The Central Intelligence Agency's Armed Remotely Piloted Vehicle-Supported Counter-Insurgency Campaign in Pakistan – a Mission Undermined by Unintended Consequences?

by Simon Bennett

Abstract

This paper views America's 'drones-first' counter-insurgency effort in Pakistan through the lens of Merton's theory of the unintended consequences of purposive action. It also references Beck's Risk Society thesis, America's Revolution in Military Affairs doctrine, Toft's theory of isomorphic learning, Langer's theory of mindfulness, Highly Reliable Organisations theory and the social construction of technology (SCOT) argument. With reference to Merton's theory, the CIA-directed armed Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) campaign has manifest functions, latent functions and latent dysfunctions. Measured against numbers of suspected insurgents killed, the campaign can be judged a success. Measured against the level of collateral damage or the state of US-Pakistan relations, the campaign can be judged a failure. Values determine the choice of metrics. Because RPV operations eliminate risk to American service personnel, and because this is popular with both US citizens and politicians, collateral damage (the killing of civilians) is not considered a policy-changing dysfunction. However, the latent dysfunctions of America's drones-first policy may be so great as to undermine that policy's intended manifest function – to make a net contribution to the War on Terror. In Vietnam the latent dysfunctions of Westmoreland's attritional war undermined America's policy of containment. Vietnam holds a lesson for the Obama administration.

Keywords: *RPV; War on Terror; CIA; Pakistan; Merton; Dysfunctions.*

Seeds of change

In an increasingly risk-conscious world (Beck, 1992, 2009; Waters, 1995) politicians attempt to reduce risk to a level deemed acceptable by their electors. This dynamic functions in every sphere, from energy generation to war-fighting. In a Risk Society, legitimacy lies in the support of the body politic. As shown by western powers' reluctance to commit ground troops to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria (Joshi, 2014), public support is seen by politicians as a precondition for military operations – especially those undertaken not in defence of the homeland, but to promote a foreign policy objective. Regarding military action, existential threats have greater legitimatory power than non-existential threats: The American public's perception that the intermediate-range nuclear missiles deployed to Cuba by the Soviet Union posed an existential threat to the continental United States helped legitimise Kennedy's 1962 blockade. The issue was less clear-cut in the case of the communist insurgency in South East Asia. The growing belief that the spread of communism in that region did *not* pose an existential threat to the continental United States gradually undermined the American public's support for military action. Westmoreland comments: "[O]ur national interest was not at stake .... Many in the American public thought that our participation was ... not necessarily in the national

interest" (2008: 340).

Most Cold War conflicts were spatially, temporally and politically constrained (Osgood, 1994). Despite its policy of containment, the United States was never comfortable with military adventures (Osgood, 1994). Since the exertions of the Second World War, America's political class has found it increasingly difficult to win support for military action (Deri, 2012). The Vietnam War proved a watershed. Vietnam was the first war to be fought in the media spotlight. Images of body-bags being unloaded from military transports and of setbacks like the 1968 Tet Offensive were beamed into American homes (Mandelbaum, 1982; Messenger, 1995; Isaacs and Downing, 1998; Cerny, 2010). Losses shaped the public mood:

> The USA entering the 1970s seemed a nation in turmoil and shock. The Vietnam war was an economic drain, and divided the country internally (Davies, 1995: 2).

McCain notes:

> It took a long time before America became united again. There was a lot of anger ... (2008: 482).

Later reversals like the Carter administration's 1980 failure to rescue the fifty-two Americans taken hostage by Iranian students and the Clinton administration's withdrawal from the UN mission to Somalia following the loss of eighteen elite soldiers in the 'Battle of Mogadishu' provided further justification for new thinking.

The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)

According to Shaw (2005), today's wars must be fought in such a way that they deliver both military success *and* public approval. 'Risk-transfer war' means risks are displaced to foreign soil (for example, many of the risks associated with fighting the War on Terror have been transferred to Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and the Yemen). By advocating a more technology-centred approach to warfighting (James and Kievit, 1995; Sloan, 2002; Scales, 2003; Davis, 2010), RMA supports risk-transfer. RMA synthesises "information superiority, dominant manoeuvre, precision engagement, full-dimensional protection and focused logistics" (Davis, 2010: 14). According to Metz and Kievit, RMA garners public support:

> [A] force built around stand-off, precision weapons ... would be more politically usable than a traditional force-projection military (1995: vii).

Given the risk-averse nature of Western constituents, the escalating cost of conventional war-fighting and the post-2007 economic downturn, governments unwilling to eschew foreign campaigns have adopted technologies that offer relatively risk-free and cost-effective capabilities (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011; Alley, 2013). The age of the armed Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) has dawned (Alley, 2013).

Arms-length engagement – benefits and costs

Technologies like armed RPVs are an important component of the new war-fighting paradigm. Although vulnerable to conventional weapons, RPVs all but eliminate 'home' casualties thereby making it less likely that the public will turn on the political class (as it did in the United States over the Vietnam conflict (Davies, 1995)). Arms-length weapons systems like RPVs exemplify US General George S. Patton's philosophy: "No poor bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making other bastards die for their country" (cited in Appathurai, 2003).

However, while the accuracy of drone strikes has improved, non-combatants are still killed or injured (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011; Boyle, 2013). In Pakistan, factors that induce collateral damage include:

RPV strikes called up by unreliable informants (what is to stop someone with a grudge from using the CIA to eliminate an enemy?); insurgents living amongst non-combatants; poor quality video images; and the CIA's use of 'signature strikes' that involve profiling the behaviour of suspected hostiles (Deri, 2012; Boyle, 2013). Boyle asserts that because signature strikes are based on profiling that is deficient in cultural awareness, they exemplify a general disregard amongst US personnel for the lives of non-combatants. Cloud claims that drone operators referred to all mature Pakistani men as "military-age males", abbreviated by operators to 'MAMs' (Cloud, 2011). The MAM nomenclature may have primed operators' perceptions. Speaking to the moral dimension of the CIA's Pakistan campaign, Boyle concludes: "[S]tandards of proportionality have been eroded with drone warfare" (2013: 8). Alley claims that a lack of "reliable, on-the-ground human intelligence" has caused "the barrier of targeting certainty [to be] lowered" (2013: 9). Proportionality is an important moral principle in a State's application of force, whether through a civilian police service or the military. There is little sense of proportionality in the use of force in authoritarian states (like Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Pol Pot's Cambodia or Putin's Russia).

It is claimed that RPV-incurred collateral damage has several consequences, including: the alienation of host-nation civilians from the War on Terror; recasting of terrorists as freedom-fighters; instigation of terrorist attacks on home territory (like the attempted 2010 Times Square bombing); undermining host nations' local and national democratic institutions (because of their apparent inability to influence RPV policy); erosion of host nation cultural norms like weddings, tribal gatherings and communal burial ceremonies (because of the fear that any gathering is a potential CIA target); psychological distress (both acute and chronic) amongst those who live or work in the theatre of operation; and hostility to preventive medicine programmes (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011; Pew Research Centre, 2011; Birch, Lee and Pierscionek, 2012; Deri, 2012; International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, Global Justice Clinic, 2012; Ahmed, 2013; Alley, 2013; Boyle, 2013; Foust, 2013).

Seen through the prism of Merton's (1936) theory of unintended consequences, RPV operations in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Yemen have several latent dysfunctions or unintended negative consequences (in Hudson, Owen and Flannes's (2011: 123) argot, "blowback"). The question for US policy-makers is whether these unintended negative consequences are so great that they negate the benefits that accrue from RPV operations (e.g. reducing the number of soldiers who return home in body-bags).

Merton's hypothesis

Merton (1936) claims that purposive social action ("action which involves motives") can have both intended (expected) and unintended (unexpected) consequences (which he terms 'functions'). Manifest functions are the consequences we expect. Latent functions are those we do not. There are two types of latent function: those that support the original intent, and those that work against it. Because they undermine the intent, 'latent dysfunctions' are the worst type of unanticipated consequence. Examples of Merton's 'law of unintended consequences' abound: exhortations to eat sensibly, watch your weight and exercise have both manifest and latent functions. For some they improve health, self-esteem and longevity (manifest functions). For others they undermine health by causing eating disorders like anorexia nervosa. Viewed through Merton's prism, anorexia is a latent dysfunction of well-intentioned advice.

Five factors influence the chances of an action having unintended consequences:

1. Ignorance
The more imperfect the foreknowledge, the greater the chance of an action having unintended

consequences.

2. Error

The more wayward the initial assumptions, the greater the chance of an action having unintended consequences.

3. Imperviousness

The more myopic the actors (the more closed to contra-indications and susceptible to groupthink), the more likely an action will have unintended consequences.

4. Dogma

The more zealous the actors, the greater the chance of an action having unintended consequences.

5. Predisposition

The more predisposed the actors, the greater the chance of an action having unintended consequences. Sveiby *et al.* (2009: 4) illustrate how predisposition can produce unintended consequences: "[B]ecause organisational change initiatives have failed in the past, [subsequent] change initiatives are met with cynicism by employees, thereby further increasing the risk of failure". Predisposition may render action ineffectual (the unintended consequence).

Examples taken from the realm of social policy (health campaigns, for example) support Merton's hypothesis that purposive social action can have both intended and unintended consequences (some of which are functional, others not). But what of the military domain? What does Merton's hypothesis tell us about innovations like RPVs? Do RVP operations have both intended and unintended consequences (functional and dysfunctional)? If so, what impacts might there be on mission aims and objectives?

The RPV-supported counter-insurgency campaign in Pakistan

Introduction

Like air-launched cruise missiles, RPVs are 'arms-length' weapons systems that mitigate the risks inherent in armed conflict. In part, the development of RPVs like Predator and Reaper reflect a shift in American military tactics brought about by a change in American public opinion. Obey (cited in Hamilton, 2012: 687) claims that post-Somalia America wanted "zero degree of involvement and zero degree of risk and zero degree of pain and confusion". America's doubts about 'boots on the ground' military expeditions were reified in drone technology and doctrine. Seen through the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) lens (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985; Latour, 1991; Bjiker, 1994; Pinch, 1996), the desire to sanitise conflict was reified (concretised) in the armed RPV. SCOT theorist Jameson (1995: 37) talks about "the ultimately determining instance" – the spur to action, the nub, the catalyst. The Somalia episode could be described as that for the armed RPV.

The number of nations possessing some type of RPV numbers seventy-five. The RPV market is lucrative. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation considers the RPV a force multiplier (Birch, Lee and Pierscionek, 2012). The clamour over RPVs conceals limitations, however.

A critique of armed RPV technologies and modus operandi

1. Because they are slow-flying, RPVs are vulnerable.

2. Compared to manned aircraft, RPVs have a high attrition rate (Tvaryanas, Thompson and Constable, 2006).

3. Even with high-fidelity sensors it is difficult to identify individuals. Cultural events (like weddings or meetings of elders) are susceptible to multiple interpretations, especially by those unfamiliar with local custom. Misinterpretation results in collateral damage (Cloud, 2011). Estimates of such damage are subject to political spin (Boyle, 2013). "[S]tatistics yield a civilian fatality rate that ranges from 15 percent to more than twice that" says Deri (2012: 7). It is claimed collateral damage persuades some to join terrorist organisations. Collateral damage also provokes retaliation (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). The Taliban said its 2009 attack on the Manawan (Lahore) Police Academy (that killed seven) was in retaliation for CIA-directed RPV operations (Deri, 2012). Following a lethal Predator attack on a civilian convoy, a USAF Major General claimed the hyper-technologisation of warfare might persuade personnel that errors are unlikely: "Technology can occasionally give you a false sense of security that you can see everything, that you can hear everything, that you know everything" (Poss cited in Cloud, 2011). Bainbridge (1983) says automation is Janus-faced.

4. If ground troops encounter suspected hostiles they can detain and question them. While RPV crews can observe suspected hostiles for extended periods, the detain-and-question option is not available (unless ground troops can be guided to the location in time). RPV-centric warfare reduces the number of interrogation-based intelligence-gathering opportunities (Callam, 2010). The Government of Pakistan forbids US ground operations, but tolerates RPV missions. There is a lethal irony to this policy: were the Pakistanis to allow US ground operations, the volume and quality of intelligence would increase, thereby reducing the insurgent threat (and, perhaps, the global terror threat). There would be significant political fallout, however, as demonstrated by the negative reaction to the insertion of Special Forces into Abbottabad to assassinate Osama bin Laden (Mohanty: 2013).

5. Orwell (1949) predicted the normalisation of conflict. Because RPV strikes eliminate the visible costs of war (news-footage of body-bags being offloaded from transports) it is possible to form the view that wars can be fought with impunity. Sanitisation may accelerate the militarisation of foreign policy. Deri (2012) suggests the American establishment and public have normalised drone warfare to the point where it is a 'background' activity. "In America … UAV technology …does away with the greatest emotional burden of being at war: the condolence letter" explains Deri (2012). While a 2012 Pew Research poll "found substantial opposition to drone strikes among American allies" this was not the case amongst US citizens, where "62 per cent of [those] sampled supported drone strikes" (Alley, 2013: 29).

6. There is the question of operators' willingness to pull the trigger. According to Otto and Webber (2013), RPV pilots have a similar mental health risk-profile to fast-jet pilots. To counter the possibility that RPV crews might feel disconnected from the battle-space, the USAF has revamped its training to instil more of a 'warrior culture' (Barnes, 2010). The life of a RPV operator is very different to that of a soldier or airman who serves in-theatre. After their shift, RPV operators return to a familiar world, possibly domestic. They would be aware of issues connected to collateral damage. Indeed, friends, family, neighbours and even persons in the street might make them aware of the moral dimensions of RPV operations. It is possible that comments and admonitions might play on a RPV operator's mind. Soldiers under training are de-sensitised. This involves "brutalisation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning and role modelling" (Grossman, 1998: 3). Seeing comrades killed or wounded generally reinforces a soldier, sailor or airman's resolve. Because they are removed from the front-line, RPV operators do not

experience reinforcement. They do, however, experience at first-hand debates current in civilian life. Towards the end of the Vietnam War, soldiers home on leave were sometimes challenged by those who disagreed with the war, triggering defensiveness (Gitell, 2007). Those connected with CIA operations in Pakistan could find themselves facing the same 'court of public opinion' as that faced by Vietnam veterans. Having said this, the CIA campaign enjoys considerable support in America (Deri, 2012; Alley, 2013).

7. There is the possibility that so-called 'double-tap' strikes will eliminate not only suspected terrorists but also those who attend the dead, dying and injured (Deri, 2012; International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, Global Justice Clinic, 2012; Boyle, 2013). While verifiable evidence is hard to come by, the Bureau for Investigative Journalism believes it has identified several double-tap strikes, including a May 24, 2012, RPV strike against a mosque where a second strike allegedly killed six rescuers, and a July 6, 2012 RPV strike against suspected insurgents where a second strike allegedly killed a dozen civilians (Woods, 2013). In January 2014 the Bureau for Investigative Journalism published (on-line) an internal Pakistan government report detailing casualties from over 330 CIA-directed RPV strikes launched between 2006 and 2013. Although partially censored by Pakistani authorities, the report confirms the deaths of both combatants and non-combatants (e.g. infants) (Ross, 2014).

8. There is the question of how RPV crews react to the considerable psychological pressure induced by operating a drone for long periods. According to the USAF, 46% of Reaper and Predator pilots and 48% of Global Hawk sensor operators experience 'high operational stress' (Dao, 2013). A number of RPV operators also exhibit 'clinical distress'. Birch, Lee and Pierscionek (2012: 8) define clinical distress as "anxiety, depression or stress severe enough to affect an operator's job performance or family life". Stressors include: overwork due to RPV crew shortages (typically an operator works 5-6 days on with 2-3 days off); switching between the military and civilian sphere on a daily basis ("Every day is a small-scale reintegration, requiring the operator to find a balance between supporting the war effort ... and domestic responsibilities" (Anonymous, 2013: 12)); working in isolation; and witnessing death on live feeds (Sifton, 2012; Dao, 2013). One RPV operator who left the military with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) wrote in his diary: "Total war. Every horror witnessed. I wish my eyes would rot". After his first kill he said he "… felt disconnected from humanity for almost a week". As his trauma grew he was less able to communicate. He told his girlfriend: "I can't just switch and go back to normal life". He knew he had a serious problem when he heard himself say to colleagues: "What motherfucker is going to die today?" (Bryant cited in Abé, 2012). Abé (2012) likens RPV pilots' mental dysfunction to "a short-circuit in the brain of the drones" and notes: "One of the paradoxes of drones is that, even as they increase the distance to the target, they also create proximity". Tart (cited in Abé) concurs: "War somehow becomes personal". A stressed or depressed operator may not perform as expected. S/he might launch an unwarranted strike or fail to execute a warranted strike.

9. There is the matter of truth and transparency in regard to drone operations. The CIA-directed programme in Pakistan is not open to scrutiny (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School, Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law, 2012). According to Foust and Boyle (2012), one of its defining characteristics is secrecy. This, says Deri (2012), facilitates the manipulation of facts.

10. Finally, and limiting ourselves to the specific type of armed RPV operation that is the subject of this paper, there is the possibility that CIA-directed RPV operations over sovereign territory will so de-legitimise and de-stabilise the elected government of Pakistan that it is less able to withstand the threat

posed by home-grown terrorist movements like the 35,000-strong Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (Boyle, 2013). Boyle (2013) suggests that the US military's drones-first policy undermines the State Department's efforts to create stable nations able to repel both home-grown and insurgent terrorist organisations. According to Hudson, Owens and Flannes (2011) and Boyle (2013), America's anti-terror policy is incoherent. Washington's National Intelligence Council (2012) refers to Pakistan's "faltering governance institutions". In its 2013 *Failed States Index*, the Fund For Peace (2013) ranked Pakistan the thirteenth most unstable state, and Somalia the most unstable state. The CIA engages in targeted killing in both Pakistan and Somalia (Boyle, 2013).

A Mertonian analysis of the use of armed RPVs in Pakistan

Seen through Merton's prism, the CIA-directed RPV counter-insurgency campaign in Pakistan has manifest functions, latent functions and, worryingly, latent dysfunctions.

Manifest functions

1. Elimination of high-value targets (HVTs) and lower-ranked combatants.
Several HVTs have been killed, including, in 2009, "infamous terrorist" Baitullah Mehsud (Deri, 2012: 1). However, International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School, Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law (2012: vii) says: "The number of high-level targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is extremely low".

2. Sanitisation of war for aggressor nation.
The elimination of 'home' casualties and avoidance of adverse publicity helps politicians, civil servants and the military 'sell' interventions. It also helps the public come to terms with war. While a 2013 CNN/Opinion Research poll found that 82% of Americans opposed the war in Afghanistan (PBS Newshour, 2013), a 2012 Pew Research Centre (2012) poll found that only 28% of Americans disapproved of drone strikes. Wary of being drawn into open-ended conflicts, Obama's anti-ISIS strategy will probably revolve around airstrikes by fast-jets and RPVs (Joshi, 2014).

3. Reduction of the political risks inherent in foreign actions.
Failed military expeditions undermine leaderships. The divisive Vietnam War ended Johnson's presidency (Davies, 1995; McCain, 2008). Carter's failure to rescue the Iranian hostages harmed his 1980 re-election campaign. Somalia rebounded on Clinton. Actions that risk few or no friendly casualties carry less political risk. The land-borne component of Obama's anti-ISIS strategy will be limited to Special Forces (Joshi, 2014).

4. Reducing the cost of warfighting in a time of hardship.
During the United States's 2007-2009 recession (the longest since World War II) the government sought to maintain its global posture. RPVs provide a cost-effective means of projecting lethal power – although, according to Foust and Boyle (2012), they are not as cost-effective as is sometimes claimed.

Latent functions

1. Helping to sustain US scientific and technological leadership.
According to Boyle (2013), global spending on RPVs will rise. Many nations will look to the US to supply their drones. High-technology products underpin America's economy (Friedman and Mandelbaum,

2011).

2. Helping to maintain the military-industrial complex.

Determined to capture as much of the drone market as possible, the Pentagon has authorised RPV sales to sixty-six countries. Weapons sales underwrite the USA's military-industrial complex – an important economic structure.

3. Helping to sustain a Keynesian economic policy.

In an effort to cushion the effects of the post-2007 downturn, President Obama injected money into the US economy (Mason, 2012). While the Department of Defence budget was cut, spending on the technologically-ambitious and over-budget Global Hawk RPV was secured (Mehta, 2014). Spending on high-technology items like Global Hawk supports the US economy. The state of the economy will help determine whether the Democrats retain the Presidency in 2016.

Latent dysfunctions

1. Killing non-combatants.

The killing of non-combatants in RPV operations has proved a public-relations disaster in Pakistan (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). It has been claimed that drone warfare is less wasteful of innocent lives than conventional warfighting techniques like carpet-bombing, the laying of minefields or the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This argument is specious. Given the current state of US military affairs and doctrine, no commander would use such overwhelming force against a widely scattered and lightly-armed opposition. Currently there are only two military counter-insurgency options available to a commander: RPV hunter-killer missions (like those directed against Tehrik-i-Taliban in Afghanistan/Pakistan), or intelligence-led operations by Special Forces. Evidence suggests the former lack the finesse of the latter (Boyle, 2013).

2. Swelling the ranks of terrorist organisations.

Civilian deaths have spurred some Pakistanis to join terrorist organisations (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). Others voice support or sympathy for terrorists (rehabilitated as 'freedom fighters'). Writing before the escalation of the drone campaign, Hersh (2004: 287) observed: "Pakistan … is a nuclear power that harbours some of the most dedicated and potentially destabilising anti-American Islamic activists in the world". Terrorists have travelled to flash-points like Iraq and Syria (Boyle, 2013). Drone warfare has helped create a terrorist diaspora. One could ask whether it has helped create al-Baghdadi's anarchic (Diab, 2014) (but probably temporary) caliphate.

3. Undermining the legitimacy and destabilisation of a democratic government.

In the eyes of many Pakistanis the government's inability to reign-in the United States has undermined its credibility and legitimacy (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). The drone campaign has made Pakistan's long-standing governance problem worse. Terrorist organisations are able to fill the political vacuum. Undermining a key actor in the War on Terror (Hersh, 2004) may rebound on the United States and its allies.

4. Destabilisation of a nuclear power in a volatile region.

Unstable nuclear powers or blocs pose a threat to regional and global security (Mearsheimer, 1994). There are tensions within Pakistan, and between Pakistan and her neighbours (Hersh, 2004; Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011; Kapoor, 2013). These tensions are not eased by America's Pakistan strategy. America's

stance on Pakistan is Janus-faced. On the one hand it seeks to create a strong and stable state able to police its borders, while on the other it pursues a drones-first counter-terrorism policy that undermines the government's authority and gives succour to terrorists and their supporters (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011; Boyle, 2013). The US government is either oblivious to, or is unable or unwilling to address the contradictions inherent in its Pakistan strategy. Political unrest over the summer of 2014 further destabilised the country.

5.   Undermining the USA's efforts to occupy the moral high ground in the War on Terror.

According to a report in the *New York Times* (Becker and Shane, 2012), all males of military age killed in CIA-directed RPV strikes are classified as militants, unless categorically proven otherwise by whatever post-strike investigation takes place. Put another way, in the CIA campaign, anyone touched by a drone strike is guilty until proven innocent. In the US a party is innocent until proven guilty. Because of the paucity and superficiality of post-strike investigations, and tradition of same-day burials, the CIA's reverse burden-of-proof criminalises innocent parties. Other factors, like the secrecy surrounding the CIA-led campaign (Foust and Boyle, 2012) and deaths of non-combatants further undermine the reputation of the United States.

6.   Creating an opportunity for misjudgement.

The Pentagon proposed a new honour – the Distinguished Warfare Medal (DWM) – to recognise RPV operators' contribution. The announcement that the DWM would outrank awards like the Bronze Star with Valour "sparked uproar among troops and veterans" (Tilghman, 2013). Obama abandoned the DWM. Such episodes could impact RPV operators' self-image and morale, possibly making them less reliable in the performance of their duties (Bennett, 2013).

7.   Eroding self-esteem.

Because front-line troops overcome existential risks they experience high self-esteem and earn the respect of others. Facing no existential risks, drone operators can struggle to build self-esteem (Birch, Lee and Pierscionek, 2012). The success with which a person performs their duties is influenced by self-esteem (because self-esteem impacts morale). A demoralised operator may not perform as expected. S/he may terminate non-legitimate targets or fail to terminate legitimate targets. A warfighting system that operates unpredictably is a liability (Bennett, 2013).

8.   Inviting allegations of illegality in the use of military force.

The legality of US drone strikes is contested (Foust and Boyle, 2012; International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School, Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law, 2012; Ahmed, 2013). There are two questions. First, the legality under international law of interstate extrajudicial killings. Secondly, the legality of CIA-directed drone strikes in cases where they are used against US citizens (Ahmed, 2013). Foust and Boyle (2012: 3) suggest the US "… is operating within its bounds under the international framework established by the UN". Shah, however, argues against extrajudicial killings: "[U]nilateralist behaviour from powerful states to achieve their objectives while violating the territorial sovereignty of weaker states is extremely damaging to the interstate paradigm" (2010: 129).

Why is the USA's counterterrorism strategy afflicted by latent dysfunctions?

According to Merton (1936, 1968), five factors determine the number and severity of latent dysfunctions: Ignorance; Error; Imperviousness; Dogma; Predisposition. The alienation of many Pakistanis from the War on Terror reflects US ignorance, error, imperviousness and dogma in the matter of its approach to counter-

terrorism. By measuring the success of its Pakistan operation solely in terms of numbers of terrorists killed, the United States overlooks the possibility that its drones-first strategy may be strengthening rather than weakening the ranks of organisations like al-Qaeda and the TTP.

Wedded to the CIA's secretive campaign, and content to measure success by counting corpses, the Obama administration has blinded itself to the possibility that its *modus operandi* may fatally undermine the War on Terror. Obama has made the same mistake Johnson did over Vietnam. Content to measure success by counting NVA and Viet Cong (VC) dead (Lewy, 1984; Isaacs and Downing, 1998; Bernhardt, 2008), Johnson and his generals failed to appreciate they were losing the war of hearts and minds. The Johnson administration's ignorance, error, imperviousness and dogma blinded it to the Vietnam War's latent dysfunction – specifically that it was increasingly seen as a war of imperial conquest rather than of liberation (Greene, 1967). Groupthink (Janis, 1972) may have played a part in the Johnson administration's myopic Vietnam strategy (as it did the Kennedy administration's support for the ill-starred 1961 Bay of Pigs counter-revolutionary insurgency).

In Vietnam, events like the My Lai massacre (in which 347 villagers were murdered by US troops (Sheehan, 1988)) served to alienate locals from the American cause. Lewy says: "It was difficult to convince villagers that the Americans had come as their protectors if in the process of liberating them … allied troops caused extensive harm" (1984: 7). According to Warnke (1994), the American public's reaction to the massacre was muted.

In Pakistan (and Afghanistan) the killing of civilians in drone strikes serves to alienate locals from the War on Terror (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). The US appears to have no understanding of (or chooses to ignore) the cultural dimension of warfighting in a country like Pakistan. Specifically, it has no understanding of the tribal and other bonds that unite the people of Pakistan's border regions, and no comprehension of what happens when close-knit communities are attacked by a foreign power. As demonstrated by the growth in membership of organisations like the TTP, wilful ignorance of cultural norms is counter-productive. In failing to re-appraise its drones-first counterterrorism policy in Pakistan the US demonstrates imperviousness and dogma. According to Merton (1936, 1968), these traits are likely to produce latent dysfunctions. In his 2013 analysis of the drones-first counterterrorism policy, Boyle mentions a number of latent dysfunctions (which he terms 'second-order political effects'). Hudson, Owens and Flannes recast Boyle's second-order political effects as 'blowback':

> [W]e argue that drone warfare has created five distinct, yet overlapping, forms of blowback: (1) the purposeful retaliation against the United States, (2) the creation of new insurgents, referred to as the 'accidental guerrilla' syndrome, (3) the further complication of US strategic coordination and interests in ... the Afghan/Pakistan ... theatre, (4) the further destabilization of Pakistan and (5) the deterioration of the US-Pakistani relationship (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011: 123).

The recruitment by ISIS of foreign jihadis may be considered partly a blowback phenomenon.

An absence of active learning ?

Perhaps the most interesting question is not why the Obama administration continues its counterproductive drones-first policy, but why has it failed to learn the lessons of Vietnam? The parallels between Obama's dysfunctional drones-first policy and Johnson's failed attritional war are obvious. Johnson sought to kill as many of the enemy as possible, regardless of the costs (Bernhardt, 2008). He continued the policy despite the

contra-indications. For example:

a) Soldiers' awareness that while they were killing NVA regulars in the hills in significant numbers, VC insurgents were taking military *and* political control of lowland hamlets (Lewy, 1984).

b) The 1968 Tet offensive that sowed panic throughout South Vietnam and disillusion at home (Karnow, 1994; Isaacs and Downing, 1998). The US Army was being outflanked even as Johnson and Westmoreland claimed the war was being won. Defeat in Vietnam challenged America's hegemony (Ambrose, 1971; Hall and Jacques, 1989; Cooke, 2008).

Johnson's dogged attachment to a simplistic attritional war served to undermine the South Vietnamese government's pacification programme, designed to bring security and development to rural communities. By preventing the needs of rural communities from being met, Johnson's war let the Viet Cong in by the back door:

Attrition offered a convenient way to measure success in the short run …. [but it] meant the underlying political issues of the war were overlooked ... (Hunt, 1994: 341).

Because they lived with the consequences, US troops realised the Johnson-Westmoreland strategy could not work. One Marine Corps officer wrote:

The rationale that ceaseless US operations in the hills could keep the enemy from the people was an operational denial of the fact that in large measure the war was a revolution which started in the hamlets ... the Viet Cong were already among the people when we went to the hills (West cited in Lewy, 1984: 6).

Obama has committed many of the same, or similar errors in relying on CIA-directed armed RPVs to prosecute the War on Terror in Pakistan. Toft's (1992, 1997) theory of isomorphic learning suggests Obama and his generals could learn from Johnson and Westmoreland's failure. Toft describes a person or organisation's failure to translate lessons into action as passive learning. Active learning requires that lessons inform policy and action.

Lessons

By using RPVs to reduce the human, political and financial risks of warfare, the United States has incurred significant costs (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011). However, the USA's new warfighting paradigm has created a set of unintended consequences that are undermining the War on Terror. Failure to manage the campaign's latent dysfunctions could render the War on Terror an exercise in futility.

The CIA's drone campaign offers several lessons for the Obama Administration and for the other nations prosecuting, or considering the prosecution of a conflict with armed RPVs:

1. Latent dysfunctions can undermine, if not fatally compromise, purposive action. The net effect of the drones-first policy may be to increase rather than reduce the risk of terrorism.

2. Ignorance, indifference and dogma can blind actors to latent dysfunctions. Contra-indications (signs that the strategy is not working) are either missed or ignored. The outrage felt by many Pakistanis when non-combatants are killed seems lost on American policymakers.

3. Latent dysfunctions can be avoided – but only with effort. Specifically, those in charge must respond to contra-indications. Had Johnson and Westmoreland reacted to reports that their attritional war was alienating South Vietnam's rural population (Lewy, 1984; Bernhardt, 2008), they might have been able to

challenge the Viet Cong's appeal. Theories of collective mindfulness (Weick, 1987; Langer, 1989; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfield, 1999) and high-reliability (Roberts, 1990; LaPorte and Consolini, 1991; Roberts, 1993; McIntyre, 2000; Mason, 2004; Health and Safety Laboratory, 2011) teach that reflective practice (awareness, constructive critique and recalibration) improves system reliability.

Mindful militaries are more capable. Because Major Orde Wingate heeded the contra-indications of the British Army's conventional war in Burma, he was able to formulate a strategy (reified in a volunteer, deep-penetration guerilla force called the Chindits) that challenged the Japanese. Wingate revelled in his open-mindedness and rejection of convention (Allen, 1984). Respected by his men and supported by Churchill, he personified mindfulness: "Wingate was a lateral thinker who questioned everything and everyone – especially his superiors" (Bennett, 2010: 5). Wingate "… changed the nature of jungle campaigning" (Allen, 1984: 148).

Conclusion

Our Mertonian dissection of the United States's use of armed RPVs to prosecute the War on Terror inside Pakistan shows how US tactics have produced manifest functions (e.g. elimination of high-value targets) and latent dysfunctions (e.g. deaths of non-combatants and instability). We conclude that the drone campaign's latent dysfunctions may be so severe as to undermine that policy's intended manifest function – to make a net contribution to the War on Terror.

Latent dysfunctions can only be remedied if those directing purposive action are willing to listen and act. In our comparison case study of the Vietnam War, had Westmoreland heeded his officers' scepticism (that is, had he practiced *mindfulness*) he might have been able to salvage a US$112 billion campaign that cost the lives of nearly 50,000 US soldiers (Lewy, 1984). Regarding the latent dysfunctions inherent in today's CIA drones-first strategy, it would appear that the Obama administration believes that the negatives (collateral damage, vengefulness, de-legitimation of the government of Pakistan, diplomatic rifts, regional instability, etc.) are outweighed by the positives (e.g. the saving of US airmen and soldiers' lives). As of August, 2014, there is no sign that President Obama will act to remedy the latent dysfunctions we have identified that are inherent in the drones-first strategy.

As to how the Pakistan mission is ultimately judged, the answer depends on the criteria applied. Measured against the number of alleged insurgents killed, or against the popularity of the policy with American voters, or, indeed, against induced advances in RPV technology, the mission can be judged a success. Measured against Pakistan's support for the War on Terror, or countering the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, or improving America's relations with the developing world, the answer is less clear-cut. Possibly it is trending towards the negative:

> *Drone attacks … deliver a politically satisfying short-term 'bang for the buck' for US constituencies ignorant of, and indifferent to those affected by drone warfare, or the phenomenon of blowback (Hudson, Owens and Flannes, 2011: 125).*

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