Stein said, “In fact, the drone wars kill nine unintended victims for every intended target. And even that intended target is essentially an assassination victim, which is a violation of international law to start with. So, we need to start over.”⁸⁶ In a third-party presidential candidate debate in 2012, Stein said, “A foreign policy based on brute military force is making us less secure, not more secure...we need to end the drone wars, not bring the drones home because they’re already coming home. We need to put an end to the use of drones and actually lead. Not to lead this development of a new arms race but to lead in an international treaty and a convention to permanently ban the use of drones as a weapon of war and as a means of spying on the American public.” Stein also said, “Dropping bombs on weddings and funerals, which is what drones do with an incredibly high civilian casualty rate, that is not a good way to win the hearts and minds of people in the Middle East.”⁸⁷

Military Action

Ajamu Baraka

Candidate for Vice-President



Jill Stein’s running mate has also expressed vocal opposition to drone use. On his website, the vice presidential candidate states: “After years of drone attacks from the U.S., the end of the agony of the people of Yemen is nowhere in sight. These attacks targeted weddings, funerals, first responders to an initial drone attack and so-called signature strikes where an anonymous person is murdered because he fits the behavior profile of a ‘terrorist.’ After pounding the country into rubble with six months of terror from the sky, the Saudi’s [sic] are now involved in ground operations in Yemen that will only increase the death toll and the humanitarian disaster. This is the world that a President Sanders promises—continued war crimes from the sky with drone strikes and Saudi led terror in support of the Western imperial project.”⁸⁸

Drone Strikes

Libertarian Party

Gary Johnson

Candidate for President



Relevant Positions:
Gov. of New Mexico
(1995 - 2003)

Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson has expressed opposition to the use of drones for targeted killing, even stating that the U.S. targeted killing program represents a war crime. Johnson opposes the use of military force abroad except in limited circumstances. Johnson's running mate, Bill Weld, has expressed limited support for drone strikes.

In a November 2015 interview with *Reason*, Johnson said, "When it comes to drones, I think it makes a bad situation even worse. We end up killing innocents and fueling hatred as opposed to containing it. It just hasn't worked."⁸⁹

Drone Strikes

In response to the question "Should the military fly drones over foreign countries to gain intelligence and kill suspected terrorists?" on the website ISideWith.com, Johnson wrote, "No, the military has no right to do so without a Congressional declaration of war."⁹⁰ In an October 2013 interview with *RT*, Johnson said, "When you talk about drone strikes, look, let's wake up to the fact that we're making more enemies. We don't just kill the target, we kill a lot of innocent civilians every time these drones launch a missile, and it's resulting in more enemies to this country." Later, in the same interview, Johnson agreed with the interviewer that "the United States is committing war crimes with its drone program."⁹¹

Effectiveness

Bill Weld

Candidate for Vice-President



Relevant Positions:
Gov. of Massachusetts
(1991 - 1997)

Gary Johnson's running mate has expressed limited support for drone strikes if used in certain scenarios. In a town hall event with *CNN* in August, Weld said "If it's an obvious ISIS training platform in South Yemen and you have a complacent or unwilling local government, maybe drones is the way to take that out," but added "if it's isolated people roaming around in hills and caves in Afghanistan, much less appealing."⁹²

Drone Strikes

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