

October 2021

Targeting Drones: Framing, Vetting, and Power in Transnational Advocacy Issue Networks

Alexandria J. Nylén
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<https://doi.org/10.7275/24565133> https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/2286

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**TARGETING DRONES: FRAMING, VETTING, AND POWER IN
TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY ISSUE NETWORKS**

A Dissertation Presented

by

ALEXANDRIA JANE NYLEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2021

Political Science

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TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY ISSUE NETWORKS**

A Dissertation Presented

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ALEXANDRIA JANE NYLEN

Approved as to style and content by:

Charli Carpenter, Chair

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Department of Political Science

DEDICATION

For my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not be possible without the generous participation of a transnational group of individuals.

First, I wish to thank my dissertation committee: Charli Carpenter, Jamie Rowen, and Nina Tannenwald. Charli has served as a stalwart mentor throughout my entire time in graduate school, dedicating hours and an abundance of her energy to my professional (and personal) development. I am forever grateful to her and hope to model such mentorship as I move forward in my own career. Jamie has likewise aided me in the development of my academic imagination by constantly challenging me to look beyond disciplinary boundaries to discover productive interdisciplinary synergies. I first came across Nina's prolific scholarship as an undergraduate student and followed her work throughout my academic career- it was an absolute highpoint of my journey that she served as my outside member. It was an honor and privilege to work with a doctoral committee of such calibre. I am also grateful to the larger UMass Amherst Political Science Department community for their endless support – be it through workshop feedback from fellow graduate students, the mentorships I gained through teaching assistantships, or Emily White's prompt responses to my frantic emails.

Second, I wish to thank my family – my mom, dad, sister, and grandparents. They have all supported me unwaveringly as I have pursued a life in higher education since 2007. I would be remiss if I did not also thank my closest friends, who were always only a group chat or text away when I needed my perspective restored.

Thirdly, I wish to thank my husband, Usmaan. We met as starry-eyed new graduate students in the orientation for our PhD program and continued endlessly supporting one

another long after the initial excitement of a new academic endeavor wore off. His constant feedback on this project (as well as sanity-checks) means the world to me. I also have our cat Thor to thank for all the stress he must have absorbed from us secondhand- his antics kept both of us grounded during the most difficult times of our program.

Lastly, I wish to thank the activists who spoke to me for this project, which would not be possible without them. Some individuals even took great personal and professional risks to talk to me about sensitive issues regarding national security policies. I can only hope that this finished project does even a modicum of justice to their lived experiences. I am especially grateful to the individual who warmly welcomed me into their home – with absolutely no prior knowledge of my existence – so that I could conduct the international portion of my fieldwork. I am also extremely grateful to the individual who took an interest in my topic of study and introduced me to this person so I could overcome roadblocks I was facing. My memories of homecooked food shared with friendly company during my fieldwork will long outlive my memories of researching and writing this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

**TARGETING DRONES: FRAMING, VETTING, AND POWER IN
TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY ISSUE NETWORKS**

SEPTEMBER 2021

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Existing international relations literature shows that coherent messaging by advocacy networks is a key component for successful transnational mobilization around human security issues. However, traditional models of transnational advocacy do not fully explain how activists working against armed drones have mobilized over the past two decades. This dissertation explores the case of a transnational advocacy coalition that – despite efforts to do so – was unable to coalesce around a central message: the anti-drone issue network. I ask two interrelated questions: 1) Why have international anti-drone activists not been able to overcome disagreements over framings? and more broadly, 2) How do actors with differing levels of geopolitical power navigate a transnational human security network? Drawing on an original text and picture dataset of 300 anti-drone advocacy documents, 38 in-depth interviews with key informants, and multi-sited fieldwork, I argue that distinct exertions of power by specific, geographically disparate actors affected the overall issue network’s ability to cohere around a unifying frame. Specifically, partnering

decisions at every level of the network were impacted by an original concept that I call “inverse vetting” – a process through which less materially and geographically powerful network actors legitimize the advocacy framings of more powerful groups by partnering with them or not.

I demonstrate this argument through three empirical chapters that examine different levels of the transnational advocacy network against drones. In the first empirical chapter, I focus on the most powerful actors in the network: international non-governmental organizations that lobby international organizations. I then analyze US-based activists who primarily petition their own government over its drone policies. The last empirical chapter examines a violence-affected segment of the anti-drone network in Pakistan. Each of these chapters explore how power is operative in transnational advocacy networks through the mechanism of inverse vetting. I argue that inverse vetting demonstrates how actors who are traditionally considered the least enfranchised members of a network can affect the overall coherency of an advocacy campaign by making their voices and interests heard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Puzzle and Research Questions.....	1
Possible Explanations.....	4
Argument.....	6
What is a Drone?.....	7
Significance in International Security.....	9
Which Laws Apply to Drone Strikes?	11
Conflating Targeted Killing with Drones.....	13
Emergence of an International Activist Response.....	15
Key Concepts: Anti-Drone Activism.....	16
Coherent Networked Advocacy.....	17
Inverse Vetting.....	19
Frames and Frame Typology.....	20
Methods and Analysis.....	25
Dissertation Layout.....	33
2. “INVERSE VETTING”	36

Introduction.....	36
Institutional Politics of Transnational Advocacy.....	37
Power and Positionality in Transnational Networks	41
Transnational Advocacy Processes.....	46
Theorizing Armed Drones.....	52
Conclusion: Theorizing Power and Inverse Vetting.....	56
3. “A VERY WIDE CHURCH”	61
Introduction.....	61
Transnational Civil Society Mobilizing Around Drones.....	66
Competing Transnational Frames.....	68
Complicating Cooperation.....	75
The Case of EFAD.....	77
Discussion and Conclusion.....	80
4. “AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE”	83
Introduction.....	83
The Domestic Network Actors.....	87
US Civil Society Mobilizing Against Drones.....	90
Ethical Framing of “Ban Drones”.....	93
Secular Ethical “Ban Drones” Frame”.....	94
Faith-Based Ethical “Ban Drones” Frame.....	102
Ethical Frames Facilitating and Complicating Partnerships.....	107
Discussion and Conclusion.....	115
5. “VETTING THE BOOMERANG”	118
Introduction.....	118
Theorizing Relationships Between Activists in the Global North and South.....	122
Case Selection Logic.....	124

U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan	124
Pakistan’s Ambiguous Stance on U.S. Drones	127
Pakistani Civil Society Mobilizing Against Drones.....	128
Skepticism Towards INGOs and Transnational Civil Society.....	132
Drones as Only Part of a Bigger Problem.....	138
Making Connections.....	143
Discussion and Conclusion.....	149
6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	152
Introduction.....	152
Inverse Vetting and Power in Transnational Advocacy Networks.....	154
Vetting Dynamics Between the Global North & South.....	154
Vetting Dynamics within the Global North.....	155
Implications of Inverse Vetting for Advocacy Networks.....	157
Looking Forward.....	161
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	165

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1: Frame Typology.....	23
3.1 Overall Frame Typology with Relevant Meta-Frames Highlighted.....	69

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1: Conceptual Overview of Issue Network and Levels (Author, 2021).....	30
1.2 Illustrative Diagram of Drone Advocacy Issue Network (Author, 2021).....	31
2.1 The Inverse Boomerang (Pallas, 2017).....	58
2.2 The Inverse Boomerang (Pallas, 2017) with Author’s Conceptual Addition.....	58
3.1 Example of “Lawful Usage” Frame in Amnesty International Report, 2014.....	70
3.2 Example of “Lawful Usage” Frame from TBIJ’s Website	70
3.3 Example of “Ban Drones” Frame from Drone Wars UK Website, 2020.....	71
3.4 Example of “Ban Drones” Frame on War on Want’s Website	72
4.1 Example of Ethical Argument in Anti-War Frame from Knowdrones.com.....	94
4.2 Example of Ethical Argument in Anti-War Frame from CodePink.....	95
4.3: 2017 Anti-Drone Television Ad Targeting Drone Base Communities I.....	96
4.4: 2017 Anti-Drone Television Ad Targeting Drone Operators II.....	97
4.5: Scaled 8-Foot-Long Drone Model Created by Interviewee.....	98
4.6 Street Art in New York City I, NY by Essam Adam Attia.....	99
4.7: Street Art in New York City II, NY by Essam Adam Attia.....	100
4.8: Anti-Drone Art by Essam Adam Attia.....	101
4.9: The Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare’s Traveling “Peace Quilt”.....	105
4.10: Banner from Amnesty International’s 2013 “Game of Drones” Tour.....	113
5.1: “Lawful Usage” Frame on FFR’s Drone Portal.....	145
5.2: FFR’s Anti-Drone Campaign Partner Page.....	147

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

The Transnational Armed Drone Issue

Puzzle and Research Questions

“I am feeling a lot of frustration with the drone folk,” Max¹ sighed, shaking their head. Max works as a media communications expert at an organization focused on helping nonprofits amplify their various mission goals in the mainstream media. They coordinate communication between advocacy organizations working on armed drones, like Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), and others. While they are generally surprised at the large amount of effort it takes to coordinate joint events with these groups on drones, they reported that their largest frustration yet was with the silence from these activists regarding the January 2020 Baghdad strike that killed the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani.

While the US government defended the strike as a legitimate “targeted killing” within its broader “war against terrorists,”² the Gen. Soleimani killing represents a dramatic evolution in US drone policy. As the head of the Revolutionary Guard’s Quds Force, Gen. Soleimani was Iran’s most powerful intelligence and security officer.³ The January strike was the first killing by drone of an official whose government the US is not at war with. Given Gen. Soleimani’s prominence, the strike ratcheted up tensions to

¹ Name changed as per participant request and gender-neutral pronouns to conceal identity: “they/them/their’s”

² Gearan and Itkowitz, 2020

³ The US and Israel both officially designated Gen. Soleimani a “terrorist”

a fever-pitch between the US and Iran. Experts were quick to point out the possible legal violations of this strike.⁴ Notably, the strike apparently occurred without the consent of the Iraqi government,⁵ and without the consent of US Congress.⁶ Some contend, at the very least, that the collateral deaths of nine other individuals caused by the strike were almost certainly illegal. But, despite the action's dubious legality, international anti-drone activists did not release a timely joint statement acknowledging the strike.⁷

The absence of a public response from the anti-drone activists is not the result of a lack of effort on the part of specific actors within that community. For example, Max attempted to coordinate a simple and decisive joint statement on the Soleimani killing the moment after they heard about the strike. However, according to them, back-and-forth quibbling between key actors over framing resulted in a failure to produce such a statement for more than a month after the strike. This is despite the shared and expressed goal of activist community to make coordinated public comments on drone-related current events.

The disagreements reportedly centered around language. Some organizations wanted to take as strong of a stance as possible and call the January 2020 strike “illegal” and use it as a way to demonstrate the insidiousness of drone warfare. However, HRW and AI were approaching the situation with an abundance of caution and were both hesitant to label the strike as “illegal.” In light of this resistance from the two human rights gatekeepers, other actors suggested that rather than producing a novel joint statement, the anti-drone community should compile and re-release its past statements on drones. However, HRW and AI were, at the time of writing, unwilling to accept this compromise.

⁴ Carpenter, 2020

⁵ Johnson, 2020

⁶ Zraick, 2020

⁷ Yeung, 2020

The Soleimani strike seems to be just the type of lightning-rod external event that can activate and reinvigorate transnational human security campaigns. This vignette offers a particularly powerful and contemporary example of the transnational anti-drone activists' inability to come together in a key moment. This is not an isolated incident, nor a recent trend, within this specific advocacy community. On the contrary, this story exemplifies the centrality of internal discord over framing decisions in transnational actors' attempts to organize joint advocacy activities, after they have already deemed the issue as a legitimate topic for advocacy.

Disagreements and internal squabbles are common and normal for activists attempting to work together in nascent human security campaigns.⁸ However, activists working on issues that enjoy a robust and sustained civil society interest – such as landmines and killer robots – typically overcome these arguments through compromise or elite consolidation around a “vanilla” umbrella frame.⁹ Alternatively, if no compromise around framing can be found or if powerful advocacy organizations do not want to work on the subject, the issue may fade away and/or die.¹⁰ In addition to these factors, international relations literature shows that issues regarding bodily harm to vulnerable populations are particularly salient for garnering civil society's attention, and that advocacy topics that easily graft onto preexisting transnational issues are more likely to form robust campaigns through processes of conceptual interlinkage, norm cascades and band-wagoning.¹¹ The anti-drone advocacy issue is theoretically interesting from these standpoints, as activists have not found an overarching frame compromise, yet they have persisted in focusing on the issue topic of armed drones for well over a decade.

⁸ Bahçecik 2019; Carpenter 2007

⁹ Mekata 2000; Stroup and Wong, 2017; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Breen 2019

¹⁰ Carpenter, 2014

¹¹ Winston 2018; Lake and Wong 2009; Haddad 2013; Florini 1996

In light of this, my project asks two interrelated questions: 1) Why have international anti-drone activists not been able to overcome disagreements over framings? and more broadly, 2) How do actors with differing levels of geopolitical power navigate a transnational human security network?

Possible Explanations

There are a couple alternative explanations for the lack of an overarching campaign message, one external and one internal. First, explanations for this lack of cohesive transnational advocacy might point beyond the tactics and strategies of the activists themselves and to a hostile political opportunity structure regarding the regulation of armed drone issue. Political opportunity structures are the objective, external institutional environment in which contentious politics takes place – they define “the nature of resources and constraints external to the challenging group.”¹² States are generally theorized as being largely unresponsive to civil society attempts to reign in their power on issues central to national security.¹³ However, the presence of challenging political opportunity structures does not fully explain the case of fragmented drone advocacy from both empirical and theoretical levels.

On an empirical level, there is actually a *widening* of state interest in addressing or at least engaging with specific aspects regarding the regulation of drones: proliferation and assassination. While states may have been reticent to address the use of drones when there was only one primary state user (the United States) and a small pool of potential targets (al-Qaeda and its affiliates), the increasingly bold and sophisticated instances of nonstate usage – such as the 2019 attack on a Saudi oil field¹⁴ and the attempted

¹² Meyer, 2009: 19; Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1998

¹³ Baldwin 1993; Waltz 2001

¹⁴ This attack was claimed by Houthi rebels, but a majority of international actors like the US, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia blame Iran (Hubbard, Karsz and Reed, 2019)

assassination on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro¹⁵ by drone in 2018 – firmly situates export and proliferation control as a national security issue.¹⁶ Additionally, as the January 2020 US drone strike on Iranian General Qasem Soleimani shows, prohibition norms surrounding the lethal targeting of state officials may be crumbling.¹⁷ On a theoretical level, substantial transnational mobilization against an expanded state practice can still occur even in the presence of long odds.¹⁸ Indeed, transnational activists have launched successful campaigns aimed at banning weapons states once considered important to their military arsenal, such as anti-personnel landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear weapons.¹⁹

Second, turning inward to the anti-drone activist community, another potential explanation for a lack of cohesive messaging against armed drones is disinterest from elite transnational civil society organizations in anti-drone campaigning.²⁰ Theory suggests that powerful international organizations like Human Rights watch act as “gatekeepers” that can legitimate or ignore various human security issues.²¹ The effect of a gatekeeper’s lack of interest in an issue is that the issue does not become a transnational campaign.²² For example, when local activists who wanted to ban male circumcision were turned down as partners by large international organizations, their proposed issue was kept off the transnational advocacy “agenda” and they were unable to spark a global campaign to end the practice.²³ However, unlike in many of these cases where elite civil

¹⁵ It is still unclear who conducted this attack; a wide array of claims have been leveled, from anti-government forces to the potential of a false flag operation to solidify regime power (Franke, 2018)

¹⁶ Milan and Bassiri Tabrizi 2020; Chávez and Swed 2021; Senn and Troy, 2017: 210; Horowitz, Kreps, and Fuhrmann, 2016

¹⁷ Thomas 2001, 2005; Carpenter, 2020; Banka and Quinn 2018

¹⁸ Bayat, 2013; Goodwin and Jasper, 1999

¹⁹ Garcia, 2015; Rosert 2019

²⁰ Park, Murdie, and Davis 2019

²¹ Bob, 2009

²² Carpenter, 2014

²³ Ibid

society actors need to be convinced that a particular issue is worth their time, gatekeeper organizations were some of the earliest “adopters” of the armed drone issue. For example, AI, HRW and CIVIC all launched highly publicized reports on the US use of armed drones for targeted killing as early as 2010.²⁴

Argument

The above factors – an opening political opportunity structure and the pre-existing engagement of gatekeeper organizations – suggest that the anti-drone advocacy issue should be ripe for a robust transnational advocacy campaign in favor of regulating or banning armed drones.²⁵ However, anti-drone activists have not been able to overcome their fundamental differences in how they frame the “problem of drones.” Indeed, the complexity of the armed drone issue lends itself to a variety of human security frames and advocacy groups hold differing ideas of the “true” problem.

This dissertation explores the case of a transnational advocacy coalition that – despite efforts to do so – was unable to coalesce around a central message: the anti-drone issue network. I analyze internal networking processes in order to understand why the anti-drone community did not coalesce around a specific framing, despite the drone issue’s seeming conduciveness to transnational campaigning. Drawing on an original text and picture dataset of 300 anti-drone advocacy documents, 38 in-depth interviews with key informants, and multi-sited fieldwork, I argue that distinct exertions of power by specific, geologically disparate actors affected the overall issue network’s ability to cohere around a unifying frame. Specifically, partnering decisions at every level of the network were impacted by an original concept that I call “inverse vetting.” Inverse vetting builds on the theoretical concept of “elite vetting,” which shows that the most powerful actors

²⁴ Kenneth Roth 2010; “The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions,” 2012; “Will I Be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan,” 2013

²⁵ Park, Murdie, and Davis 2019; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow, 2005; Meyer 2003; Bob, 2009; Carpenter, 2014

in an advocacy network oftentimes determine which human security issues emerge as campaigns.²⁶ Alternatively, I argue that inverse vetting is a process through which less materially and geographically powerful network actors legitimize the advocacy framings of more powerful groups by partnering with them or not. As I will develop throughout this dissertation, inverse vetting is a relational process between actors with varying levels of geopolitical power that can influence the coherence of a human security campaign. In this case for example, the most disenfranchised actors - anti-drone grassroots activists in Pakistan - exercised power in global politics, as their actions inadvertently impacted how the armed drone issue is campaigned around in transnational space. Thus, the anti-drone issue network's inability to cohere can at least partially be explained by the presence of both elite and inverse vetting processes. This dissertation contributes to and expands the theorizing on transnational advocacy processes focuses on traditionally less-powerful actors.²⁷

What is a Drone?

A military drone, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), is a remotely piloted aircraft. This means that unlike traditional aerial bombers, there is no human inside the cockpit. Instead, drone pilots operate the vehicles hundreds, oftentimes thousands, of miles away.²⁸ Drones also differ from fully autonomous weapons, since there is still a human pilot operating the aircraft and strikes are based on human decision-making processes.²⁹ Military drones come in multiple models, such as General Atomics' MQ-9 Reaper and MQ-1 Predator. They are also dual use – with models specializing in strike

²⁶ Carpenter, 2014

²⁷ Arensman, van Wessel, and Hilhorst, 2017; Bownas, 2017; Capie, 2012; de Almagro, 2018; Hauf, 2017; Hertel, 2006; Irvine, 2013; Pallas, 2017; Pallas and Nguyen, 2018; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2013; Schramm and Sändig, 2018; Temper, 2019; Wajner, 2017

²⁸ For a fascinating and critical take on the history of bombing and its connection to imperialism, see Lindqvist, 2001

²⁹ Umbrello, 2019

capabilities, surveillance capabilities, or both.³⁰ Drones can be used in support of troops on the ground but also in independent targeted strike operations. Another key defining characteristic of drones are which operational chains of command they fall under— the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency are both capable of running reconnaissance and lethal international drone operations.³¹

As drone technologies are rapidly proliferating in civilian life, there can be confusion amongst non-experts on what the issue actually *is*.³² Drone technology is currently being used in multiple dimensions of everyday life – from the use of small drones for photography and videography purposes to their role in Amazon deliveries.³³ There is a massive research and development drive focused entirely on evolving drones from their original use in the military to a significant role in commerce and civil government applications, such as in farming.³⁴ Goldman Sachs anticipates that this domestic civilian “market opportunity” is the “fastest growing” sector – around \$30 billion; while still estimating the military R&D potential at \$70 billion.³⁵ The domestic use of nonmilitary drones are certainly without controversies of their own – especially when it comes to issues of policing and surveillance.³⁶ For example, in Summer 2020, domestic drones stoked controversy for their use by police to monitor peaceful demonstrations

³⁰ Drones are increasingly being used for commercial and civilian purposes, such as in agriculture, photography and package delivery (Schulzke, 2019). They are also increasingly being used in domestic police forces for purposes such as border monitoring (Csernaton, 2018). This dissertation is only concerned with their military use outside of the user state’s borders in pursuit of national security objectives.

³¹ However, this trend may be changing more in favor of the Pentagon as it draws back support for the CIA operations (Barnes and Schmitt 2020)

³² Suhrke, 2019

³³ “Drones: Reporting for Work,” n.d.

³⁴ Schulzke, 2019; “Drones: Reporting for Work,” n.d.

³⁵ Goldman Sachs, n.d.

³⁶ Davis 2019; Heen, Lieberman, and Miethe 2018

associated with the Black Lives Matter movement.³⁷ Again, however, this is beyond the purview of this dissertation which is only concerned with military usage of drones.

Significance in International Security

Military drone technology is rapidly proliferating – both state and nonstate actors are solidifying patterns of use that are in turn affecting how contemporary wars are fought.³⁸ As of 2020, 120 countries have acquired some model of military drone and 11 have used armed drones in combat.³⁹ As the technological first-mover, since 2001 the US has launched over 4,700 confirmed strikes in seven different countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya.⁴⁰ The Obama Administration massively expanded the targeted killing program started by the Bush Administration,⁴¹ with an increase in drone development, strike numbers, deaths, geographical scope, and institutionalization.⁴² Bolstered by the previous Administration's bureaucratizing of the legal and policy framework, these upward trends continued under the Trump Administration.⁴³ Within its first in office, the quantity of strikes doubled in Somalia, tripled in Yemen, while also increasing in Pakistan.⁴⁴ Since 2001, these strikes have resulted in between 7,275 - 10,586 total deaths, according to differing nongovernmental accounts,⁴⁵ with 737-1,551 of these estimated as civilian deaths.⁴⁶

³⁷ Biddle, 2021

³⁸ Senn and Troy, 2017; Horowitz, Kreps, and Fuhrmann, 2016; Kreps and Zenko, 2014

³⁹ PAX, 2020

⁴⁰ Savage, 2015; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2018

⁴¹ McCriken 2011; The first recorded U.S. drone strike occurred on November 2001 in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing an estimated seven people. The Bush Administration oversaw 50 total drone strikes, all concentrated towards the end of his last term, all inside Afghanistan.

⁴² Jameel, 2016: 6; Within Obama's first two terms in office, the number of drone strikes increased six times over, and deaths quadrupled.

⁴³ But also see Yousaf 2020

⁴⁴ Purkiss, Serle and Fielding-Smith, 2017

⁴⁵ Ibid. These numbers do not include the number of drone strikes in the ongoing air war in Syria and Iraq, or Israeli drone activity in Gaza.

⁴⁶ Civilian casualty counting in regard to drone strikes has been contested, with the U.S. government citing only 116 total civilian deaths. The discrepancy between the

While the US continues to remain the primary user of armed drones in the international sphere, the drone issue is an inherently transnational one.⁴⁷ The US drone program relies on a well-developed international security architecture for proper functioning.⁴⁸ For example, the Ramstein airbase in Germany houses the satellite relay station that grants drone operators in the US the ability to communicate with UAVs striking in the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan.⁴⁹ Niger Air Base 201 in Agadez further demonstrates the complex and deeply transnational nature of US drone operations. While this base is owned by the Nigerien military, it was built, paid for and is operated by the US as a launching point for armed UAV operations in the Sahel.⁵⁰

In addition to functioning as enabling partners for US operations, EU states and the UK also have their own policies on the development and use of armed drones.⁵¹ For example, the UK has its own small fleet of Reaper drones, with plans to acquire the new “SkyGuardian” version of the former Predator drone.⁵² The British military and intelligence services have also pursued targeted killing operations independent from the US command and control. Meanwhile, the EU is currently laying the groundwork to develop the first multinational armed drone as part of the new European Defense Fund (EDF) – the first model being Airbus’s “Eurodrone.” Germany, France, Italy and Spain collaborated on its development, and the “Eurodrone” will be strike-capable when it reaches flying stage sometime in 2020.⁵³ On this topic, Airbus’s CEO stated that the distribution of strike-capable models will depend on the “political sensitivities” within

government’s numbers and independent reports likely arises from a difference in definition of combatant and civilian (Kreps and Kaag, 2014)

⁴⁷ Welch, 2021

⁴⁸ Cannon, 2020

⁴⁹ Scahil, 2015

⁵⁰ Rempfer, 2020

⁵¹ Mair, Minor, and Holder 2017

⁵² “An Overview of Britain’s Drones and Drone Development Projects,” 2021

⁵³ *ibid*

each EU user nation.⁵⁴ These varying levels of partner-state complicity in US operations, along with the development of independent drone programs by different users, complicates the work of transnational activists. The diffused nature of drone warfare creates a problem of scale regarding decisions by activists on which governments to target.

Understanding the parameters and idiosyncrasies of the “drone debates” in the wider international sphere is a necessary first step before analyzing the more specific case of contestation within drone-related transnational advocacy. This is because the conceptual ambiguities that arise from these broader debates contribute to the frame disputes amongst activists. These effects are most notable in discussions around the relationship between the drone *technology* and the *policy* of targeted killing.⁵⁵ Below I will detail a few aspects of the debates - and the foreign policy shifts which gave rise to them - that are relevant to my dissertation’s subject.

Which Laws Apply to Drone Strikes?

Since the US has been the overwhelming sole-user of armed drones for the majority of the past two decades, its patterns of use solidified precedents and set the terms of the drone debates. US drone operations fall in line with the US’s overall approach to its “war against terrorists:” that the country is engaged in an ongoing and shifting global conflict.⁵⁶ This foreign policy approach began after 9/11 when the Bush Administration took the position that the US should treat terrorism as an act of war rather than one of crime, and that they should not restrict combat operations to a single battleground.⁵⁷ Under this “war paradigm,” the Bush Administration legalized its war in Iraq and its use of renditions and “enhanced interrogations,” and the Obama

⁵⁴ Sprenger, 2018

⁵⁵ Cortright, Fairhurst, and Wall 2015

⁵⁶ Brunstetter and Jimenez-Bacardi 2015; Fisk and Ramos 2016

⁵⁷ Savage, 2015

Administration institutionalized the use of drones for targeted killing both within and beyond active warzones.⁵⁸

All post-9/11 US Administrations have taken the unwavering legal position that counterterrorism operations abroad fall under the jurisdiction of the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) rather than International Human Rights Law (IHRL).⁵⁹ This position is contested within international society, by both state and nonstate actors, given the fact that the LOAC are much more permissive than IHRL in terms of civilian casualties and lethal targeting in general.⁶⁰ This has been especially true in the case of US drone usage, since lethal strikes have occurred in areas that do not meet the threshold for a state of armed conflict, such as in Northern Pakistan.⁶¹ As long as its drone strikes adhere to the LOAC principles of distinction, proportionality, and military necessity, the US's legal position is that targeted killing via drone is legal.⁶²

This war paradigm for drone strikes did not go uncontested; many international human rights advocates, attorneys, international law experts, nongovernmental organizations and state governments disagree with the US's legal position.⁶³ For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) states that *both* IHL and IHRL are applicable during armed conflict, and that as the "law of peacetime," IHRL should manage conduct outside recognized battlefields.⁶⁴ Many other international actors argue

⁵⁸ A key way that the Obama Administration legalized its drone program was by extending the notion of self-defense and imminent threat; Hurd, 2017; Trenta, 2017; this type of weaponization of law is referred to as lawfare Dill 2017

⁵⁹ Savage 2015; Fisk and Ramos 2016; Hurd 2017; Post-9/11 US Administrations also maintain that areas outside active battlefields (such as Northern Pakistan) fall into the category of Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIAC), a type of conflict that has vague rules governing the use of force.

⁶⁰ Dill 2019; Casey-Maslen 2012

⁶¹ Jaffer, 2016

⁶² Otto, 2012

⁶³ Brunstetter and Jimenez-Bacardi 2015

⁶⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010

that IHRL demands a “policing paradigm” for counterterrorism and drone strikes.⁶⁵ This means that targeting killing would only be legal if the suspect was posing an immediate threat to others’ lives.⁶⁶

Conflating Targeted Killing with Drones

These legal debates, and the confusion that can sometimes arise from them within the public sphere, creates conceptual murkiness. This imprecision is the most consequential when it conflates targeted killing – a policy – with drones – a weapons technology.

Targeted killing is a leadership decapitation and deprivation tactic that have been a central action in post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy.⁶⁷ The US military has used targeted killing extensively in its global counterterrorism operations to deprive groups like al-Qaeda and Daesh of their leadership with the ultimate goal of scattering the organizations.⁶⁸ Proponents of targeted killing claim that these strikes have sent terrorist groups into a hard-to-reverse decline.⁶⁹ While armed drones have been the primary weapon platform from which these US counterterrorism strikes have occurred, targeted killing can be undertaken with a number of weapons.⁷⁰ Indeed, the most publicized example of a targeted killing by the US military was the SEAL Team raid that killed Usama bin Laden.

Drones, on the other hand, are an unmanned aerial weapons platform capable of launching air-to-ground laser- or radar-guided missiles, the most common of those being Hellfire missiles. While there are a variety of drone models from different manufacturers, the key factor that separates drones from traditional military aircraft is the fact that they

⁶⁵ Otto, 2012; Kreps 2016

⁶⁶ Roth, 2010

⁶⁷ Walsh, 2018

⁶⁸ Ward, 2005

⁶⁹ Byman, 2013

⁷⁰ Haas and Fischer, 2017

are remotely piloted and can hover over targets waiting for an opportunity to strike.⁷¹ Armed drones are *not* autonomous weapons, since they require a human in the loop that constantly controls the aircraft and makes the strike decisions. Fully autonomous weapons – labeled “killer robots” by some international activists⁷² – are currently in the research and development stage and completely remove human control from direct targeting decisions.⁷³ Importantly for the topic of this dissertation, the international drone campaigners and the international “killer robot” campaigners are distinct advocacy issue networks.⁷⁴ According to the activists I spoke with, this is because many human security activists are frustrated at the complexity of the armed drone issue and activists’ inability to settle on a coherent message. They report that activists can much more easily frame “killer robots” in a black-and-white way: that they are inherently “bad,” while drones fall into a shade of gray.

These differences are more than semantics. Focusing myopically on the technology of the drone is precisely the legal tactic that the US government has unwaveringly adopted since 2001.⁷⁵ This is because, as stated earlier, the US military argues that as long as the strikes are undertaken in a manner consistent with the principles of war law – distinction, proportionality and necessity – their use of armed drones are legal (again, because the entire globe is a “battle zone” under the war paradigm).⁷⁶ The drone is revered as one of the most precise weapons technologies in the US’s arsenal in terms of targeting combatants and limiting civilian casualties,⁷⁷ and the US

⁷¹ For a fascinating take on what this hovering capability means in terms of weaponizing media, see Franz, 2017

⁷² Goose and Wareham, 2016

⁷³ However, there are reports that the US have already used fully autonomous weapons for a lethal operation in Libya in 2020 (Vincent, 2021)

⁷⁴ Goose and Wareham, 2016

⁷⁵ Nylén, 2019; Hurd, 2017; Otto, 2012

⁷⁶ Brunstetter and Jimenez-Bacardi, 2015

⁷⁷ Of course, the distinction between “civilian” and “combatant” is a politically loaded construct in the first place that is not stable nor uncontested (Kinsella 2011)

military's logic follows that drones are uniquely capable of compliance with war law, especially when compared to bombers of the past.⁷⁸ Some public intellectuals and academics even echo this narrative of drones as uniquely humane weapons.⁷⁹ This is in spite of the fact that the US government has kept casualty numbers caused by drones largely secret and opaque as a matter of policy.⁸⁰

Conversely, many activists and scholars urge a widened view- one that acknowledges the potential precision-strike capability of drones as a technology; but also interrogates the US's *jus ad bellum* reasoning – or the legal claim that anywhere al-Qaeda and its affiliates hide is part of their wider war on terror – on their policy of preemptive drone strikes outside active battlefields.⁸¹ Critics argue that conflating the technology with the policy obfuscates legal questions about when and where the US can undertake lethal targeting.⁸² These debates and the ensuing conceptual murkiness surrounding drones and “what matters” about them also impacts how activists advocate on the issue of armed drones— particularly in framing decisions and intra-network disagreements.

Emergence of an International Activist Response

While the Bush Administration used armed drones for lethal targeting missions inside the active battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, the international activist community began concentrating on armed drones as a significant human security issue largely under the Obama Administration. The years 2008-2106 saw a massive uptick in lethal targeting operations via armed drones within Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia - these attacks outside active battlefields drew the most early activist responses.⁸³ In 2010, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) became one of the first organizations to dedicate

⁷⁸ Kaag and Kreps, 2014; Evangelista, Shue, and Biddle 2014

⁷⁹ Byman, 2013; Lewis, 2013

⁸⁰ Arkin 2015; Fisk and Ramos 2016;

⁸¹ Casey-Maslen, 2012

⁸² Banka and Quinn, 2018

⁸³ “Drone Strikes,” n.d.

significant resources towards elevating armed drones as an important security issue through their ongoing casualty recording project.⁸⁴ In 2012, both human rights and humanitarian disarmament groups like CIVIC, AI and HRW issued in-depth reports on the dubious legality of drone strikes outside Afghanistan and Iraq, drawing attention to the civilian cost of such strikes.⁸⁵ As will be further explored in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, smaller organizations based all over the world also adopted armed drones onto their agendas during this decade. The key hubs of anti-drone advocacy were based in the US, the UK, the EU and Pakistan.

In addition to these individual organizations' responses, anti-drone advocates also began to collaborate with one another under the Obama years. For example, the US-based Interfaith Network on Armed Drones formed in 2014, while the EU-based European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) formed in the same year. In the most highly published example of partnerships between organizations based in the Global North and South, CodePink partnered with the Pakistani organization Foundation for Fundamental Rights in its protest march from Islamabad to Waziristan.⁸⁶ At this same time, Open Society Foundation (OSF) became the major funder of anti-drone advocacy internationally, a massive project that only just tapered off in early 2021.⁸⁷ With these activities and funding patterns in mind, the bulk of transnational anti-drone work was carried out between 2010-2021, with most activists describing issue interest as waning in the past several years.

Key Concepts: Anti-Drone Activism

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ "The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions," 2012; "Will I Be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan," 2013; "Killing Outside the Bounds of Law?," 2013

⁸⁶ Boone 2012

⁸⁷ OSF's funding of anti-drone work was so broad that activists reported that they felt no competition with other organizations for funding to work on armed drones

This dissertation focuses only on activists who are opposed, either in part or in whole, to current state use of armed military drones. While there are robust pro-drone (mostly corporate) lobbying activities,⁸⁸ these actors are beyond the purview of this dissertation. It is important to make a note of my terminology and definition here, so that it is useful in regard to the diversity of actors in this network. “Anti-drone” refers to a group or individual’s broad opposition to how armed drones are currently being used by state actors, not necessarily that they desire a wholesale weapons ban against the technology. For example, Human Rights Watch is only concerned with whether or not armed drones are being used legally or illegally in combat; they do not oppose the weapon. This is different from a small peace-oriented organization like Drone Wars UK that opposes the armed drone entirely, and advocates for the technology to be banned.

Coherent Networked Advocacy

Overall frame coherence is the dependent variable in this project, and this terminology needs further elaboration. In order for a transnational advocacy network to be effective, they must be able to strategically communicate a coherent message about their goals on a particular issue to policymakers and stakeholders.⁸⁹ This involves overcoming the problem of a “frame soup,” in which multiple actors in the network have competing, contradictory or just different preferences on how to define the human security issue at hand.⁹⁰ Indeed, fragmented and unfocused advocacy is not only ineffective, but it may also deter interest from policymakers due to “attention fatigue.”⁹¹ If activists can overcome this jumble, a coherent advocacy message comes in the form of an umbrella frame – the unifying call to action or “demand” on powerholders that can

⁸⁸ Calvo Rufanges 2021; see Hanegraaff 2015 for a discussion on how corporate lobbying has infiltrated transnational policymaking spaces as competitors to NGOs, and how this may make international organizations (IOs) vulnerable to capture by private interests

⁸⁹ Cullerton et al. 2018; Sell and Prakash 2004; Burgerman 1998

⁹⁰ Carpenter, 2014;

⁹¹ Cullerton et al. 2018

push disparate aspirations into a consolidated campaign. In this way, strategic participatory communication in social movements is “at the heart of social change” in transnational politics.⁹²

Assuming other conditions are ripe in transnational politics, it is from this consolidated human security campaign that activists might achieve some level of policy “success” by altering the state behavior they label as “undesirable.”⁹³ Here, we can think of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) as the prototypical example of a “successful” and coherent human security campaign, as the ICBL campaign had a cogent driving frame and achieved its self-described goals of banning anti-personnel landmines through a treaty.⁹⁴ The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is another example of a human security campaign that consolidated on a simple umbrella frame (outlaw nuclear weapons) and ultimately achieved its specific goal of creating a new international treaty.⁹⁵ The more contemporary Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, which seeks to outlaw autonomous weapons, is an illustrative example of a campaign that faced significant internal arguments between activists over framing initially, but eventually cohered into a targeted campaign and is still ongoing.⁹⁶ Of course, the attainment of these advocacy goals does not ensure efficacy – the mere existence of international treaties does not mean compliance.⁹⁷

My project is not meant to be a diagnostic of the “success” or “failure” of the anti-drone campaign, nor is it meant to account for all of the factors necessary for “human security campaign emergence.” Instead, as the first academic project on the anti-

⁹² Waisbord 2014

⁹³ Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink, 2005; Davis, Murdie and Steinmetz, 2012

⁹⁴ Price, 1998; Garcia, 2015; Haddad, 2013

⁹⁵ Bolton and Minor, 2016

⁹⁶ Bolton and Mitchell 2019; Carpenter, 2016

⁹⁷ Búzás 2018; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007

drone advocacy network, this project explores the various frames that constitute the UAV “frame soup.” I study the relational processes between actors with drastically varying levels of geopolitical power that went into trying to create an umbrella frame for a transnational anti-drones campaign. I found that a key relational process – inverse vetting – played a significant role in explaining why the anti-drones network was ultimately unable to cohere around a unifying frame.

Inverse Vetting

I argue that vetting, which are inherently relational processes, can influence the overall coherence of a transnational advocacy campaign’s framing. While elite vetting in advocacy networks has been studied extensively, I show that both elite and inverse vetting processes were at play in the anti-drone advocacy network. This new coalition-building dynamic builds on traditional and contemporary literature transnational advocacy processes. The conventional boomerang model of transnational advocacy shows us that local groups will link up with better endowed international organizations when they face challenges.⁹⁸ This can potentially allow less well-resourced activists to circumvent blockages, as these more powerful partners are thought of as bringing tangible resources to bear, such as political access, financial resources and technical expertise. In the words of Keck and Sikkink (2018): “For the less powerful Third World actors, networks provide access, leverage and information (and often money) they could not expect to have on their own.” Other studies inverse the traditional boomerang model, as well as introduce other “types” of boomerangs that will be discussed in the next chapter in more detail.⁹⁹ The inverse boomerang model specifically suggest that sometimes *international* organizations are the ones to first initiate contact with smaller

⁹⁸ Keck and Sikkink, 1998, 2018

⁹⁹ Almagro 2018; Temper 2019; Bloodgood and Clough 2017; Irvine, 2012

groups when facing lobbying blockages.¹⁰⁰ This is because diverse stakeholder participation is thought of as boosting campaign legitimacy, and as we know from existing work, legitimacy is the key currency of international NGOs.¹⁰¹

While the boomerang models are about directionality, agenda setting helps us better understand which issues get adopted by transnational civil society. International gatekeeper organizations are thought of as carefully “vetting” the advocacy topics they undertake, legitimizing only a few human security issues by adding them to their agenda.¹⁰² I combine the above-described inverse boomerang model with a new vetting model, how actors with differing levels of power navigate an issue network. I argue that less powerful groups “vet” partnerships and issue framings in much the same way as gatekeeper organizations. Inverse vetting reverses the traditional advocacy vetting model, meaning that the less powerful grassroots actor chooses whether to legitimize certain advocacy framings by transnational groups, rather than only the other way around. When this inverse vetting process leads to a rejected partnership this pathway towards a unifying frame for a given global campaign becomes more muddled and fragmented. The implication of the inverse vetting process is that it may show a mechanism through which activists based in the Global South, or less resource-rich groups more broadly, impact transnational advocacy.

Frames and Frame Typology

Groups advocating against drones vary in terms of professional focus, geographical location, and size. This collection of actors includes human rights groups, humanitarian disarmament groups, peace groups, religious groups, and individuals like journalists and academics who self-identify as anti-drone activists.¹⁰³ These communities

¹⁰⁰ Pallas, 2017

¹⁰¹ Arensman, van Wessel, and Hilhorst 2017; Stroup and Wong, 2017

¹⁰² Carpenter, 2014; Bob 2009

¹⁰³ Academics, despite a myth of “scholarly irrelevance” in international policy processes

have varying degrees of communication and project synergy with one another, and are located within geographically dispersed networks in Washington, DC, New York, the UK, the EU and Pakistan. While all of these groups take positions against state use of armed drones, the groups vary significantly in their focus, as well as in their prescriptions.

From the human rights groups' perspectives, the use of drone strikes outside "active" battlefields is illegal and constitutes extrajudicial execution. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, alongside smaller human rights organizations, tend to focus on the *policy* of targeted killing, and when it can legally be used by states.¹⁰⁴ Their advocacy efforts center around writing reports on the consequences of specific strikes. They also engage in litigation on behalf of victims of US strikes and pursue government transparency regarding armed drone policies.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, humanitarian disarmament groups, having a relatively successful track record on banning certain weapons technologies like landmines, have primarily focused their advocacy attention on demonstrating that the drone itself may be inherently harmful. More specifically, these activists are concerned that drones are uniquely destructive weapons technologies because they might lower the threshold for the use of force by making it easier and cheaper; that the precision-strike narrative around drones makes policymakers less likely to ask about civilian casualties;¹⁰⁶ and that the drone's ability to hover wreaks extreme psychological damage to those who live beneath them in targeted territories.¹⁰⁷

(Kittikhoun and Weiss 2011) have meaningfully participated in transnational advocacy campaigns through knowledge production and experteering; see for example Morin 2014 of academics' role in transnational intellectual property rights advocacy, or Bolton and Mitchell 2019 for an analysis of how scientists have influenced the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Roth, 2010

¹⁰⁵ "Killing Outside the Bounds of Law?" 2013

¹⁰⁶ Walsh 2015

¹⁰⁷ Chamayou, 2015; Bashir and Crews 2012; Shaw and Akhter 2012

A third set of actors, direct action and peace groups like Code Pink are more “hands on” in their approaches to political mobilization. For example, as part of their “Ground the Drones” campaign, Code Pink activists have travelled to Pakistan in order to join local activists in a solidarity march from Peshawar into what was then called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA; now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or KP), and they also host an annual trip to Creech Air Force in Nevada to “shut down” its normal operations through embodied protest.¹⁰⁸ Religious groups in the US have formed a robust domestic interfaith network, which focuses on the critiquing the ethics of drone strikes and how they relate to human dignity. Religious groups employ direct action tactics like weekly sit-ins at drone bases, while also focusing on community socialization through sermons.¹⁰⁹

A fourth group of activists in Pakistan vary in their substantive focuses, with some adopting a human rights litigation approach, some working on data gathering, and others opting for a more indigenous grassroots response. These groups typically work directly with survivors of strikes as part of their advocacy, though the activists vary in their willingness to network with European and American organizations.

In this study, I identify three overarching meta-frames that groups in this transnational network utilize when naming the “problem with drones.” I refer to these overarching concepts as “meta-frames” in order to differentiate them from the various sub-frames that exist under each category within my typology.¹¹⁰ These meta-frames include: the “Lawful Usage” Frame, the “Ban Drones” Frame and the “Neocolonialism” Frame, and they all represent broad ways in which groups present the drone issue in their

¹⁰⁸ Boone, 2012

¹⁰⁹ Linehan, 2019

¹¹⁰ In this dissertation, I use the terminology of “frames” rather than only referring to actor’s understandings of the issue as “problem definitions.” This is because I look at both the external presentation of issue definitions as well as how they define the issue internally.

advocacy. As will be developed throughout this dissertation, there are important nuances under each category and different types of groups tend to favor specific frames within these categories. Figure 2 below contains useful information on each meta-frame, such as a brief description, examples of specific issues, and the proposed solutions of activists who fall into a given category.

Meta-Frames:	Description:	Specific Issues:	Solution:
<u>“Ban Drones” Frame</u>	Innate characteristics of the drone technology is problematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unethical, either from a secular or religious standpoint - lowers threshold of force - dual-use function - hampers situational awareness 	Ban drones
<u>“Lawful Usage” Frame</u>	The technology is <i>not</i> inherently problematic; policy and current state use (i.e. - for targeted killing) are the problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - targeted killing - violation of sovereignty - lack of transparency - lack of accountability 	Regulate drones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Export control - Legal guidelines - Transparency measures
<u>“Neocolonial” Frame</u>	Technology, policy, legacies of historical dispossession and hierarchy in transnational civil society are all parts of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural sovereignty - societal harm - imperialism 	Transformational demands regarding power relations Falls outside a liberal universalist ontology and understanding of world politics

Table 1.1: Frame Typology

The “Ban Drones” Frame focuses on the weapon platform itself, arguing that there is something uniquely insidious about drones- for example, this could be its dual-use function, so its fluidity in moving from a surveillance mission to a kill mission, or

general discomfort over its “panopticon” effect- that someone is always watching. Groups operating from peace traditions, such as those within the US-based Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare or the UK-based Drone Wars, tend to be the most comfortable with adopting this more radical stance. As will be further explored in the chapter focusing on the transnational level, there is a schism within the humanitarian disarmament community. This division is between groups that advocate for a coalition to ban drones, similar to the one this community successfully led on anti-personnel landmines, and those who think such an approach would actually backfire in terms of civilian protection, given that drones are more precise and therefore less destructive than traditional aerial bombers.

The “Lawful Usage” Frame focuses on how states deploy and use drones in combat. In this framing, the drone technology itself is not viewed as a problem per se. In fact, Human Rights Watch’s position on drones is that this technology, when used correctly, can limit civilian casualties.¹¹¹ Within this frame, the primary issues are extralegal behavior, such as extrajudicial execution and violations of sovereignty. Groups that adopt this meta-frame tend to latch onto specific aspects of usage, depending on their organization’s professional orientation. For example, data advocacy groups like the Bureau of Investigative Journalism tend to be more concerned with questions of government transparency and accountability. These activists have focused a large amount of attention on simply gaining access to information on civilian casualties and government drone policies through actions like FOIA requests.¹¹²

The “Neocolonialism” Frame is more complicated than the above categories, because it does not easily mesh with professionalized understandings of transnational

¹¹¹ Phone interview with author, Transnational 3; 17 June 2019

¹¹² “ACLU V. DOJ - FOIA Request Regarding Targeted Killing of Anwar al-Awlaki,” 2011

advocacy and it only appears in the violence-affected level of the network. Here, technology, policy, state control, colonial legacies, and even hierarchy in transnational civil society are all imbricated problems. Activists who adopt this meta-frame are more concerned with a broader tapestry of civilian harm in the drone-affected regions, including civilian casualties by drones but also internally displaced peoples, cultural discrimination, economic justice, and how both historical and modern colonial underpinnings perpetuate these problems. The “problem with drones” for these individuals then mostly surrounds societal harm, cultural sovereignty, and the potential that the Pakistani state is complicit in the US operations.

These three meta-frames represent fundamental differences in goals, venues for advocacy, and desired outcomes – they are the discordant ingredients within the armed drone “frame soup” that activists were unable to unify. These various groups choose these frames for different reasons, and the empirical chapters in this dissertation explore these reasons. What is key is that the frames groups choose to utilize informs how they vet potential partners. The first two meta-frames can be thought of as the “professionalized advocacy frames,” favored by large, mainstream international groups like Human Rights Watch. As the network diagram in the next section will show, the actors that adopted the Neocolonialism meta-frame are disconnected from groups that fall into these professionalized meta-frames.

Methods and Analysis

For this dissertation, I adopt a multi-methods approach to data collection and analysis in order to study how activists communicate and coalition-build across a specific transnational network.¹¹³ I take a deterritorialized approach to data collection, as such an approach is particularly well-suited to examining “how ideas circulate” through

¹¹³ Rowen, 2017: 14-19; Merry, 2006

transnational space, because it considers “temporary sites of action” (such as conferences) alongside more fixed sites of power (such as the UN First Committee or the EU Parliament).¹¹⁴ This dissertation is based on three years of research (2017-2020), during which I conducted three distinct but interrelated methods of data collection: 1) creating an original text and picture dataset of advocacy organization publications, websites, and internal communications on drones; 2) conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants from various hierarchal slices of the issue network; and 3) field site visits to conferences and offices.

As an initial step, I compiled a master list of advocacy organizations working on the armed drone issue through web-based research. This Excel spreadsheet categorizes organizations based on 1) name, 2) self-identified advocacy community, 3) type of drone advocacy tactics, 4) location, 5) policy stance on drones [if any], 6) public partnerships with other drone organizations, and 7) contact information for key informants [when available]. This basic information allowed me to start tracing connections between organizations through salient information such staff overlaps between organizations, jointly signed documents, jointly published projects, jointly attended conferences, and co-hosted drone events.¹¹⁵ In terms of sampling, I identified key actors through jointly signed agreements and through participant lists for anti-drone conferences and activities. I then contacted these organizations and used a snowball sampling method to identify other key actors. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, my interviews with Pakistani activists came from a professional connection who has an extensive network amongst affected actors.

¹¹⁴ Merry, 2006: 14

¹¹⁵ Through extensive internet research, my initial list of organizations was meant to represent the universe of anti-drone advocacy organizations. I then selected interviewees who could act as key informants for their organizations, or themselves if they were individual issue entrepreneurs. This includes 15 interviews from the transnational level, 13 from the grassroots level and 10 from the US domestic level.

This initial research allowed me to begin compiling an original text and picture dataset of drone advocacy documents. The database includes over 300 multimedia artifacts, such as website pages, court filings, research reports from NGOs, local news sources, videos/short documentaries, interactive web material, books published by the organizations, and protest artwork. This data was collected during fieldwork, from email listservs, and through website scraping. With the support of an undergraduate research team, these artifacts are documented in an Excel spreadsheet according to 1) title 2) publishing organization 3) type of artifact, 4) link to resource if available and 5) a brief description.

In order to investigate the relationships between advocacy groups in different slices of the network, I supplement the database with 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants from the drone advocacy issue network. These interviews were gathered through a snowball sampling technique and averaged 30-90 minutes. They were collected between 2017-2020 in New York, NY, Hartford, CT, Washington DC, and Islamabad, Pakistan as well as over Skype and phone. In order to achieve a reasonable level of comparability between participant responses, I posed the same semi-structured interview questions to individuals at three hierarchical levels of the issue networks: transnational, domestic, and violence-affected.

Finally, I gathered data through fieldnotes taken during field visits to sites at the transnational, national and violence-affected levels. My first field site visit occurred in October 2017, at the Annual Humanitarian Disarmament Forum in New York. Along with participating in workshops and breakout groups during the long weekend, this forum granted me insights into the key actors in the elite level of the network. Additionally, I attended a Side Event on drones at the UN Headquarters in New York during the meeting of the First Committee of the General Assembly in 2017. This allowed me to witness key transnational advocacy groups interacting with state

representatives on the issue of armed drones. At the more domestically-focused level, I attended an interfaith conference on armed drones in 2018 at the Hartford Seminary, along with virtually-held anti-drone peace conferences in 2020. On the violence-affected level, I traveled to Islamabad, Pakistan in 2018 to speak with the less traditionally legible drone activists. With the aid of a local informant, I visited various offices in the city, including both legal offices and organizational headquarters (as well as public spaces such as cafes and parks for security reasons) in the city and its surrounding areas.

I qualitatively coded my database, interview transcripts, and fieldnotes in NVivo 12. After conducting a preliminary round of coding, I identified key themes and patterns in my transcripts and documentary data and created the first draft of a codebook. These codes included information on networking dynamics and decision making as well as framing. I use a ground theory approach to analysis. Grounded theory is inductive, as it involves approaching data with a question and allowing theories, concepts and hypotheses to emerge from it.¹¹⁶ Such a qualitative approach to studying a transnational network “allows collecting details on (a) the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole, (b) data on informal ... networks not available through quantitative analysis, and (c) an insider view on the relationship between informal and formal policy networks.”¹¹⁷

This analysis resulted in a preliminary list of broad descriptive codes, such as “targeted killing,” “transparency issues,” and “morally wrong.” I then refined these broad codes in the second draft codebook as I started to note patterns in the text, especially regarding what types of groups favored which frames, and how various frames could be organized into larger buckets, such as “drone technology is the problem” and “policy of TK [targeted killing] is the problem.” The final codebook is organized into five sections:

¹¹⁶ Charmaz, 2006

¹¹⁷ Ahrens 2018

“Advocacy Tactics and Strategies,” “Network and Advocacy Dynamics,” “Political Opportunity Structure,” “Problem with Drones,” and “Solutions.” Each of these sections have both self-contained codes as well as subfolders such as “Challenges with Advocacy” and “Partnering Dynamics.”

In order to systematically assess connections, I keep all data sources on all levels of the transnational network in the same single NVivo project, separated by clearly labeled files. For example, any mention of specific organizations or actors by a specific network actor can be linked back to both that actor’s and organization’s top-level cases—a function in the software that allows me to keep track of who is talking about whom. This enables me to track ties between specific actors within the overall network across both interviews and documentary sources and to run analytical queries within the software across all data sources. Utilizing both the dataset as well as interviews allowed me to triangulate my findings, investigate how the public and private faces of these actors relate to one another, and to reach a level of consistency in responses that signaled to me that I achieved an acceptable level of saturation.

In this dissertation, I organize the overall transnational anti-drone issue network into three slices: activists working at the transnational level, activists working primarily at the domestic level, and activists working closest to a violence affected region- specifically in Pakistan. Groups operating at the transnational level primarily petition international/regional bodies such as the UN and EU; domestic groups focus on petitioning their own governments; and violence-affected groups work at the grassroots level in an affected country. Within these three slices are different types of advocacy organizations, such as human rights groups, humanitarian disarmament groups, data transparency groups, and peace groups. The following chapters are organized along these three network segments, and focus on relationships *between* and *within* these different

hierarchical groups. Figure 1 below gives a conceptual overview of the issue network's levels.

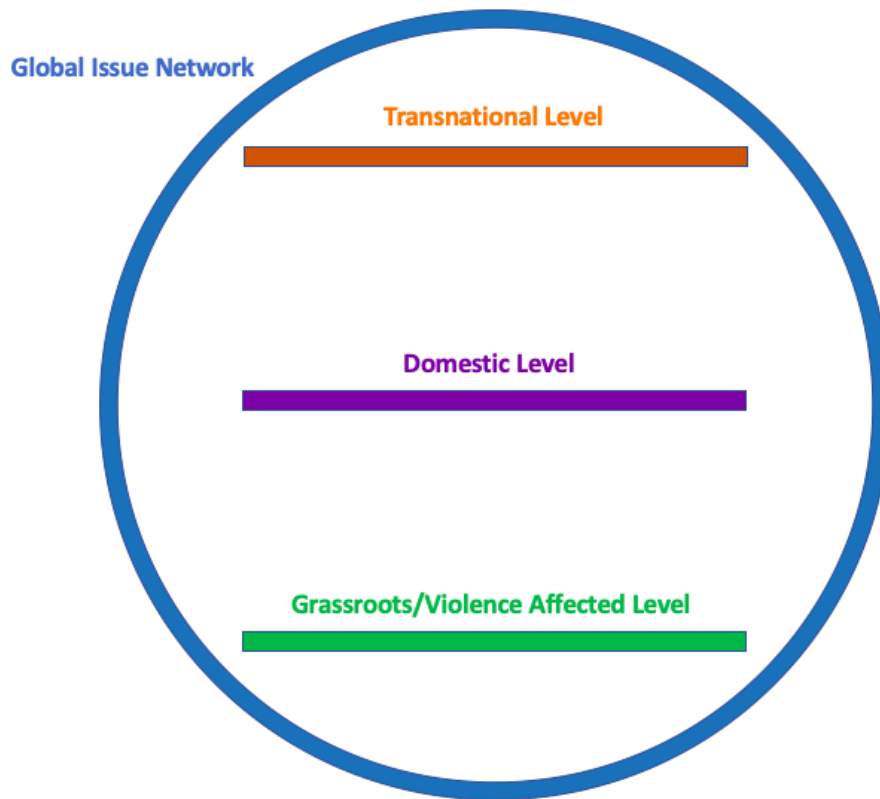


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Overview of Issue Network and Levels

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, a network graphic created using the analytical outputs of my NVivo analysis, partnerships tend to occur between those actors that share common meta-frames.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the most common mixed-frame cooperation happens between actors who ascribe to one of the two professionalized meta-frames: the “Lawful Usage” Frame or the “Ban Drones” Frame. This has the effect of not only leaving the Neocolonialism frame disconnected, but also the majority of the violence-affected actors, since they are the ones that utilize this less dominant frame. Notable here is that the most politically disenfranchised population in the transnational network

¹¹⁸ Any individual or group that opted to remain anonymous is assigned a random letter in the graphic

remains the most tenuously connected to the overall network, which largely conceptualizes itself as advocating on their behalf.

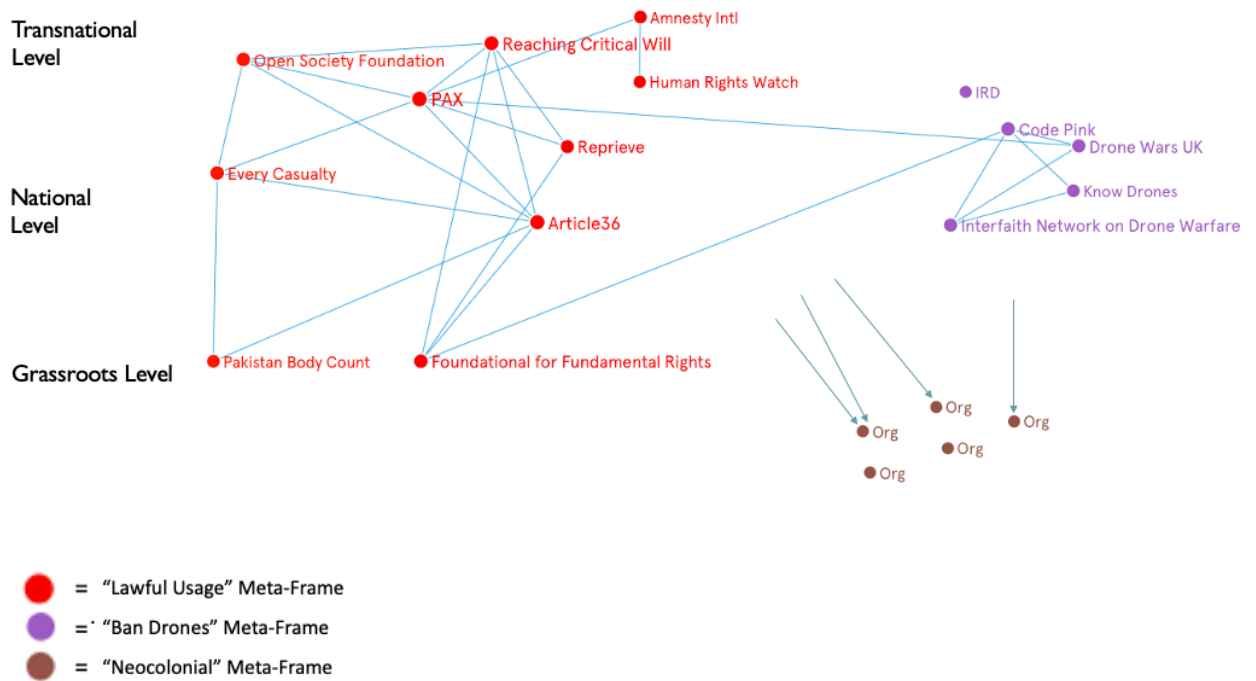


Figure 1.2: Illustrative Diagram of Transnational Drone Advocacy Issue Network

This dissertation is primarily interested in the stories about the role of power within the transnational drone network that are difficult to tell in a network visualization. First, as will be elucidated in Chapters 4 and 5, is the story of how groups with discordant meta-frames overcome these differences and collaborate on joint advocacy projects. For example, smaller groups within the Global North networks do not always merely submit to the frames of the more powerful gatekeeper organizations. Even in the instances where the coalition moves forward with a framing that not all member groups agree with, oftentimes a careful process of coalition-building ensured that all groups felt as though they were meaningfully included in the process. Interviews with these activists reveal complex processes of stakeholder buy-in from less powerful organizations. In these cases, we can see that the less powerful actors inversely vet their more powerful

counterparts but come to a collaborative result because they felt as if their differences were taken seriously.

Second, lack of connection to the network is not necessarily due to powerlessness. In fact, as will be discussed in the violence-affected chapter focused on Pakistan as well as the US domestics-focused chapter, purposely deciding *not* to participate in business-as-usual in transnational civil society may be an important exercise of power as well. We can see this in the examples of grassroots drone activists in Pakistan choosing not to legitimize the transnational framing by accepting gatekeepers' overtures at partnership. We can also see this in the radical anti-war American activists who also refused to make ties with more moderate international activist partners. The result of these inverse vetting processes were that more radical activists either to rebuffed or heavily renegotiated the networking proposals from transnational actors. Such decisions ultimately impact the overall cohesiveness of the armed drone network's messaging, since a noncollaborative result means that individual groups continue to work with their own chosen framings of armed drones.

These processes reveal important lessons about how power flows through a transnational network, and how actors with differing levels of geopolitical power navigate these obstacles.¹¹⁹ Specifically, inverse vetting processes show how the agency of less well-positioned actors *also* shapes the contours of transnational advocacy issue networks.¹²⁰ In instances of mixed-frame cooperation, which occurred across group-type as well as positions in the network, activists stated that they felt like their understandings were taken seriously and meaningfully addressed in decision-making processes. However,

¹¹⁹ Hertel 2006

¹²⁰ Capie 2012; de Almagro 2018; Hertel 2006; Pallas 2017; Pallas and Nguyen 2018; Pallas and Urpeläinen 2013; Temper 2019; Wajner 2017

in cases where actors reported feeling high levels of dissatisfaction with feeling included in joint advocacy projects, actors avoid making ties and pursue solo projects.

Dissertation Layout

The empirical chapters of this dissertation investigate the three slices of this overall network described above. Each empirical chapter offers separate but interrelated case studies that reveal distinct coalition-building processes within the transnational drone issue network, while developing the inverse vetting concept and working within the advocacy frame typology.

Chapter Two, *“Inverse Vetting: Powerlessness and Power in Transnational Advocacy,”* outlines the theoretical basis and contribution of this dissertation. I put three different bodies of academic literature into conversation with each other for the first time— theorizing on transnational advocacy networks, social movements, and armed drones. I further develop my original concept of inverse vetting and how it can act as a useful diagnostic of power within advocacy issue networks.

Chapter Three, *“A Very Wide Church:’ Drone Advocacy at the Transnational Level,”* maps the elite actors in the network. In this chapter, I show how processes of inverse vetting led to a failure to coalesce around an overarching umbrella frame. In this way, fights over frames at the transnational level correlates with missed opportunities for joint activism with a focused and unifying message. These disagreements occur at multiple levels within the network. On the one hand, there is an overall difference between the groups ascribing the to the “Ban Drones” meta-frame and those who adopt the “Lawful Usage” meta-frame. However, there is also a debate internal to the groups who gravitate towards the “Ban Drones” meta-frame. This disagreement is largely within the humanitarian disarmament community, which is split amongst those who desire an outright ban of the technology and those who favor regulation. In situations where actors overcame framing disagreements and worked together on a distinct project, the

weaker actors describe a feeling of meaningful inclusion in the process, but only after they pressed the more powerful actors through a process of inverse vetting. This described “meaningful inclusion” by powerful network actors is an important condition for coalition-building amongst groups with differing meta-frames across all levels of the network.

Chapter Four, “*An Examination of Conscience: Domestic Peacemakers and the Drone Issue*,” zooms in on the US-based activists who primarily petition their own governments over its drone policies. Where the transnational level of the network has found difficulty keeping interest and combatting issue-fatigue, this peace-focused domestic network has sustained active lobbying and grassroots protest activities for over a decade. However, this robust horizontal partnerships between domestic US activists does not scale up to vertical connections. In this case, we can see both inverse and traditional vetting dynamics at play. Gatekeeper organizations did not largely seek out these radical groups due to perceptions that their messaging was too anti-war, while at the same time, a number of these domestic groups did not even attempt to initiate contact with transnationals out of frustration with their comparatively bland framings of drones.

Chapter Five, “*Vetting the Boomerang: Advocating on the Armed Drone Issue from Pakistan*,” examines the violence-affected segment of the network. In this chapter, I contextualize the transnational drone issue in terms of the domestic politics within a drone-targeted state: Pakistan. The case study in this chapter discusses both the domestic and international obstacles Pakistani actors face in seeking accountability for US strikes in the tribal regions. I found that the activists who held fundamental differences in how they frame the “problem of drones” either rebuffed or renegotiated networking proposals through inverse vetting processes. The empirics in this chapter demonstrate that the decisions of local actors matter alongside the choices of large international organizations in global processes like transnational advocacy. This also shows us that the

means through which groups achieve outcomes is important, even if it defies certain understandings of “effective” – refusing to partner is also a strategy.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation by drawing the insights gained from studying different slices of the network together, and what they mean in terms of power. I argue that power is operative in this network in two primary ways. The first is in terms of the reproduction of geopolitics. This is evidenced in the fact that the most influential groups are based in the states responsible for the bombings: the US, UK and Europe. This is also reflected in the fact that the most dominant meta-frames, the “Lawful Usage” and “Ban Drones” frames, are both squarely based in an ontologically liberal understanding of transnational politics. The second way is in terms of responses to power from the bottom up. While the Neocolonialism meta-frame and its adherents are the least well connected to the overall network, I argue that this is a *response* by these grassroots actors to power structures they disagree with, rather than solely a result of powerlessness and lack of agency. In this way, actors at the other end of the boomerang throw, who are traditionally considered the least enfranchised members of a network, are capable of making their voices and interests heard. I close with a discussion of how these responses might impact efficacy and a consideration about what opportunities taking inverse vetting processes seriously might hold in terms of more egalitarian futures in transnational advocacy.

CHAPTER 2

Inverse Vetting:

Powerlessness and Power in Transnational Advocacy

Introduction

This dissertation brings together international relations literatures on the institutional politics of advocacy, political sociology literatures on transnational social movements, and a multi-disciplinary body of research on armed drones. While much has been written in all three of these areas, these literatures have not been brought together before. Specifically, the transnational advocacy literature has not engaged with the drone literature, and the drone literature has not engaged with the transnational advocacy literature. Bringing these bodies of literature into conversation with one another is of interest to an interdisciplinary social science audience, as such a synthesis further elucidates how power operates in transnational space.

I combine and extend these literatures by introducing the dynamic of inverse vetting to our understanding of networked transnational advocacy. Specifically, the inverse vetting concept contributes to the literatures on patterns of transnational advocacy participation by disempowered actors by showing another process through which these actors participate in transnational politics.¹²¹ Specifically, the inverse vetting concept as defined in this dissertation deepens our understanding of the mechanisms through which actors in a transnational network can affect the cohesiveness of overall campaign messaging. It deepens our understandings of how actors who are considered

¹²¹ Pallas, 2017; Pallas and Nguyen 2018; Almagro 2018; Temper 2019; Schramm and Sändig, 2018; Irvine, 2012

the least powerful in a transnational network exert influence that reverberates up to the transnational level. Importantly, it must be noted that the discreet actions that go into creating this effect are largely unintentional and are in pursuit of situational goals unique to these actors. The inverse vetting dynamic, an inherently relational process, also demonstrates another instance of how social and ideational factors can influence international relations.¹²²

Institutional Politics of Transnational Advocacy

Much of the early scholarship on INGO-led campaigns highlights the altruistic motivations of activists, and the horizontality of transnational networks. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) foundational study examines the ways in which individual political entrepreneurs can change norms within world politics through concerted transnational advocacy campaigns targeted at national governments. The authors posit that, when successful, these morally motivated political entrepreneurs can affect foreign policy through strategic processes of social construction.¹²³ These processes entail reshaping meanings around state action by constructing a once accepted practice as inappropriate or shameful.¹²⁴ This theorized ability to teach states how to "properly" conduct politics has led some scholars to call human security INGOs, NGOs and their transnational partners key "makers and shapers" of legitimacy and change in the international arena.¹²⁵ The efficacy of INGOs is thus theorized as being dependent in part on their acceptance

¹²² Avant, Finnemore and Sell, 2006

¹²³ Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 888

¹²⁴ Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3, 5; this is held to be true even in hard cases like national security (Price, 1998)

¹²⁵ Price, 1998: 639; Davis, Murdie and Steinmetz, 2012: 199; Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013; Additionally, we know that state officials can come to view certain weapons technologies as particularly "taboo," meaning that foreign policy decision making is not solely based on efficacy or expediency but also morality and ethics (Tannenwald, 1999; Price 2018; Petrova 2019)

as a principled, legitimate authority in a given issue area,¹²⁶ as well as on their ability to communicate this identity to relevant audiences.¹²⁷

Numerous scholars have since argued that the saliency of INGOs in global governance is not an unqualified normative good.¹²⁸ For example, research demonstrates that institutional factors ranging from resource scarcity¹²⁹ to internal decision-making structures¹³⁰ shape INGO behavior and stymie their influence. For example, rather than attributing a numerical growth in organizations as evidence of global civil society's increasing robustness,¹³¹ Cooley and Ron (2002) contend that this growth causes competition for funding between NGOs, undermining project collaborations.¹³² Given the intersubjectivity and hierarchy of transnational political space, this asymmetrical competition between organizations can ultimately influence which civil society voices get heard and represented in elite policymaking arenas like the UN.¹³³

Relatedly, recent studies consider how INGO authority – bestowed in the form of deference from policy-relevant audiences¹³⁴ – hobbles the most powerful INGOs like Amnesty International from making “transformational” demands on states.¹³⁵ Stroup and Wong (2017) argue that concerns over maintaining status as authorities lead these groups to adopt strategies that result in “vanilla victories,” which are tolerable to a wide range of

¹²⁶ The representativeness of an INGO-led advocacy campaign, as well as its accountability are two key factors that may determine perceived legitimacy (Pallas, 2017; Ebrahim, 2007; Keck and Sikkink, 2018).

¹²⁷ Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Murdie, 2014; Clark, 2001

¹²⁸ Barnett & Duvall, 2005; Hurrell, 2005: 33; Bob, 2005

¹²⁹ Bob, 2002: 399; 2005; Lewis, 2000

¹³⁰ Wong, 2012

¹³¹ See for example Fukuyama, 2001

¹³² Cooley & Ron: 13; see also Ron, Ramos and Rodgers, 2005

¹³³ Bob, 2005; 2012

¹³⁴ Andia and Chorev 2017 show that a key metric of success for transnational advocacy campaigns is the level of confidence advocacy targets hold in the campaigners' knowledge claims

¹³⁵ Stroup and Wong, 2017

elite global audiences.¹³⁶ This is, of course, at odds with smaller “direct action” organizations and political groups, which make comparatively radical demands and adopt contentious and sometimes even anti-state strategies.¹³⁷

Pursuing this organizational need for legitimacy and authority also impacts the representativeness of campaigns involving activists from the Global North and South. On the one hand, research shows that the perceived legitimacy of human security campaigns does in part rest on how diverse they appear from the outside, with diversity being measured by levels of Global South stakeholder involvement in the movement.¹³⁸ In the words of Keck and Sikkink (2018): “For northern groups, they [Global South partners] make credible the assertion that they are struggling with, and not only “for”, their southern partners.” Inclusivity and fostering grassroots “ownership” are then important factors for transnational advocacy campaign-building success and hence desirable goals on the part of INGOs.¹³⁹ However, studies also show that campaign diversity and effectiveness can sometimes be mutually exclusive goals.¹⁴⁰ This is because activists are constantly juggling network *unity* with network *diversity*.¹⁴¹ Additionally, the need to access elite actors in transnational politics can lead INGO brokers to focus on cultivating contacts with other professionalized bodies (such as donors or corporations) while becoming less responsive to grassroots partners affected by the human security

¹³⁶ Ibid: 40

¹³⁷ Magued 2018

¹³⁸ Pallas and Urpelainen 2013; as the authors show, however, the appearance of meaningful stakeholder input does not guarantee actual meaningful inclusion

¹³⁹ Arensman, van Wessel, and Hilhorst 2017; Wong 2012; however, see Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi 2017 for a discussion of how transnational advocacy can actually hamper localization and norm enforcement by creating a conservative domestic backlash against liberals, and Matejova, Parker, and Dauvergne 2018 for an analysis of how domestic activists can be framed as foreign agents.

¹⁴⁰ Saz-Carranza, 2012

¹⁴¹ Schramm and Sändig 2018: 1313; Saz-Carranza, 2012; see Bloodgood and Clough 2017 for a quantitative modeling that shows extensive networking can lead to organizational collapse, even though networking is essential for NGOs

issue.¹⁴² Thus, ensuring political efficacy and access on the transnational level oftentimes involves steamrolling the interests of their grassroots partners, an act that undermines their “normative legitimacy”¹⁴³ by making the network less horizontal and more vertical.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, this “logics of effectiveness” approach favored by INGOs - in which the large INGOs pursue their goals as efficiently as possible in the transnational policy space - can create “divisions of labor” within the transnational advocacy network that fosters competition between hierarchical factions.¹⁴⁵ In this way, Global South stakeholder inclusion in transnational advocacy can simultaneously appear to “empower” disenfranchised global populations while also exacerbating global inequalities.¹⁴⁶

Scholarship on the institutional politics of transnational advocacy sheds light on the structural constraints imposed upon nonstate global civil society actors. It is well established that while individuals and groups may be guided by (what they consider to be) “principled” motivations, INGOs and NGOs are not insulated from mundane bureaucratic pathologies and external pressures that impact institutional processes and outcomes more generally.¹⁴⁷ That being said, much of this literature takes a traditional understanding of the political, in that actors’ interests are relatively fixed and rational, and that politics primarily happen within formal channels of organizational structures and through official communications. My dissertation builds on this literature’s insights, by asking how actors with varying levels of geopolitical power within these structures collaborate (or fail to collaborate) on creating a unified advocacy message. This approach draws on another insight of this literature: that the institutional characteristics of

¹⁴² Bownas, 2017

¹⁴³ Norman, 2017

¹⁴⁴ Bocse, 2021; Wajner, 2017

¹⁴⁵ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2019; Hendrix and Wong, 2014; Murdie 2014

¹⁴⁶ Cheng et al., 2021

¹⁴⁷ Bagozzi and Berliner 2018; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005

influential organizations – such as access to policymakers and resource endowment – heavily favor INGOs from European and American contexts.¹⁴⁸

Power and Positionality in Transnational Networks

While the above scholarship offers a useful understanding of the institutional politics involved in transnational advocacy, a different strand of literature addresses the former's tacit assumption that politics are largely limited to "formal" spheres.¹⁴⁹ Scholars in this tradition consider the overarching discursive framework of "global civil society" in which INGOs and NGOs are embedded.¹⁵⁰ They argue that the universalist movements promoted by most INGOs – such as human rights, rule of law building, and economic development – are themselves political projects that are deeply enmeshed with hegemonic state and economic power.¹⁵¹ They contend that these projects are meant to build and sustain a neoliberal "world order," through encouraging an engaged global citizenship.¹⁵²

For this reason, some scholars see that relationships between activists – especially between groups in the Global North and South – are inevitably ones of problematic power relations.¹⁵³ They posit that activists from less resource-rich states (or from organizations that make transformational demands) are in disadvantaged positions to

¹⁴⁸ Murdie, 2014; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2013

¹⁴⁹ Bucher, 2014; Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007;

¹⁵⁰ Autesserre 2014; Almagro, 2018; Petrova 2018; Bolton and Minor 2016

¹⁵¹ Escobar 2012; Falk, 1997; See Higgott, Underhill and Bieler, 2000 for an exploration of Gramscian theories of power in transnational space.

¹⁵² The intersubjective nature of international politics means that these liberal projects are constantly in contest with alternative visions, and that the overarching hegemony of the 'liberal world order' is not a guaranteed teleological endpoint; indeed, some scholars see that it currently has strong challengers (Duncombe and Dunne, 2018).

¹⁵³ Duncombe and Dunne, 2018: 30. Florini (1999) defines "transnational civil society" as being distinct both from states as well as nonstate actors like corporations and terrorist organizations –she characterizes transnational civil society actors as nonviolent and self-organized by individuals pursuing a larger good. Of course, other mainstream transnational scholars problematize these rigid distinctions between "types" of actors. (Price, 2003).

take part in a so-called global citizenry.¹⁵⁴ For example, the traditional boomerang model of transnational advocacy contends that activists in the Global South reach out to partners in the Global North in order to circumvent local policy blockages.¹⁵⁵ In this conceptualization, local groups are thought of as kicking their grievances “up” to better known and more resource-endowed European and/or American organizations, who then advocate on the behalf of their Global South stakeholders.

More recent work focuses on the role that activists from the Global South play in transnational advocacy networks and challenges a perceived “Northern bias” in transnational advocacy theorizing. For example, Hauf (2017) argues that the early advocacy literature “overstates the Northern dimension” of transnational movements at the expense of considering how activists in the Global South also influence a given network. Other scholars show that sometimes Global South advocacy networks do not even reach out to Northern partners, but instead partner horizontally with one another in order to lobby regional governments, as in the case with Vietnamese activists in the HIV/AIDS issue area.¹⁵⁶ Global South-based activists have also played important roles as stakeholders in advocacy directed at governments with emerging economies, as with campaigns against extractive industries in BRIC countries.¹⁵⁷ This critical literature shows that activism in the Global South - both in terms of who is advocating and which governments they are targeting - is more vibrant and agentic than traditional international relations theorizing portrays.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, marginalized populations are able to participate in

¹⁵⁴ While the empirical cases within this body of literature largely favor economic development and service providing INGOs, many of the same logics of ‘shared humanity’ underpinning these projects seem to be used to legitimate transnational advocacy on human rights and/or disarmament (Pallas, 2012: 186; for example, see Donnelley, 2013)

¹⁵⁵ Keck and Sikkink, 1998

¹⁵⁶ Pallas and Nguyen 2018

¹⁵⁷ Shipton and Dauvergne 2021

¹⁵⁸ Moreira et al., 2019

and impact transnational advocacy through various processes, even if they are much less visible than transnational groups based in the Global North and are forced to act within systems that are embedded in inequitable hierarchies.¹⁵⁹

This Southern-focused transnational advocacy literature extends to reexamining unidirectional processes such as the traditional boomerang model. For example, Pallas (2017) suggests that “inverse boomerang” throws also exist. This occurs when global campaigns initiated by Northern INGOs hit policy blockages and seek out stakeholders in the Global South to bolster their perceived legitimacy.¹⁶⁰ The “inverse boomerang” is theorized as creating a paradox, in that Northern partnership with Southern NGOs may boost campaign legitimacy, but it simultaneously undermines meaningful stakeholder input.¹⁶¹ The initial goals and strategies of the Southern groups can be coopted by more powerful groups, who retranslate their frames to sit better with policy relevant audiences.¹⁶² Other studies show how repressive domestic environments can even make the traditional boomerang pattern dangerous and undesirable for local activists.¹⁶³

Other scholars argue that in addition to traditional and inverse boomerangs, “double boomerangs” can exist as well.¹⁶⁴ Through the example of women’s groups in the Balkans and their use of both UNSCR 1325 and local gender norms, Irvine (2012) shows that activists can pressure to both international and national authorities simultaneously to achieve their goals, while utilizing two different sets of norms. Almagro (2018) points of the existence of “lost boomerangs” as well. A lost boomerang occurs when the pattern of pitching ideas between claimants and large organizations

¹⁵⁹ Ciplet, 2019; Schramm and Sändig 2018

¹⁶⁰ Pallas, 2017: 282

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Joachim, 2007:136

¹⁶³ Matejova, Parker, and Dauvergne 2018

¹⁶⁴ Irvine 2013

rebounds back and forth off mutually exclusive norms.¹⁶⁵ Temper (2019) steps out of the boomerang model and points to the existence of “catapult” patterns of transnational advocacy as well. In the “catapult” model, transnational organizations send information and resources into local groups like “projectiles” in order to bolster their own campaigns – what is important here is that external support is not always asked for by local groups.¹⁶⁶

These power differentials have led to disagreements over the emancipatory potential of transnational activism and “global citizenship.” Many see that European- and American-based INGOs are in privileged position within this liberal discourse,¹⁶⁷ since they oftentimes possess the technical knowledge and professionalized expertise that serve as barriers to entry into global governance networks.¹⁶⁸ Some critical scholars take this point further, and argue that these attributes – intentionally or unintentionally – replicate colonial patterns of “power and powerlessness” between INGOs and their local partners.¹⁶⁹ Others remain more positive, arguing that many smaller local groups across several different issue areas have reclaimed these universalist projects in order to pursue counter-hegemonic resistances to globalization and oppression.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Almagro, 2018

¹⁶⁶ Temper, 2019

¹⁶⁷ Discourses here are treated as affective. Discourses are “sets of rules for ordering and relating discursive elements (subjects, objects, their characteristics, tropes, narratives, and so on) in such a way that some meanings rather than others are constituted” (Muppidi in Weldes: 2015: 231).

¹⁶⁸ A key example is the privileging of ‘neutral’ scientific knowledge over more ‘local’ forms of knowledge in the framing of transnational issues – this is especially acute regarding environmental degradation (Paulson, 2017).

¹⁶⁹ Matua, 2007: 33; Mercer, 2002: 5

¹⁷⁰ Rodriguez-Garavito and Santos, 2005: 6-7; Thayer, 2013; Some of these scholars argue that local activists – as well as their Northern partners – can “decolonize” their approaches and take lived experiences of the subaltern more seriously (Nader & Savinar, 2016: 52; Autesserre, 2014). Additionally, some scholars of social movements see that continued ‘virtualization’ is making transnational space more horizontal, less state-centric, and perhaps lowering the traditional barrier for entry (Hall, Schmitz, and Dedmon 2019; Castells, 2012)

In this dissertation, I present the dynamic of inverse vetting as displaying a mixture of these conclusions regarding power and powerlessness in transnational politics. On the one hand, I am careful to never describe inverse vetting as a celebration of complete agency or a “reclaiming” of control by less powerful actors, especially those based in the Global South. This is because many of these actors’ motivating reasons for such vetting processes arise from interests and goals inherently shaped by historical and contemporary political dispossession. On the other side however, I also acknowledge the true influence, even if oftentimes unintentional, that these traditionally disenfranchised actors have on a global advocacy issue network, specifically in terms of its coherence and connection. At its heart, the anti-armed drone issue network story is one about discreet decisions driven by situational interests, mediated through relational transactions.

Analyzing intra-network relationships’ abilities to shape and even drive transnational advocacy processes can tell us about participation in global governance. Social networks are “networks of meaning,”¹⁷¹ comprised of “patterns of communication and exchange.”¹⁷² While early research on transnational advocacy networks emphasized the “horizontal” and “reciprocal” nature of network ties, subsequent work shows that network connectivity forms over an uneven and hierarchal terrain.¹⁷³

Networks then become more than a means for amplification of voices and transportation of information/resources; they become key sites of power within advocacy communities, where certain meanings are elevated at the expense of others.¹⁷⁴ For example, Charli Carpenter’s (2014) work contends that while things like moral entrepreneurship are important, an advocacy organization’s position in the larger network structure – and its connection to ‘gatekeeper’ organizations like Amnesty

¹⁷¹ White, 1992: 67

¹⁷² Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 8

¹⁷³ Lake and Wong, 2005; Carpenter, 2007: 101

¹⁷⁴ Weldon, 2006

International – largely determines if a group’s chosen issue makes it onto the transnational advocacy agenda.

Transnational Advocacy Processes

In order to understand these advocacy network processes and dynamics more fully, I also draw on conceptual tools and definitions from political sociology and comparative politics literatures on social movements. These theoretical discussions at times overlap with international relations work on NGOs, and studies like Jackie Smith et al (2021) show that this increasing synergy has the potential to contribute to our overall shared knowledge of transnational activism in the 21st century.

It is first useful to distinguish between various types of transnational advocacy.¹⁷⁵ Khagram, Riker and Sikkink’s (2002) distinctions include: transnational advocacy networks, transnational coalitions/campaigns, and transnational social movements. Transnational advocacy networks consist of the least formal connections out of the other two, and are defined as international actors “who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.”¹⁷⁶ Transnational coalitions/campaigns are more coordinated in terms of information exchange and strategizing, involving “concerted efforts by multiple organizations lobbying for a specific outcome around a certain issue.”¹⁷⁷ A transnational social movement, as defined by Tilly and Tarrow, is “a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities.”¹⁷⁸ Social movement actors use a repertoire of tools, and consider themselves “worthy, unified, numerous, and committed.”¹⁷⁹ Mobilization against armed

¹⁷⁵ Tarrow (2005) defines transnational activists as “individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favor of goals they hold in common with transnational allies” (43; 25)

¹⁷⁶ Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 2

¹⁷⁷ Carpenter, 2014: 102

¹⁷⁸ Tarrow, 2005: 6-7

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

drones falls conceptually between the first and second categories. This mobilization is fractured amongst distinct, loosely connected networks of organizations with differing levels of influence, with some of these clusters producing more targeted coalitions and even calls to action. However, as this dissertation will show, the anti-drones network is missing “a common discourse,” leading to difficulty in making “collective claims.”¹⁸⁰

In order to get a better understanding of advocacy messaging in the anti-drone human security issue in transnational space, it is useful to consider theorizing on other humanitarian disarmament campaigns. Humanitarian disarmament is a broad approach to international security that seeks to end human suffering through developing laws on the use of specific weapons;¹⁸¹ it is distinct from the traditional disarmament movement due to its focus on the individual human as the referent of security rather than the state.¹⁸² Transnational humanitarian disarmament campaigns, which are focused on creating treaty law on a specific weapon, are a key way in which these activists attempt to impact world politics and pursue their goals.¹⁸³ The aim of these individual treaties is to gradually expand the humanitarian obligations that states have towards individuals in peace and war time, with the ultimate goal of reducing unnecessary suffering caused by specific weapons of war.¹⁸⁴ They do so by not only attempting to create international treaties, but also by pioneering “norms of acceptable state behavior”¹⁸⁵ – for example, the “taboos” around the usage of nuclear weapons and chemical weapons can in part be connected to transnational campaigning against these specific technologies.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ See for example “The European Forum on Armed Drones Call to Action,” 2021

¹⁸¹ Docherty, 2013

¹⁸² Newman 2010; Paris, 2001

¹⁸³ Alcalde, 2014; Garcia, 2015; Bolton, Fihn, and Minor, 2017; Bolton, Njeri, and Benjamin-Britton, 2019;

¹⁸⁴ Docherty 2009

¹⁸⁵ Dolan 2013; Fariss 2014

¹⁸⁶ Price 2018; Tannenwald 1999, 2018; of course, the existence of international norms does not ensure treaty compliance, and the existence of treaties does not ensure the emergence of underlying norms (Valentino, Huth, and Croco 2006; McKeown 2009;

All of these campaigns had concise external messaging regarding what was “wrong” with each weapons technology. The most famous humanitarian disarmament campaign is the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), which resulted in a treaty-based ban on anti-personnel landmines and is widely considered to be the most successful transnational campaign.¹⁸⁷ Anti-personnel landmines were considered uniquely harmful weapons due to the fact that they are victim-activated and unable to distinguish between combatant and civilian; they are also oftentimes left behind as remnants of war that accidentally get triggered by civilians.¹⁸⁸ Humanitarian disarmament activists also succeeded in banning the use of chemical weapons and cluster munitions,¹⁸⁹ both of which were campaigned against as being inherently indiscriminate in their effects on both combatants and civilians.¹⁹⁰

These campaigns have also been able to produce pre-emptive weapons technology bans, such as in the case of blinding lasers, which were presented as causing unnecessary lasting harm and suffering to victims.¹⁹¹ While it has not yet produced policy outcomes, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a robust and active campaign trying to preemptively ban fully autonomous weapons.¹⁹² The campaigners have framed these weapons as potential science fiction nightmares ala *The Terminator*, due to the fact that a human does not maintain meaningful control over the targeting procedures and it is

Percy 2007; Inal 2016). Additionally, scholars disagree on the lifespan of such weapons norms even if they were once held as social truths. Two examples include the crumbling anti-assassination norm (Thomas 2001; 2005; Banka and Quinn 2018; Bergman 2018; Scahill 2017) and the possible crumbling of the non-nuclear use norm (Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017; Carpenter and Montgomery 2020; Rathbun and Stein 2020).

¹⁸⁷ Anderson, 2000; Mekata, 2000; Price, 1998

¹⁸⁸ Garcia, 2015

¹⁸⁹ Docherty 2009

¹⁹⁰ Price 2018; Petrova 2019 shows that in addition to the “naming and shaming” tactic, laggard states adopt norms against certain weapons through processes of “naming and praising”

¹⁹¹ Carnahan and Robertson 1996

¹⁹² Bode 2019

unclear how they would be able to conform to the laws of war.¹⁹³ Another contemporary campaign, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), captured headlines by winning the Nobel Prize in 2017 for its success in creating an international treaty ban on nuclear weapons.¹⁹⁴ Much like with landmines, cluster munitions, and chemical weapons, the ICAN campaigners framed nuclear weapons as being inherently indiscriminate and destructive since they are unable to target only combatants and cause widespread environmental degradation.¹⁹⁵

Advocacy frames are a particularly useful modality through which to study relational meaning-making processes in humanitarian disarmament campaigns such as the ones discussed above.¹⁹⁶ On the broadest level, sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) defined frames as the “principles of organization which govern events – at least social events – and our intersubjective involvement with them.”¹⁹⁷ More specifically, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) define a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a [strategic] connection among them.”¹⁹⁸ The social movement literature characterizes collective action frames as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate [advocacy] activities,” which are created through negotiation between activists. Frames are important heuristic and strategic devices, because they have the ability to name key social problems and suggest their solutions.¹⁹⁹ Framing is thought to impact mobilization largely through

¹⁹³ Bahçecik, 2019; Bode, 2019; Bolton and Mitchell, 2019; Carpenter, 2016; Goose and Wareham, 2016; Maas, 2019; Rosendorf, 2021; Rosert and Sauer, 2021

¹⁹⁴ Borrie 2014; Borrie, Spies, and Wan 2018; Considine 2017; Docherty 2018; Evans 2021; Meyer and Sauer 2018; Müller and Wunderlich 2020; Plesch 2016; Ritchie 2019; Ritchie and Egeland 2018; Ware 2016

¹⁹⁵ Docherty 2018, Borrie, 2014

¹⁹⁶ Snow et al, 1986

¹⁹⁷ Goffman, 1974: 10-11

¹⁹⁸ Gamson and Modigliani in Nelson & Kinder, 1996: 1057

¹⁹⁹ Nelson and Kinder: 1055; Joachim, 2007: 19

variables like credibility, salience and resonance.²⁰⁰ For example, Jutta Joachim's study shows that transnational women's groups gained traction at the U.N. after strategically re-framing the violence against women issue from an "equality" frame to a "development" frame.²⁰¹

Advocacy frames matter in terms of understanding how activists publicly communicate "problems" to wider audiences. While the strategic framing literature offers a useful foundation, this project treats factors like culture and interpretation as constituting features of framing processes, rather than as objective variables subsumed within the larger concept.²⁰² The epistemological value of studying processes like framing from *within* activist networks prioritizes the meanings activists articulate and avoids making a network seem more cohesive than it is.²⁰³ Such an approach more closely examines the tensions that go into creating advocacy frames, both within groups and between groups. The process of framing is laden with power relations, because a frame necessarily focuses on one narrative over another.²⁰⁴ It signifies what can be considered as properly political, and by extension who can be considered as a central issue stakeholder.²⁰⁵ Indeed, determining whose advocacy frames "count" over others is theorized as being integral to building the appearance of a unified transnational campaign.²⁰⁶ Studying these processes is thus a useful diagnostic for inter- and intra-network politics.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ Benford and Snow, 2000

²⁰¹ Joachim, 2007

²⁰² Goodwin and Jasper, 1999

²⁰³ Zibechi, 2012; Della Porta and Rucht, 2013

²⁰⁴ Della Porta and Rucht (2013) show that power is a dynamic both internal and external to advocacy networks and social movements

²⁰⁵ Benford and Snow, 2000; for applied examples in IR: Carpenter, 2005; Bob, 2002; 2009

²⁰⁶ Pallas, 2017

²⁰⁷ Of course, frames are not the only things that determine the contours of transnational mobilization. It is also important to consider concepts like political opportunity structures and resource mobilization. Political opportunity structures are the objective,

The canon transnational advocacy literature oftentimes eschews the understandings and framings of local actors in favor of looking at how larger organizations mobilize on their behalf and present the issue to wider audiences.²⁰⁸ This can be seen in the theoretical assumption that once an understanding or frame is adopted into a transnational advocacy campaign, it remains static and not contested.²⁰⁹ In reality, there is an ongoing process of ideational contestation within the network even after an “umbrella frame” emerges to “consolidate” the campaigners – and even when this frame finds influence in policy circles, it is not just automatically accepted by individuals at the grassroots level.²¹⁰ For this reason, critical scholars of transnational advocacy and international norm diffusion recommend focusing on the “productive power and on the co-constitution of agents and the norms for which they advocate.”²¹¹ Going back to Almagro’s (2018) theoretical model of the “lost boomerang,” the process of campaign building is one of social construction that can lead to the “exclusion or annulment of certain subject positions and discourses” when the positions of actors in a network are so different from the mainstream that they are beyond intelligible boundaries.²¹² This has led

external institutional environment in which contentious politics takes place – they define “the nature of resources and constraints external to the challenging group” (Meyer, 2009: 19; Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1998). Scholars have since complicated this model, arguing that these structures do not exist independently of activists’ perceptions of them, and that substantial mobilization occurs even when these structures don’t exist. Others contend that the traditional literature’s understanding of these structures, as well as collective action repertoires, is insufficient in the face of globalization and virtualization (Castells, 2012). While external factors undoubtedly constitute an important part of the drone mobilization story, I do not treat these concepts as separate from how activists describe them; I account for constraints and opportunities in terms of how activists speak about them and how this feeds into the creation of goals, strategies and partnerships.

²⁰⁸ Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007

²⁰⁹ Krook and True 2012

²¹⁰ Epstein 2012

²¹¹ Almagro, 2018: 674; Bucher, 2014

²¹² Almagro, 2018: 674

some scholars to call localization – the process through which local activists are thought to adapt transnational norms into local contexts – a “myth.”²¹³

This internal frame contestation matters because disagreements can impact norm evolution, campaign coherency and ultimately policy outcomes.²¹⁴ Shareen Hertel (2007) shows that contentious frame negotiations can occur in two patterns: an “outside-in” pattern, in which campaigns are framed in the Global North and then imposed on activists in the Global South, and a “dual-target pattern,” in which shared interests guide collaborations between activists to solve problems in both the Global North and South.²¹⁵ Especially in the case of an “outside-in” framing pattern, international NGOs are viewed as being detached from the frames of the affected population for which they advocate. This has led some scholars and practitioners to advocate for an increased role for “Affected Peoples’ Organizations” (APO) to frame their own human security issues and for international NGOs to merely act in a supporting, non-framing role.²¹⁶ Thus, framing in transnational advocacy campaigns is always a battle over legitimacy and meaning that takes place at multiple levels of the network simultaneously.²¹⁷

Theorizing Armed Drones

Armed drones have captured the curiosity of many academics as well as public intellectuals, writing from a variety of disciplines both within and outside academia.²¹⁸ While expansive, the armed drone literature falls roughly into three conceptual and thematic buckets: security studies-focused, public opinion/discourse-focused, and law/ethics-focused.²¹⁹

²¹³ Capie, 2012

²¹⁴ Holzscheiter, Gholiagha, and Liese 2021

²¹⁵ Hertel, 2007: 25

²¹⁶ Schramm and Sändig 2018

²¹⁷ Wajner, 2017

²¹⁸ Cortright, Fairhurst, and Wall 2015; for an anti-drone activist’s take on the key issues, see Benjamin, 2013

²¹⁹ Bergen and Rothenberg 2015; Cortright, Fairhurst, and Wall 2015;

Studies concerned with the efficacy of drone warfare consider whether the U.S. policy is actually reducing national security threats or if it is causing suboptimal security results.²²⁰ Here, “policy success” is generally treated as reducing terrorist attacks against the US and its allies.²²¹ One of the most active debates in this area is over the issue of “blowback” – or whether US drone strikes foment anti-American sentiments within the areas being bombed.²²² Another dimension of this debate is the extent to which individuals in the targeted states support drone strikes. Reputable polling institutes such as Pew have long reported that Pakistanis generally strongly disfavor drones. However, Aqil Shah (2018) criticizes these polls for being misleading, while Christine Fair et al (2016) claims NGO reporting on drones is inaccurate and biased because it relies on television reports from affected regions.²²³ Both authors claim that people living in the areas affected by the strikes are actually the most *supportive* of the policy. According to Shah, this is because people living in the tribal areas comprise the population who is most besieged by terrorism, as well as by the Pakistani army’s counterterrorism tactics. Others have made similar arguments,²²⁴ though it is useful here to remember that measuring any kind of civilian perceptions of violent action during conflict is methodologically challenging since these perceptions are filtered through pre-existing ideas of perpetrators and victims.²²⁵ Some even argue that “success” of drone strikes may not even be possible to measure reliably.²²⁶

Another subset of drone literature studies US public opinion and popular discourse around drones. Academics disagree over how much public opinion on foreign

²²⁰ Zegart, 2020

²²¹ Johnston & Sarbahi, 2016; Fair, 2014; Byman, 2013

²²² Cronin, 2009

²²³ Shah, 2018; Fair, 2014

²²⁴ Taj 2010; Jeewanjee 2010

²²⁵ Silverman 2019

²²⁶ Carvin, 2012

policy issues can constrain policymaking,²²⁷ and whether or not American citizens even care about foreign policy issues.²²⁸ Recent research argues that US citizens may in fact care quite deeply about whether or not their government respects international law and norms.²²⁹ Additionally, public opinion polls on the armed drone issue have been difficult barometers for Americans' "true" sentiments on this specific foreign policy issue. This is because the framing of survey questions on armed drones and international law in US media are often misleading or erroneous,²³⁰ which leads to priming effects – and even socialization effects – that favor the US government's stance.²³¹ The perceived "apathy" or hawkishness on the part of the American electorate may be due to the convoluted cultural framing of the armed drone issue, rather than a "true measure" of their feelings.²³²

A large chunk of the literature considers the legality of drone warfare under existing international law,²³³ as well as how drone usage may impact future laws and norms of war, such as preventative force.²³⁴ Relatedly, a wide interdisciplinary literature that spans from political science to critical geography considers the ethical implications of drone warfare – oftentimes focusing on themes of distance and disembodiment in warfare, morality, neocolonialism, or on lived civilian experiences.²³⁵ Other studies put

²²⁷ Eichenberg 2005; Grieco et al. 2011; Gartner 2008

²²⁸ Holsti, 2004; Simmons, 2009; Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000; Wallace, 2013; Sagan and Valentino, 2017.

²²⁹ Horowitz, 2016; Chilton and Versteeg, 2016

²³⁰ Kreps and Wallace, 2016

²³¹ Nylén and Carpenter, 2019; Carpenter, Montgomery and Nylén, 2020

²³² When offered a chance to give open-ended, non-structured qualitative answers in a mixed method survey on security issues, respondents typically equivocate and qualify their more hawkish answers in the rigid, quantitative portion of the survey (Carpenter, Montgomery and Nylén, 2020).

²³³ Jameel, 2016

²³⁴ Fisk and Ramos 2014; Buchannan and Keohane, 2015; Crawford, 2015; Falk, 1997; Ward, 2005

²³⁵ Enemark 2017; Bashir and Crews, 2012; Shaw, Graham and Akhter, 2012; Nylén, 2020; Espinoza 2018

forth regulatory recommendations.²³⁶ Buchanan and Keohane's (2015) "Drone Accountability Regime" is one of the most well-known set of policy recommendations to come out of the scholarly drone literature. The authors argue that drone proliferation is inevitable and that powerful states like the U.S. would not sign on to any binding legal document dictating proper usage of drones. They identify three primary risks of drone usage: the violation of sovereignty inherent to the technology, over-use of military solutions, and difficulty in accountability for casualty counting. They conclude that any legal framework should be informal and nonbinding, as well as inclusive of nonstate actors. Their recommendations include increased transparency, enabling civil society to hold states accountable to any abuses, and the creation of a drones Ombudsperson who would have broad investigative responsibilities. Neta Crawford (2015) penned a rejoinder to this article, in which she dismisses Buchanan and Keohane's assumption that terror is an act of war. She instead suggests a novel hybrid approach to addressing terrorism that uses both law enforcement and military tactics. Additionally, Crawford suggests that domestic regulation around drones must first be pioneered before designing an international regime.²³⁷

As mentioned at the opening of this section, the drone literature and the transnational advocacy literature has not yet overlapped. However, studying international activists' responses to armed drones is a useful addition to this multi-disciplinary body of work. In terms of the more security-focused literature, studying transnational advocacy patterns around a specific weapon can garner information on whether the security measure is acceptable to different constituencies and populations. How much popular support a human security advocacy campaign enjoys can act as signals and almost litmus tests for policymakers. In part, this is why the debate detailed above over "popular

²³⁶ Enemark 2020; Mazetti, 2013; Scahill, 2017; Horowitz, 2016

²³⁷ Crawford, 2015: 39

support” for drones is so contentious – implicit (and sometimes explicit) in these arguments is whether current security policies around drones should be continued as is, or if they are too costly. But these studies have focused on public opinion measuring, and not directly on transnational advocacy. Here, a more grounded study in an affected country like Pakistan can add value. As I will explore in Chapter V, local anger at drones (at least anecdotally) is largely aimed at the Pakistani government, rather than the US government. This has the effect of further destabilization by further fomenting distrust in government institutions within a nuclear armed country.

In terms of the literature subsection focused on the legality and ethicality of armed drones, paying attention to how activists mobilize these concepts into political action offers a useful empirical grounding. Because concepts like legality and ethicality are socially enacted and enforced, studying one of the key processes through which these ideas can solidify into consolidated law and norms is important.²³⁸ Additionally, by turning analytical attention to the legal and ethical interpretations of traditionally marginalized actors in global civil society, such as the Pakistani activists in this case, we can also get a glimpse at which narratives and understandings of “law” are typically left out of international law and policy discussions.²³⁹

Conclusion: Theorizing Power and Inverse Vetting

Drawing on these synergistic bodies of literature, this dissertation explores the processes through which activists within the anti-armed drone issue network attempted to create a unified campaign. I study hierarchal relationships within this single-issue network in depth, in order to speak to larger questions about the role of social

²³⁸ Additionally, Rosert and Sauer 2019 show us that there may actually be practical utility in adopting an ethical “human dignity” framing in campaigns against certain weapons, rather than a technology-focused framing.

²³⁹ Nylén, 2019

connections in global governance.²⁴⁰ I also build on drone-specific theorizing by introducing a new modality – transnational activism – through which to study drones. I see that this unique epistemological point of departure is important, as it offers a new case for studying transnational advocacy processes and also maps a specific advocacy issue that has not yet been addressed.

The anti-armed drone case also further illuminates the operation of power within transnational processes. Unlike Lukes’ first face of power, where an actor has direct or sovereign control over another, a Foucauldian approach sees power as dispersed, constantly negotiated, and in flux.²⁴¹ In other words, power is not individualized, but is instead both produced by and productive of discourses, scientific knowledge, legal frameworks, administrative rules, moral propositions, and a host of other sociopolitical structures.²⁴² Foucault’s unique approach to conceptualizing power allows us to conceptualize a transnational advocacy network as a set of co-created power relations, rather than a network in which some actors have more influence than others based on their objective position economically or geographically. In doing so, it makes it possible to see how smaller, non-gatekeeping actors produce their own discourses and positions on a human security issue – at times actively using these discourses to assess whether the position of larger groups fits with their own advocacy goals.

As discussed above, much of the institutional politics of INGOs literature takes a traditional understanding of “power” and “the political.” This focus centers scholarly attention on the actions and motivations of large, traditional advocacy organizations that are generally headquartered in the Global North. This dissertation builds on this literature’s insights by examining how grassroots actors can influence the strategic

²⁴⁰ Avant, Finnemore and Sell, 2010

²⁴¹ Lukes, 2004; Foucault, 1972

²⁴² Foucault, 1995

options available to activists working on the same issue from different transnational sites.²⁴³ By doing this, my inverse vetting concept builds on contemporary theorizing on “inverse” patterns of transnational advocacy. In order to visualize how my concept fits into and builds off of these “inverse” transnational processes, I have replicated Pallas’s (2017) original diagram with my own addition of where the inverse vetting takes place. First, Pallas’s (2017) inverse boomerang model is below:

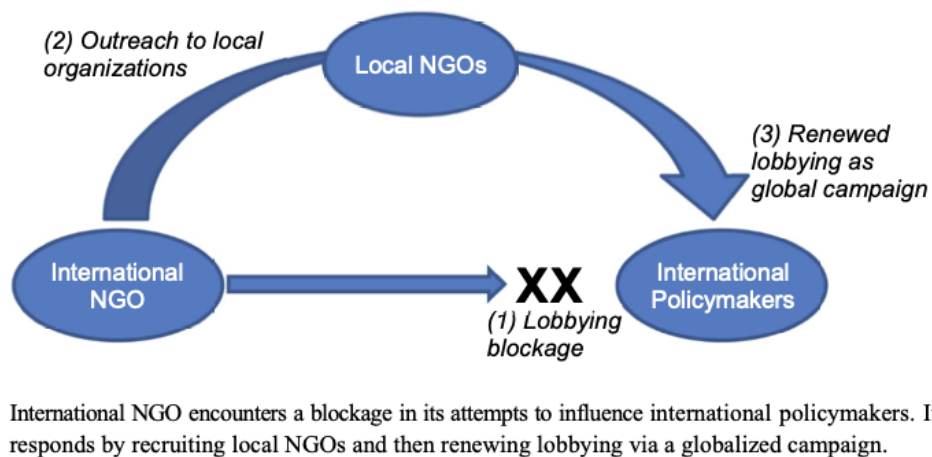


Figure 2.1 The Inverse Boomerang (Pallas, 2017)

Below, I include Pallas’s model with my own addition of where inverse vetting fits:

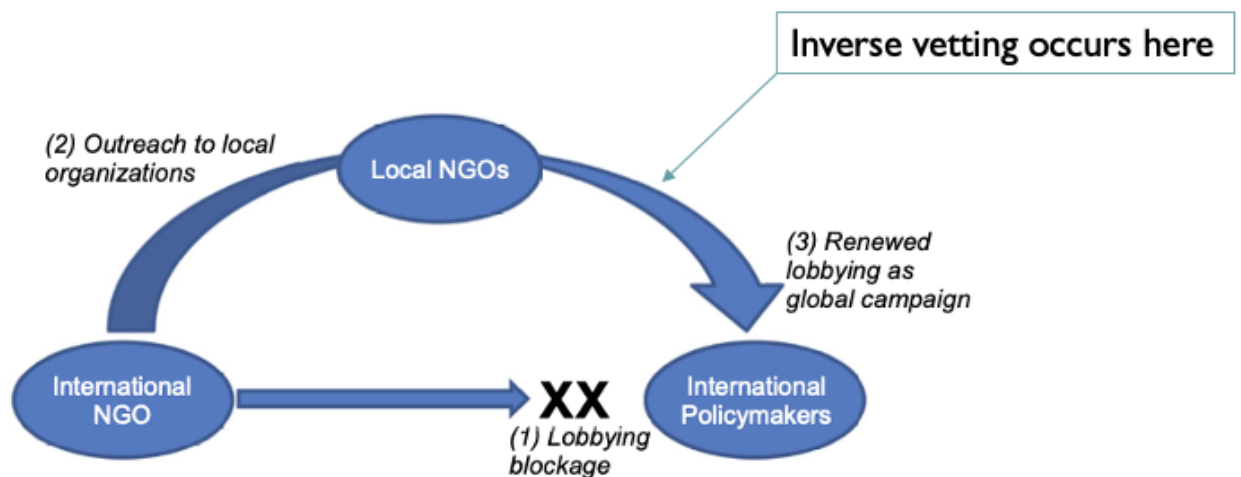


Figure 2.2: The inverse boomerang (Pallas, 2017) with Author’s conceptual addition

²⁴³ For example, see Cloward, 2016

One of the key additions to the inverse boomerang model that inverse vetting introduces is the possibility of less powerful actors to either refuse to join altogether, or to not join the transnationals in the manner that the transnationals desire. In both circumstances, the less powerful actors pursue their goals in ways that impact the cohesiveness of the overall campaign.

The consequences of assuming that power is exercised only by well-resourced and well-connected actors misses how smaller actors present and pursue their goals; how they resist hegemonic power within the network; and most significantly, how their actions lead to political effects that exceed their intentions.²⁴⁴ Inverse vetting suggests that rather than a single actor determining how the issue should be framed based on the power they have, a variety of geographically and culturally dispersed actors – in resisting and exerting their *own* power – seek to determine what the issue is to begin with. This has an unintended outcome, as it contributes to the overall network’s inability to define the problem in one meta-frame. Instead, the anti-drones work almost remains three separate campaigns, each with their own frames, working at cross-purposes.

Relationships between activists in the Global North and South are inherently characterized by hierarchical relationships.²⁴⁵ For example, the boomerang model of advocacy contends that activists in the Global South maneuver around difficult political opportunity structures and/or lack of resources by reaching out to groups in the Global North.²⁴⁶ This model can also be reversed when global campaigns seek out partners in the Global South to bolster their legitimacy.²⁴⁷ The “inverse boomerang” is theorized as creating a paradox, in that Northern partnership with Southern NGOs may boost

²⁴⁴ Epstein 2012; Hertel 2006; Bucher 2014; Plesch 2016

²⁴⁵ Duncombe and Dunne 2018: 30

²⁴⁶ Keck and Sikkink 1998, 2018

²⁴⁷ Ibid: 282

campaign legitimacy, but it simultaneously undermines meaningful stakeholder input.²⁴⁸

The initial goals and strategies of the Southern groups can be coopted by more powerful groups, who retranslate their frames to sit better with policy relevant audiences – producing the type of “vanilla victories” discussed earlier.²⁴⁹

All of this shows that transnational advocacy issue networks are deeply impacted by broader geopolitical power dynamics.²⁵⁰ Inverse vetting focuses on one of the processes through which actors with varying levels of power navigate a civil society network. This novel concept builds on and extends a growing body of literature examining patterns of activism in the Global South, as well as the fragmenting of civil society more broadly.²⁵¹ This work contributes to research that considers the work and motivations of grassroots activists at the “other end of the boomerang,” and how less powerful network actors more broadly might exert influence on a transnational level.²⁵² The preceding chapters of this dissertation explore these theoretical concepts in-depth, as they play out in three different slices of the transnational anti-drone advocacy network.

²⁴⁸ Ibid

²⁴⁹ Joachim 2007:136; Stroup and Wong 2017

²⁵⁰ Murdie, 2014

²⁵¹ Pallas 2017; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee, 2013

²⁵² Arensman, van Wessel, and Hilhorst, 2017; Bownas ,2017; Capie, 2012; de Almagro, 2018; Hauf, 2017; Hertel, 2006; Irvine, 2013; Pallas, 2017; Pallas and Nguyen, 2018; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2013; Schramm and Sändig, 2018; Temper, 2019; Wajner, 2017

CHAPTER 3

“A Very Wide Church:”

Drone Advocacy at the Transnational Level

Introduction

This chapter explores the framing differences and social relationships between the activists at the transnational level of the anti-drone network. I show that there is a significant amount of contestation between these actors and a subsequent failure to cohere around a single guiding anti-drone campaign frame. These disagreements primarily center around whether to adopt the “Ban Drones” Frame or the “Lawful Usage” Frame. As discussed in Chapter 1, these frames are distinct and carry with them different policy implications, and frames are a useful modality through which we can understand power differentials between groups and how power flows across this specific issue network. This is because the smaller groups in this network cluster tend to adopt more radical frames considered unpalatable by larger groups. I argue that framing disagreements between transnational actors kicked off processes of inverse vetting, in which the less resource-rich actors pushed back and negotiated with their would-be powerful partners.

In this chapter, I draw on a unique text and picture dataset of 300 primary advocacy documents, 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants from the transitional level of the armed drone network, and field site visits. In order to determine the key network brokers at the transnational level, I attended a side event on

armed drones at the UN, and the annual Humanitarian Disarmament Forum in 2017.²⁵³

The connections I gained granted me access to internal listservs, which include information on advocacy planning, processes, partnering amongst the transnational level actors as well as invitations to future events. This positioning at the center of the key site of power within the elite cluster of the drone network also allowed me to identify important interviewees, and to narratively map the transnational network.²⁵⁴

Through iterative processes of qualitative coding in NVivo 12, I identified salient themes and patterns across both documentary and interview data sources. I found that transnational actors have fundamental disagreements with one another over identifying “the problem of drones.” These disagreements primarily revolve around whether drones are an issue because of how governments use them to kill people, or because the drone technology is inherently bad. Though these are fundamental disagreements over the problem, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 it is common for nascent human security campaigns to face such challenges only to either 1) fade away or 2) coalesce under an umbrella frame.²⁵⁵ In this chapter, I argue that relational processes between actors, informed by their preferred frames, prevented these activists from folding their disagreements into one guiding advocacy message on drones.

We can see this by more closely examining a segment of the transnational level that should be a most likely case for developing a strong, unifying anti-drone campaign frame: the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD). The majority of anti-drone organizations based in the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) are

²⁵³ The Humanitarian Disarmament Forum is an annual multiday networking event in which both large and small NGOs convene in New York to discuss opportunities and challenges facing disarmament activists

²⁵⁴ The subsequent interviews were gathered using a snowball sampling technique and were conducted remotely via phone and videoconferencing.

²⁵⁵ Bahçecik 2019; Carpenter 2007; Mekata 2000; Stroup and Wong, 2017; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Breen 2019

members of EFAD. EFAD is an active section of the transnational network, as it sends out monthly newsletters and routinely speaks with policymakers at the EU and the UN. EFAD is also diverse in its membership; it currently has 29 official members, including human rights, disarmament, and peace-focused organizations ranging in staff size and policy impact. For example, members include gatekeeper organizations like AI and Open Society Foundations (OSF), alongside smaller NGOs like Drone Wars UK, which has a staff of three individuals.²⁵⁶ EFAD's member groups meet in-person yearly in order to share information on each organization's activities, discuss important developments regarding drone usage and development, and decide on the network's action points for the coming year. They communicate frequently throughout the year both virtually and during conferences, such as Drone War UK's 2020 ten-year anniversary webinar on the future of drone warfare.

Given the density of the exchanges between members, EFAD seems like a case within the overall anti-drone network where the activists should have been able to form an umbrella anti-drones frame. Indeed, other human security issue areas that have demonstrated similar levels of organizational diversity and sustained communication with one another were able to settle on an overarching frame. For example, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots also has a diverse membership, with organizations from the human rights, disarmament, computer science and peace groups.²⁵⁷ This campaign was able to overcome initial in-fighting over frames – with the large gatekeepers initially hesitant to use the science fiction terminology – and coalesce around a guiding meta-frame: the

²⁵⁶ Smaller groups like Drone Wars UK are purposely included in this chapter and not the next chapter on domestically focused groups. That is because despite their size, they still advocate in extra-state venues like the EU, whereas the groups in Chapter 4 only lobby a national-level government.

²⁵⁷ Goose and Wareham 2016

technology of fully autonomous weapons is inherently dangerous for its lack of human control and should be banned, or: “Ban Autonomous Weapons.”²⁵⁸

But, despite its level of intra-group communication, policy work and organizational diversity, EFAD does not have a steering committee²⁵⁹ and does not consider itself a campaign against drones like the ICBL did against landmines, ICAN does against nuclear arms²⁶⁰ or the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots does against fully autonomous weapons. Instead, EFAD’s members are loosely and voluntarily bound to a broad shared set of jointly agreed upon aspirations, codified in its “Call to Action.” This call aims five requests on armed drones at the EU and UN levels: “Articulate clear policies,” “Prevent complicity,” “Ensure transparency,” “Establish accountability,” and “Control proliferation.”²⁶¹ In addition to its leaders stating that EFAD is not a campaign, this Call to Action is different from an overarching frame because it is more aspirational than it is a targeted message about “what is wrong with drones” and “how this problem should be fixed with policy.” Again, in the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, the problem and solution is clearly and cogently stated: the problem is full autonomy, and the solution is a weapons ban.²⁶²

Given these continuing efforts to work together on joint projects, what explains EFAD’s – and the overall transnational level’s – lack of an overarching frame? As I will explore in this chapter, this absence of an overarching frame in part grew out of diverse groups with diverse interests bumping up against one another to advocate for the regulation of armed drones. I argue that the case of EFAD illuminates a wider trend

²⁵⁸ Bahçecik 2019

²⁵⁹ A steering committee is a designated group of individuals within a coalition of advocacy organizations who decide upon the priorities of and offer oversight for a given human security issue network

²⁶⁰ Borrie 2014

²⁶¹ EFAD, 2016

²⁶² Bahçecik 2019

within the transnational level of the network of how processes of inverse vetting resulted in vague Call to Actions that represent multiple perspectives on drones rather than a unified anti-drone frame that agrees on a problem and a policy solution.

Importantly, as will be shown in this chapter, inverse vetting processes can end in multiple ways. In the case of EFAD, less powerful groups that prefer more radical frames on drones reported only buying in after powerful organizations had sufficiently and meaningfully included them in the coalition-building process. The (reported) perception of procedural inclusion of course does not equate with achieving desired outcomes or meaningful representation in advocacy products. Tracing these processes illuminates how power is operative between and within the “elite” level of this transnational issue network and illuminates how network outcomes are impacted by power dynamics internal to coalition-building. The more powerful actors in the EFAD subnetwork were reportedly able to achieve a sense of inclusion amongst the smaller and more radical transnational groups to gain their organizational buy-in. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, this same signaling towards “inclusion” and “legitimation” of differing advocacy frames by gatekeepers is notably lacking when it comes to grassroots actors in Pakistan.²⁶³

This chapter proceeds with a brief case background of transnational anti-drone mobilization. I then move into an analysis of this transnational mobilization, describing the competing frames that have characterized advocacy at this level, and delving deeper into the specific case of EFAD. I conclude by considering what this case reveals about power and representation in transnational advocacy.

²⁶³ I am careful to always qualify these statements, as discussions of “legitimacy” and “feelings” are merely what activists chose to present to me; just because they told me as analyst that they feel a certain way does not mean that I have captured how they “actually” feel.

Transnational Civil Society Mobilizing Against Drones

The transnational anti-drone issue network hubs are located in the US and Europe. In the US, the primary hubs are located in Washington, DC and New York, with the human rights-focused groups mostly operating out of DC, and the disarmament-focused groups operating out of New York. Where the human rights groups primarily petition the US government directly, as well as the human rights bodies within the UN, the disarmament-focused groups target the disarmament bodies within the UN. Representatives from these key gatekeeper organizations like HRW, AI and CIVIC sit down monthly in DC to discuss their work on drones.

Since 2010, transnational civil society groups have advocated on the use of armed drones in three primary ways: data advocacy (or using computer science methods to tabulate civilian casualties),²⁶⁴ naming and shaming through writing in-depth qualitative reports,²⁶⁵ and direct lobbying of policymakers and stakeholders.²⁶⁶ Because advocacy is necessarily reactive to patterns of state use, and the US has been the overwhelming sole user until very recently, the US government has been the primary target. However, as proliferation increases, transnational activists are widening their focus.²⁶⁷

The first strategy is to seek more transparency from the U.S. government about its drone policy. Given the covert nature of the US program, both the public and activists struggled to gain even the most basic information on the strikes.²⁶⁸ For this reason, some of the earliest advocacy focused on goals of data transparency surrounding strike locations, numbers, and deaths. The UK-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) is a pioneer within the network in this regard, essentially setting the standard for

²⁶⁴ “Strikes in Pakistan,” n.d.

²⁶⁵ “Will I Be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan” 2013

²⁶⁶ Watson and McKay 2021

²⁶⁷ See for example Goxho 2019 and “An Overview of Britain’s Drones and Drone Development Projects” 2021 and

²⁶⁸ Kreps and Kaag, 2014

data advocacy on drone warfare.²⁶⁹ This data advocacy community is diverse in terms of professional backgrounds, including journalists, data scientists, roboticists as well as whistleblowers from the military, contracting and intelligence communities.

Second, human rights and disarmament advocacy groups have produced numerous reports on the use of drones since 2010. Unlike in many other transnational human security campaigns where elite civil society actors need to be convinced that a particular issue is worth their time, gatekeeper organizations were some of the earliest “adopters” of the armed drone issue.²⁷⁰ In 2012, CIVIC collaborated with the Human Rights Clinic at Columbia Law school to release a report on the civilian impact of armed drones.²⁷¹ In 2013, AI and HRW coordinated a simultaneous release of two separately researched reports on drones, with the AI report covering US drone strikes in Pakistan and the HRW report covering the Yemen strikes.²⁷² Along with the 2012 CIVIC and Columbia Law School brief, these reports became three of the most highly publicized advocacy publications on drones during the Obama years.

The third strategy is directly lobbying of policymakers and stakeholders. This tactic is unique to the transnational groups within the issue network, given their levels of elite access. Some groups focus on addressing state actors in official forums like the UN and the EU, while others form professional relationships directly with stakeholders and policymakers. For example, Article36 and other disarmament groups speak during the meeting of the First Committee every year at the UN headquarters. In addition to this, they host side events at the UN on specialized topics such as the humanitarian impact of

²⁶⁹ TBIJ is a donation-funded, not-for-profit media organization that publishes public interest news stories on how power operates in contemporary times. In addition to national security-focused stories, TBIJ also publishes stories on topics as diverse as pharmaceutical companies and democratic institutions.

²⁷⁰ Cheng et al. 2021; Bob 2009; Carpenter 2011

²⁷¹ “The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions” 2012

²⁷² Roth 2010; “Will I Be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan” 2013; “Killing Outside the Bounds of Law?” 2013

armed drones where state representatives attend to learn about an issue more in-depth.²⁷³ Distinct from this are the advocacy groups that solely produce content for state actors. For example, the Oxford Research Group (ORG) creates specialized in-depth research reports for military consumption.²⁷⁴ While the organization's broad mission aligns with other humanitarian disarmament groups, its particular tactic is to demonstrate to military and political figures why using drones is a tactical and strategic failure not in states' best interests.

Competing Transnational Frames

In the words of a transparency activist from the Oxford Research Center, the drone network is a “very wide church” with a large amount of diversity amongst its actors.²⁷⁵ While these transnational actors have a baseline agreement that the armed drone issue is worthy of valuable advocacy resources and sustained attention, they diverge when it comes to specific organizational stances and framings of the “problem.” Figure 1 below reintroduces my frame typology chart from Chapter 1 to explain the difference between the two meta-frames, offering an overview in terms of definitions, examples of what activists in these categories would consider the “key issues,” as well as the corresponding policy solutions/recommendations.

²⁷³ “The Humanitarian Impact of Drones” 2017, for example, was a report launched at the United Nations headquarters during the 2017 First Committee Meeting

²⁷⁴ Watson and McKay 2021

²⁷⁵ Phone interview with Author; Transnational 2; 20 May 2019

Meta-Frames:	Description:	Specific Issues:	Solution:
<u>“Ban Drones” Frame</u>	Innate characteristics of the drone technology is problematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unethical - lowers threshold of force - dual-use function - hampers situational awareness 	Ban drones
<u>“Lawful Usage” Frame</u>	The technology is <i>not</i> inherently problematic; policy and current state use are the problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - targeted killing - violation of sovereignty - lack of transparency - lack of accountability 	Regulate drones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Export control - Legal guidelines - Transparency measures
<u>Neocolonial Frame</u>	Technology, policy, legacies of historical dispossession and hierarchy in transnational civil society are all parts of the problem <i>Note: Present only in Pakistani network segment (Ch. 3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural sovereignty - societal harm - imperialism 	Transformational demands regarding power relations

Table 3.1: Overall Frame Typology with Relevant Meta-Frames Highlighted

As shown in Figure 2, the policy solutions for these two groups are of course dependent upon the framing they adopt. “Lawful Usage” activists tend towards more status quo stances such as requesting more transparency on state parameters of lethal targeting and regulation. On the other hand, “Ban Drones” activists generally call for more radical policies, such as a weapon ban or extreme regulations on research and development. These divides were reflected in the conversations I had with transnational drone activists.

The “Lawful Usage” frame is the preferred frame of the gatekeeper organizations within the transnational level. As stated earlier, this frame encompasses legalistic positions, exemplified in the following statement by the Deputy Washington Director of Human Rights Watch during our conversation:

“I don’t have a problem with the weapon itself... The problem I have is the approach to killing people because they are on a list of people who should be killed. That has nothing to do with armed drones per se... I mean the problem again when talking about drones is that I don’t think that they need anything special. I think that states and other actors should only use weapons in accordance with the law.”²⁷⁶

This same position, that drones are an issue of policy and not technology, is mirrored in an Amnesty International infographic (Figure 3) from my dataset:

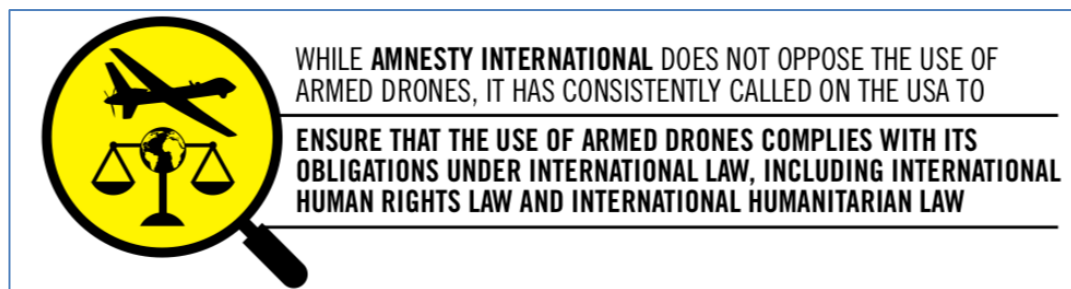


Figure 3.2: Example of “Lawful Usage” Frame in Amnesty International Report, 2014

While predominate amongst the large human rights organizations, other types of influential network actors also adopt the “Lawful Usage” frame with different professional emphases. For example, CIVIC, an international humanitarian law group, focuses on detention and criminal prosecution of suspected terrorists as an alternative approach to targeted killing. Additionally, the group advocates for “ensuring drone strikes include precautionary measures to mitigate civilian harm” rather than an all-out ban of the technology.²⁷⁷ The Oxford Research Center focuses on remote warfare as a strategy of combat more broadly, with its program head stating that “the means of

²⁷⁶ Phone interview with Author, Transnational 3; 17 June 2019

²⁷⁷ “The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions” 2012:

delivery is much less important” to them than the “misguided” policy belief that targeted strikes work.²⁷⁸ There are also groups such as New America Foundation and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) that focus solely on drone data reporting, with increased governmental transparency as their key goal. Below in Figure 4 is an example of the organizational goal of transparency, from TBIJ’s website:



Figure 3.3: Example of “Lawful Usage” Frame from TBIJ’s Website

The “Ban Drones” frame tends to be adopted by less influential – but still important – groups within the transnationals. For example, the director of Drone Wars UK argues that “there is something specific about the technological potentials [of drones], which merits addressing.”²⁷⁹ According to this organization, these drone-specific potentials include risk transfer, lowering the threshold for warfare, and “PlayStation warfare” – a distancing function of the drone that supposedly makes lethal targeting decisions easier and civilian harm more likely. These groups are more likely to adopt the name “killer drones” within their advocacy; a framing that leads to the more radical proposed policy solution of “grounding” the technology. This is exemplified in the banner below from an anti-drone rally hosted by Drone Wars UK and their partners in the UK Drone Campaign Network:

²⁷⁸ Phone interview with Author; Transnational 2; 20 May 2019

²⁷⁹ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 3; 7 May 2019



Figure 3.4: Example of “Ban Drones” Frame from Drone Wars UK Website, 2020

Some of these groups even go as far to describe drone technologies as inherently “indiscriminate” – meaning that it is uniquely destructive amongst other weapons to human life. This is in exact opposition to many of the international human rights groups’ views on drones, which sees them as potentially more humane than traditional weapons. This position is stated clearly by War on Want below in Figure 6, in which they equate drones to the destructive potential of banned technologies like anti-personnel landmines:

Time for action
 Drones are indiscriminate weapons of war that have been responsible for thousands of civilian deaths. Rather than expanding the UK’s arsenal, drones should be banned, just as landmines and cluster munitions were banned. Now is the time to stop the rise of drone warfare – before it is too late.

Figure 3.5: Example of “Ban Drones” Frame on War on Want’s Website

Practitioners are quite aware of these differences in issue frames and were eager to discuss how they perceived the cleavages in the movement. For example, as one Europe-based drone activist mapped out the key “fissure:”

“I would say that there are kind of two broad groups. But again, they break down into subsets... **One is [the group] who have a fundamental problem with the technology**, who would say that it lowers the threshold and is making the world less safe... And then there are those who say ‘well, drones are no different from other platforms, but it’s the way they are being used, they are being used for

targeted killing, and that's the problem- so we don't have a problem with the technologies, **it's how they are being used.**”

Framing disagreements can be viewed within groups of the same type as well.

While human rights groups generally correlate to the “Lawful Usage” meta-frame and peace groups with the “Ban Drones” meta-frame, there is an internal debate within the humanitarian disarmament community on which framing to adopt, and how radical of a stance they should take. The humanitarian disarmament community largely employs the “Lawful Usage” frame, yet there are a significant minority that wish to pursue the more radical “Ban Drones” frame, as explained by an activist from Reaching Critical Will:

“Some people within the humanitarian disarmament community find it difficult to know where they would sink their teeth into the drones issue. **Because they can't quite agree as a group. Not everyone is a pacifist, right?** In fact, a lot of them aren't [pacifist] in the humanitarian disarmament community... So they don't see the drone itself as a problematic. Whereas humanitarian disarmament people have largely been about banning classes of weapons that are seen as inhumane. And that it's really difficult to make the argument that drones are inhumane... It's a slippery thing to argue.”

In addition to merely being aware of these differences, there are also tensions between the “Ban Drones” and “Lawful Usage” groups. Each express varying levels of frustration that the other does not understand the true problem. As one activist stated: “people kind of constantly say to us, well what's the difference between drones and an F-16... **A lot of drone campaigners are being technology blind-** they focus on just the policy of how these things are being used.”²⁸⁰ A disarmament activist views the more moderate “Lawful Usage” framing as capitulating too much to national governments: “Accountability or transparency [approaches are] sort of like *‘if you are going to do this, can you do it a little more nicely?’* And I obviously want that as a first step, but **that feels to me somewhat a bit like giving in a bit.**”²⁸¹ Another activist from a separate humanitarian

²⁸⁰ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 3; 7 May 2019

²⁸¹ In-person interview with Author, New York, NY, 13 October 2017

disarmament organization echoed this concern, stating that the “emphasis on transfer and proliferation” that many within the network adopt “**seems like giving in too much.**”²⁸²

Others within the “Ban Drones” frame echoed this concern and actually accused the overall “meekness” of key network actors as irreparably ceding ground to state governments on drones, to the point of capitulation on the issue. They argue that not only was there not enough “early action” on the issue, but that a focus on legal discussions about usage by human rights gatekeepers staked out a very small bargaining range with governments. They argue that it is better to “better to focus on the technology” rather than targeted killing, because discussions about the policy merely turns into “discussions of law,” which in their opinion are inherently conservative advocacy positions.

For their part, multiple activists from the “Lawful Usage” framing camp dismissed the “Ban Drones” approach as being “unrealistic” and too pie-in-the-sky to attain actual policy outcomes. In the words of one activist from the “Lawful Usage” side of the humanitarian disarmament community: “I don’t think it would be politically possible to ask for a ban at the moment because the technologies have become **too normalized.**”²⁸³ Another individual from an activist policy thinktank stated that these more radical groups are ‘not part of the conversation’ within policy circles, because such a technology abolitionist framing is a “conversation stopper” for politicians and military officials. They went on to describe how the drone itself isn’t the most pressing human

²⁸² In-person interview with Author, Amherst, MA, 6 December 2017

²⁸³ In-person interview with author, New York, NY, 14 October 2017

security issue, as much as larger strategic shifts from traditional to remote warfare of which drones are an integral part.²⁸⁴

Complicating Cooperation

The above interview data indicates a divide between the more “practical” “Lawful Usage” frame activists – who desire greater transparency, accountability, legality and even regulation on use and/or proliferation – and the more “idealist” “Ban Drones” frame activists – who desire a weapon ban on armed drones. As one humanitarian disarmament drone activist put it, when you try lump these different organizations into “one basket” in genuine attempts to work together, the result is “strained social relations” and stalled work on drones.²⁸⁵ Put another way by an Open Society Foundations (OSF) drone specialist that has a birds-eye view of the overall network, “the main issue with it [coalition-building] is the fact that most of these groups do not work on drones the same.”²⁸⁶

Such differences and disagreements seem to matter when “the rubber hits the road” and diverse groups try to work together in coalitions or on joint projects on armed drones. As the same individual from OSF described: “they simply don’t agree on what the aims of a policy paper should be.”²⁸⁷ A humanitarian disarmament activist elaborated more concretely on the import of these disagreements when it comes to the mundane day-to-day work of advocating:

“There are these really small nuances which on the surface-level look like they mean nothing, but once you get to the little sentences that have to be in policy documents, you definitely notice ‘wow, we are spending a lot of time emailing about these little words here.’”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Phone interview with Author; Transnational 2; 20 May 2019; Remote warfare includes tactics such as the use of drones rather than traditional military aircraft, but also tactics like military partner capacity building.

²⁸⁵ In-person interview with author, Amherst, MA, 6 December 2017

²⁸⁶ Phone interview with Author; Transnational 2; 20 May 2019

²⁸⁷ *ibid*

²⁸⁸ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 2; 10/31/19

To avoid this perceived incompatibility, like-minded advocacy groups working on drones tend to create silos by partnering with one another on smaller projects. While this likely has to do with unconscious homophily and ease of communication, some gatekeepers make a policy of it. An interviewee who works with Human Rights Watch's counterterrorism division stated the organization's approach plainly when asked how they decide to link up with drone campaign partners: "if our views are aligned and we generally take the same approach."²⁸⁹ Similarly, an interviewee from an activism-motivated thinktank described why they do not link up with "Ban Drones" groups: "it's hard, because there are a lot of people that like work hardcore on drones, and drones very specifically, whereas for us, they're just a very interesting part of a more complex puzzle."²⁹⁰

Activists have made attempts to overcome this frame silo-ing. A media communications activist described their job as to tell the transnational anti-drone activists that: "not only should you guys work together, but it's better and amplifies your message when you guys work together on a *regular basis*."²⁹¹ This individual has worked in a similar capacity on other human security issues, such as nuclear weapons, and states that cooperation is uniquely difficult to attain between the anti-drone campaigners. They attribute this to the fact that "they are all working on different sides of this issue," because where AI and HRW "can only talk about that civilian harm point" and generally don't take positions on war, the pacifist "Ban Drones" groups "sit there like: '*no war, ever*.'"²⁹² According to them, the result of this "nitpicking" is that only likeminded groups such as CIVIC, HRW and AI regularly meet during a bi-monthly meeting in DC where they discuss joint anti-drone advocacy opportunities. When expanded to include the

²⁸⁹ Phone interview with Author, Transnational 3; 17 June 2019

²⁹⁰ Phone interview with Author; Transnational 2; 20 May 2019

²⁹¹ Skype interview with Author, Transnational 1; 6/21/20

²⁹² *ibid*

more pacifist “Ban Drones” groups, according to them “it takes them so long” to get out a joint statement that they tell them to just “release their own *individual* statements immediately.” They followed this up with the aside that they “would have a lot less work if that [nitpicking] stopped.”²⁹³

The Case of EFAD

As stated above, EFAD is diverse in terms of its member’s views on drones, and intentionally so. In the words of its coordinator, “we have everything from grassroots activists like Drone Wars UK to established human rights organizations like Amnesty International.”²⁹⁴ This coalition-building process was not without its obstacles, though. According to the same coordinator, “it’s also a challenge to get local organizations to look up and sometimes, you know, act together with other organizations. It’s more difficult than I expected it to be... sometimes they simply don’t agree.”²⁹⁵ These disagreements are the same discussed above in microcosm: “there are people who are like against drones period, because they think it’s dehumanizing. There’s also other people who disagree and don’t think it’s much different from an F16, and are more like ‘*no, it’s just the targeted killings which are the problem.*’”

As can be seen from the description above, the same “Lawful Usage” versus “Ban Drones” divide exists within EFAD. However, the actors were seemingly able to overcome it – or at least set it aside - and work together on a consistent basis even if they were unable to agree on an overarching advocacy message. According to what they reported to me, perceptions of meaningful inclusion in coalition-building processes by the more radical groups is an important variable. Specifically, the more powerful gatekeeper organizations purportedly gained buy-in amongst more radical groups

²⁹³ *ibid*

²⁹⁴ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 1, 27 March 2019

²⁹⁵ *ibid*

through fostering what these activists described to me as a sense of inclusion. They stated that these processes assuaged them that their concerns and positions were ‘being taken seriously.’ However, far from adopting their radical framing into the coalition’s overall Call to Action, the pacifist positions were folded into the positions of gatekeepers.²⁹⁶ In an effort to bring diverse groups on board, EFAD’s founders purposely did not make it a “campaign” in the vein of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. This resulted in EFAD remaining a loose coalition with a relatively benign Call to Action.

EFAD’s structure is built to allow its members to air grievances and disagreements in constructive ways. These breakout sessions happen during annual meetings, where each group can share their perceptions. One actionable way that EFAD attempts to honor organizational differences is by allowing its members to choose which joint statements they sign onto and which they abstain from. As EFAD’s former coordinator describes: “sometimes organizations simply don’t subscribe to [EFAD’s joint statements] because they don’t agree. And that’s okay; that’s allowed.”²⁹⁷ Another way in which EFAD tries to keep differing organizations engaged is by structuring breakout groups during their meetings to allow like-minded groups to partner up on smaller projects. An activist from PAX describes, after the group creates a list of goals and activities through large-group brainstorming, they “split up the work in groups of interested organizations who know what they want to do together.”²⁹⁸ Key to this process is that groups are free to choose topics that most align with their own organizational interests and viewpoints.

²⁹⁶ Stroup and Wong (2017) coined the phrase “vanilla victories” to describe the conservative demands gatekeepers make on governments in order to attain their credibility.

²⁹⁷ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 1, 27 March 2019

²⁹⁸ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 2, 31 October 2019

These organizational measures do purportedly succeed in cultivating perceptions of meaningful inclusion amongst smaller organizations, according to what these activists reported to me. Amongst these smaller organizations are several that do not present their advocacy work in English, and sometimes rely on other EFAD members to translate their work for broader dissemination. It also includes Drone Wars UK, which works its impact by working both with grassroots peace organizations as well as alongside transnational organizations. The founder of this organization approaches his advocacy work from a “Christian pacifist perspective” and is interested in drones as they pertain to the “ethics around warfare.”

While they note that they differ significantly from the larger organizations in terms of their position on drones – that they should be banned – Drone Wars UK remains a member of EFAD. According to them, this is because coalition actors like Amnesty International made enough effort to take their position seriously. The founder describes EFAD as having “good will” towards all of its members, including the more radical ones like their’s. They stated that “those of us who have perhaps more fundamental problems with the technology didn’t feel excluded,” and that the Ban Drones activists have been able to “push our perspective.” They describe a sense of control and input in EFAD’s processes and report a satisfying ability to impact the coalition’s focus:

“EFAD, I would say, has listened to our challenging them. I think at the beginning, there was an idea that we [EFAD] should only work on targeted killing; targeted killing was the problem. And I think that they have listened, and that other groups have listened to our arguments about lowering the threshold for war... They take that onboard now as well, so there is shifting and movement.”²⁹⁹

These same organizational measures aimed at fostering inclusion of diverse perspectives on drones also resulted in satisficing when it came to guiding principles and

²⁹⁹ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 3, 7 May 2019

demands. Perspective of inclusion aside, EFAD's Call to Action on the side of the "Lawful Usage" framing. Perhaps most notably, according to the founder, EFAD purposely maintains its status as a coalition rather than a campaign so that they can sustain this diversity.³⁰⁰ The founder of EFAD goes on to state the key dilemma clearly:

"The issue in the beginning was how can we find a common goal to work on together, where we have an advocacy goal that's acceptable by all? Because, you know, Amnesty has very much a human rights focus on the issue, whereas Drone Wars UK is much more outspoken... So how can still find a common ground where we can work together?"

Similarly, EFAD's coordinator - the individual tasked with corralling these 29 groups into cooperating during meetings and virtually - stated that they "just try to get as many people agree on, you know, what is the **middle road**." This oftentimes led to a situation where the more radical groups were expected to "be pragmatic and **add water to the wine**" when it comes to working together." As can be inferred from these statements, EFAD's ability to hang together as a coalition in large part depends on the more radical groups' willingness to work at the margins of smaller projects and to ultimately fold themselves into the more conservative demands of the umbrella organization rather than achieving actual representation in advocacy outputs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Above, I show that despite sharing a general common interest in advocating on drones, there are significant disagreements over how to name "the problem of drones" that transnational activists have largely not overcome. These disagreements center around whether armed drones are an issue of the technology, or of how armed drones are currently being used by governments for targeted killings. These disagreements between meta-frames generally correspond to organization type, with the human rights and transparency-focused organizations adopting the "Lawful Usage" framing, and the

³⁰⁰ Skype interview with Author, EFAD 1, 27 March 2019

anti-war groups using the “Ban Drones” framing. The humanitarian disarmament community is experiencing an internal disagreement over which framing to adopt. Some want to take the well-trodden path of squarely focusing on a specific weapon technology, as such a strategy has resulted in past victories (the International Campaign to Ban Landmines).³⁰¹ Larger humanitarian disarmament organizations such as PAX view a drone ban more skeptically, agreeing more with the human rights focused activists that the drone itself could theoretically be used to reduce civilian casualties in war and is therefore not an inherently problematic weapon of war. However, as can be seen from the EFAD case, how these activists engage with one another can determine whether or not they partner, regardless of their frames. EFAD is a story about relational processes between activists, informed by their chosen frames.

Observing how these actors relate to one another and try to come together can illuminate how power is operative within advocacy networks. First of all, the gatekeeper organizations such as HRW and AI along with other influential network brokers all adopt the “Lawful Usage” frame. However, smaller groups within the Global North networks do not always merely submit to the frames of the more powerful organizations. Oftentimes a careful process of coalition-building attempted to ensure that all groups felt as though they were meaningfully included in the process. Interviews with these activists reveal complex processes of stakeholder buy-in from less powerful organizations, which ultimately affect the network’s overall message cohesion. The desire to bring smaller groups along in the coalition led to a situation in which EFAD was unable to solidify around an umbrella frame, precisely because doing so risked alienating these more radical partners.

³⁰¹ Anderson 2000; Mekata 2000

It is important to note that collaboration and described perceptions of inclusion do not necessarily correlate to actual representation in advocacy outputs. From the outside, the coalition appears to buck the “Lawful Usage”-versus- “Ban Drones” conflict through internal procedural measures meant to foster inclusion. However, these inclusion measures themselves seem to exert a modifying influence over the radical groups. Rather than resulting in tangible representation of diverse perspectives within the coalition’s Call to Action, these “wins” by the radical groups remain more symbolic and ideational than practical and observable.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, not all transnational network partners are extended reconciliatory process-building measures as they are in EFAD. The two meta-frames discussed in this chapter can be thought of as the “professionalized advocacy frames,” favored by groups based in the Global North. As Chapter 5 will show, the grassroots actors in Pakistan that adopted the “Neocolonialism” meta-frame are almost entirely isolated from these professionalized networks. In this way, geopolitical power relations mirrored in this network, as the most powerful and well-connected organizations in the network are based in the countries doing the bombing. The present chapter demonstrates that even when transnational groups differ significantly with one another on how to frame drones, their liberal universalist ontology ultimately allows them to maintain closer connections than with actors operating outside this ontology in Pakistan. Due to their national headquartering and traditional approaches to advocacy, groups in the Global North are far more willing to work with “perpetrators” of the violence – something that grassroots actors in Pakistan largely reject.

CHAPTER 4

“An Examination of Conscience:”

US Activists and the Armed Drone Issue

Introduction

On a bright October morning in 2019, around two dozen individuals fell, in perfect synchronism, motionless to the pavement in front of the United Nations Headquarters. A former United States Army member kicked off a chant by shouting: “double tap,” to which the group responded: “drone strike!” Dressed in all white, the protestors lay on the sidewalk beneath Predator drone model. The Army veteran remained standing, holding a highlighter-yellow sign above his head detailing the civilian casualties of the US drone program, along with a demand to end the manufacturing of unmanned aerial vehicles. Named “Blank Slate,” the coordinator of this demonstration, Essam Adam Attia, refers to it as a “public art intervention.”

The timing of this protest-through-art was strategic; within the marbled-lined halls of the UN Headquarters, diplomats, policy experts, and transnational activists were convening for the opening day of the General Assembly’s First Committee.³⁰² Through allotted speaking times on the assembly floor and scheduled side events, transnational activists belonging to organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Reaching Critical Will lobby policymakers from all over the world on subjects dealing with humanitarian disarmament, including the specific issue of armed drones. Despite purposely aligning the date to coincide with the first day of the First Committee meeting, the domestic

³⁰² Rohrlich 2019

activists outside of the UN building performing a drone “die-in” protest did not communicate nor coordinate their actions with the transnational activists inside of the building. Both drone-focused advocacy activities took place literally adjacent to one another, but completely separately and with very different advocacy messaging.

In the previous chapter, I showed how inverse vetting patterns within the transnational level of the network contributed to the non-emergence of a unifying anti-drones campaign frame. This chapter further explores the overall lack of an anti-drones advocacy frame by examining the social relations and framing between activists at the US domestic level, as well as their relations to the transnational level. Observing the case of US domestic anti-drone activists stands to teach us more about vetting in transnational issue networks. First, when taken with Chapter 3, it sheds light on how inverse vetting occurs *within* the segment of the anti-drone network located in the Global North. Due to their geographical locations, the domestic and transnational activists share roughly the same cultural sensibilities.³⁰³ However, these actors – the domestics and the transnationals – do have real differences in power, influence, and resources. As I will show in this chapter, some US domestic groups refused to work with larger transnational groups based on the latter’s lack of perceived radicality. This is because they see drones as a particularly insidious expression of warfare and violent conflict, something that makes war more efficient and one-sided. The domestics defined the armed drone issue in their own way – through an anti-war discourse – and assessed transnational groups’ more moderate positions as deficient in achieving their pacifist advocacy goals.

The 2019 UN Headquarters vignette is analytically useful because it distills these two hubs – the US domestic level and the transnational level – into a microcosm.

Theorists might expect these two groups of activists to coordinate their actions and unify

³⁰³ Or, at least on a broad level; one can argue that there is a gulf American and European political sensibilities

their messaging, especially since both subnetworks were preexisting, robust, and all network actors knew of the others' existence.³⁰⁴ Sell and Prakash (2004) show that domestic level political actors and transnational actors share similar interests. Indeed, partnership with a consolidated frame and policy recommendation would benefit the smaller organizations by elevating their voices, while also benefiting the transnationals by giving them broader reach in disseminating international norms to a domestic context and diversifying their base;³⁰⁵ it would benefit both in terms of policy outcomes.³⁰⁶ This engagement with a politically active national-level network is a vital part of implementing INGO interests, because international human rights norms are theorized as influencing foreign policy after they become encoded into a domestic context.³⁰⁷ Despite this, while the US domestic subnetwork's messaging is rather cohesive and their social relations with one another produce consistent advocacy products (such as conferences and protests), the social connections between the US domestic level and the transnational level are weak and their framings remain entirely different.³⁰⁸

Normative frames can act to bind activists and differences between stakeholders in an issue area – such as the US domestic and transnational anti-drone activists – complicate cooperation.³⁰⁹ While the transnational activists, as discussed in Chapter 3, adopt both the “Ban Drones” and “Lawful Usage” meta-frames, the US domestic activists fall mostly into the “Ban Drones” meta-frame, with a unique focus on the ethical dimensions of armed drones.

³⁰⁴ Keck and Sikkink, 1998

³⁰⁵ Joachim, 2003; Sciubba, 2013

³⁰⁶ Montoya, 2013; Tarrow, 2001

³⁰⁷ Simmons, 2009

³⁰⁸ See Shawki, 2011 for a discussion on the importance of dense network ties for transnational advocacy success

³⁰⁹ DeMars, 2005; Yanacopulos, 2009

Indeed, the US domestic activists' "Ban Drones" framing of the drone technology is very dissimilar from how the transnational activists frame it. The US domestic activists lean into a heavily ethical framing of the drone technology as "evil" than the transnational "Ban Drones" activists, who would instead focus on more nuanced language out of the humanitarian disarmament tradition. This ethical framing is also different to the more clinical language of international law we see the transnational organizations using in the "Lawful Usage" frame. This focus on ethics amongst many US anti-drone activists is in part due to the large presence of the religious community in this section of the network, but also the presence of secular pacifists. To distinguish it from other "Ban Drones" frames in this chapter, I call the US domestics' focus on technology the "peace" approach, a term that activists themselves use, as it reflects their general anti-militarism.

Additionally, the domestics' framing is also different from the Neocolonialism frame. Even though the domestics' framing does share some similarities with the Neocolonialism frame, particularly in their focus on armed drones' role in imperialism, I purposely keep these two distinct. This is because the US domestics' framing of their anti-drone advocacy falls within the same liberal universalist ontology as the other organizations based in the Global North, whereas the Neocolonialism frame falls outside this conceptualization of world politics. For example, even the most radical groups in the US believe in creating change through participation in electoral politics. In doing this, these US activists advocate within systems of power that the Neocolonial activists wish to distance themselves from.

This chapter supports but also extends the traditional elite vetting theory. It supports the traditional model in that the gatekeepers clearly did not want to work with domestic partners who were deemed as too radically anti-drone, since it would possibly hurt their perceived professionalism. But in addition to showing support for the

traditional model, this chapter also extends it by suggesting that this process is not only unidirectional but can go in both directions simultaneously. In this case, both gatekeepers and domestics were hesitant to work together and subsequently vetted one another.

These vetting processes led to an absence of compromise in terms of settling on an anti-drone umbrella framing. This left both the US domestic and transnational activists to pursue their own anti-drone advocacy with their own frames; much like how the two groups in the opening vignette operated simultaneously but separately.

In this chapter, I draw on a unique text and picture dataset of 300 primary advocacy documents, 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants from the US domestic level of the armed drone network, and field site visits. As part of my initial fieldwork for this network hub, I attended a 2018 Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare regional conference in Hartford, Connecticut held in the Hartford Seminary. The connections I cultivated at this networking event allowed me to gain access to the leaders of the US domestic network hub and also granted me access to internal listservs, which include information on advocacy planning and events. This chapter proceeds with a brief case background of how US activists have advocated against armed drones over the past two decades. I then move into an analysis of this mobilization within the US context. I conclude by discussing what this case can teach analysts about transformative politics in advocacy on human security issues.

The Domestic Network Actors

I conceptualize the US domestic network hub as groups and individual issue entrepreneurs that primarily petition their own governments *without* focusing on international policy audiences. It is important to clarify that I am not sorting these groups based on their nationality alone, because there are American activists and groups that fall into the transnational activist category, such as Human Rights Watch. What is salient in this particular categorization is the fact that the activists I examine in this chapter focus

on US politics. I do not include the smaller European organizations from the previous chapter in this classification as “domestic activists,” since (despite their size) they petition extra-state bodies such as the EU and UN as part of their advocacy. Because the US groups are interested in petitioning their own government and seek partnerships with transnationals in as far as they can help them reach this goal, the US activists I spoke to did not express much interest in connecting with pacifist groups advocating in the EU (even if they admired their work).

Thus, what makes US domestic actors in the issue network distinct is that unlike their transnational counterparts, their efforts focus solely on various elements of American politics. Whereas the transnational advocacy groups – even the ones based in New York and Washington DC – primarily engage in transnational politics and petitioning international/regional organizations as well as nation states, the domestic US activists I focus on in this chapter concern themselves only with political and economic actors as well as smaller constituencies within the US. These targeted actors may include politicians, but also direct appeals to drone pilots asking them to join in protesting as well as corporations that manufacture armed drone-related technology.

Additionally, while the US-based transnational activists - such as Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First - are clustered in New York and Washington DC, these domestic-focused activists are much more geographically dispersed throughout the country. For example, the religiously focused group Coalition for Peace Action is based out of Princeton, New Jersey, while the women’s peace group CodePink is headquartered in Los Angeles, California, and Veterans for Peace is located in St. Louis, Missouri. The largest actors in this level of the network, such as Veterans for Peace, also have dozens of local chapters.

There are three further dimensions which are characteristic of this subnetwork and which ultimately informs its approach to framing the problem with drones. First, it

contains the highest numbers of anti-war pacifists. As this is also on average an older population (a large number are retirees), many US activists cut their advocacy teeth on anti-Vietnam War protests and nuclear abolitionism. They see drones as making foreign wars more tempting and easier for US policymakers; a problem, since they are steadfastly anti-war.

Second, while this level of the network is comprised of perhaps the most surprising bedfellows out of any drone network cluster – including anti-war pacifists, religious community leaders, veterans, Silicon Valley techies, as well as ‘concerned citizens’ – two types are unique to the US context: the veterans and the religiously motivated actors. Notably, this is the only part of the transnational network that contains individuals who, at one point in their lives, directly supported the US’s drone war through their professions before becoming conscientious objectors. Specifically, this includes two types of individuals: 1) veterans who either served as drone pilots or bore direct witness to drone warfare, and 2) high-tech industry workers from companies like Booz Allen Hamilton or Google who worked on the research and development side. Both types are unique amongst other actors in the broader issue network for the participatory, insider role they once played in the drone program. This perspective is significant given the layers of confidentiality and opacity surrounding the US drone program, which activists at all levels of the transnational network often cite as a key challenge to their work.

Finally, there is a significant segment of this subnetwork that is heavily religious in motivations and approaches.³¹⁰ For example, the Interfaith Network on Drone

³¹⁰ While Pakistani activists at times use religious phrases and imagery in discussing drones, these activists do not cite religion or their personal (at times, very strongly held) beliefs in Islam as their overarching ontology for taking political action on drones. Additionally, unlike the US religious activists that use houses of worship and seminaries as key sites of action, the activists I connected with in Pakistan do not similarly utilize

Warfare is an umbrella organization that focuses on grassroots education, primarily aiming to teach congregations about the ethics of drone warfare in key constituencies. This group of actors includes politically liberal protestant Christian denominations such as Unitarian Universalists and Quakers, as well as Catholic and Muslim groups. While its founder has tried to recruit Evangelical churches to join, he reported that this has been extremely difficult due to the politically conservative ideology of that denomination in the US.³¹¹ They also at times participate in direct action tactics, such as protesting drone bases and contractor headquarters, sometimes even purposefully getting arrested for publicity. The Network also has an associated but separate policy advocacy wing called the Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare based in DC that focuses on lobbying.

US Civil Society Mobilizing Against Drones

These actors have taken an eclectic approach to advocating on armed drones, with the “how” varying widely depending on the individual’s organizational affiliation. The most prominent tactics include direct protests of air bases, lobbying both local and national political figures, corporate lobbying, art installations and performance pieces, grassroots education, television ads, and litigation advocacy focused on the rights of US citizens as they pertain to drone targeting. Again, the one common thread throughout these approaches is that they are solely focused on advocating in the US context without a significant, sustained international component.

The Interfaith Network primarily focuses on grassroots education and targets religious congregations located in key congressional districts.³¹² Taking a religiously

religious establishments. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the grassroots activists I spoke to in Pakistan instead cite a decolonial ontology as informing their drone work.

³¹¹ For a fascinating analysis of how conservative domestic interests have created conservative NGOs that compete with liberal groups in transnational advocacy, see McCrudden 2015

³¹² This educational work has been funded by the Open Society Foundation as part of its wider armed drone advocacy initiative – which also includes funding the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) – since 2016.

informed ethical stance against armed drones, the Interfaith Network has produced advocacy products such as short movies, pamphlets, and pre-formatted letters to congresspeople, all of which are meant to be easily distributed by church leaders to their parishioners. The movies include versions of the films *National Bird*, *Drone*, *Unmanned: America's Drone Wars* – all edited down (after purchasing the rights from the creators) to 30 minutes for ease of screening in a church setting. In addition to these edited movies, the Interfaith Network also produced two of its own movies, which are meant to be introductory films targeted toward an American religious audience: *The Religious Community and Drone Warfare* and *Moral and Safe?: War, Peace, Drone Warfare and the Religious Community*.

The founders of this organization – two Unitarian Universalist reverends with a preexisting friendly relationship – host one national conference and thirteen regional conferences per year on drone warfare. While the national conference in Princeton, New Jersey primarily focuses on recruiting religious leaders from key congressional districts to attend, the thirteen regional conferences invite academics, religious lay people, as well as community leaders to attend. The conference that I observed in Hartford, Connecticut hosted a panel of speakers, select screenings of the short films named above, and offered opportunities for individuals to get involved with artistic advocacy work such as adding to a drone “peace quilt.”³¹³ Packages passed out to the attendees included instructions on how to introduce the issue to their own religious community, a pre-written letter to their congressperson urging them to not support drone warfare, and scheduled in-person protests. Ultimately, the goals of these smaller conferences are to convince attendees to return to their parishes and host screenings of the films and to write their

³¹³ The “peace quilt” travels all around the world, with people adding squares to it, and is meant to be a show of solidarity and common humanity with victims of US drone strikes.

Congresspeople; encouraging individuals to go out and proselytize the religious anti-drone warfare advocacy message to their community members.

Directly targeting corporations for their role in supporting the US's use of drones is another advocacy approach that is unique to this set of activists. These confrontations tend to be dramatic in terms of optics. For example, an individual issue entrepreneur organized a march in Greenwich, Connecticut to picket the house of ITT Inc.'s CEO in order to label him a 'war profiteer.' This is because ITT Inc. builds the bomb release components that allow armed drones to drop Hellfire missiles. In another instance, two separate activists became shareholders in Honeywell, only to attend share meetings and protest to the board about the company's role in pioneering avionics and mechanical systems for the MQ-9 Reaper.

These types of direct action and protests are an important part of the domestic activist's arsenal more generally. Heavily informed by the civil disobedience culture of the 1960s and 70s, some activists who participate in these protests purposely get arrested to make a political statement. While these types of regularly scheduled protests occur at air bases all around the country – such as at Horsham, Pennsylvania and San Francisco, California – the most publicized one is an annual protest at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada. Led by CodePink and in partnership with Veterans for Peace, the annual "Shut Down Creech" events include the main four-day protest, but also various "peace-bonding" activities and an desert campout at a goddess spirituality temple. These differently located protests draw on various types of artforms to make their point, and also to "go viral." For example, there is an individual activist who considers crafting scaled models of drones as their primary advocacy. These models are shipped all over the US – including to Hawaii – to be used in marches and educational events.³¹⁴ One New

³¹⁴ One of these Predator drone models was at a conference I attended for fieldwork in 2018.

York-based artist and activist specializes in Banksy-style, drone-related political street art and graffiti. This individual was actually arrested for allegedly counterfeiting NYPD posters as part of his anti-drone artwork.

Lastly, the most well-known and resourced US domestic organizations tend to focus on litigation advocacy on behalf of American citizens targeted by drones abroad as well as on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests regarding drone policy from the government. The most famous case of domestic advocacy comes out of the American Civil Liberty Union's (ACLU) work on the behalf of Anwar al-Awlaki – a US citizen who was targeted and killed by a US drone strike in Yemen for his role as an influential al-Qaeda propagandist. This case was critical in terms of compiling the most comprehensive information on the processes to date. It revealed, in part, how the US government makes lethal targeting decisions and how it internally justifies the legality of such strikes. For example, the ACLU's al-Awlaki casework revealed that in 2010 the White House Office of Legal Council (OLC) reinterpreted the US Supreme Court case *Hamden v Rumsfeld* to mean that the US can legally undertake military action within non-war zones. Until this point, even the legal reasoning of the US government on these policies had been classified.

Ethical Framing of “Ban Drones”

While the majority of these US groups subscribe to the “Ban Drones” metaframe, there are distinctly culturally American dynamics that flavor this variation and differentiate it from the transnational network's overall framing of the armed drone technology as a humanitarian disarmament issue. Specifically, the US domestic activists primarily frame their drone work around what I suggest are inherently ethical frameworks. The first type of ethical framing these groups use has a distinct anti-war dimension and the second type has intentional religious components to it. These ethical frames do overlap, but only in one direction: religious activists sometimes adopt an

overall faith-based anti-war stance, while secular anti-war groups like CodePink use ethical language but never religious parlance.

Secular Ethical “Ban Drones” Frames

Domestic US peace groups adopt the clearest anti-war stances against armed drones. This variety of activism tends to be pathos-laden in order to provoke a visceral response from its audience. Figure 1 below offers an illustrative example of this type of argument.

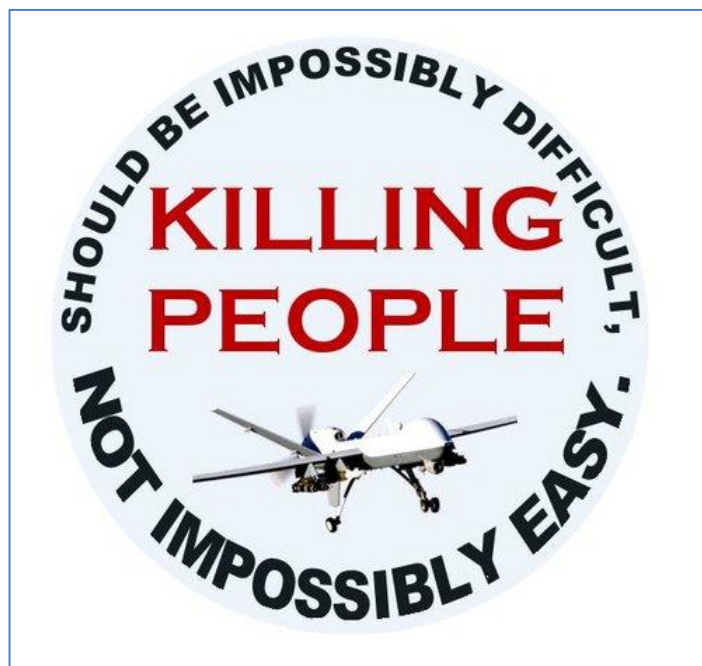


Figure 4.1: Example of Ethical Argument in Anti-War Frame from Knowdrones.com

The particular issue entrepreneur who heads up this website further explained his position in a 2018 interview. He made the ethical argument – grounded in secular pacifism – that Americans “need to know how it looks from the other end of our military machine,” and lamented that US politicians were not willing to see Americans as “world citizens.” He continues:

“It’s all well and good to say “drones don’t have any consequences.” But if you are on the receiving end of a drone hellfire missile, you are experiencing consequences. And for people to feel that you can kill people without consequence is one of the most dangerous things that you can give somebody the sense of.”

The ethical framing of drone technology can be seen particularly well in direct protests. CodePink has the most sustained and active anti-drone campaign in the US. While they also engage in speaking tours and book publications on the subject, their most notable and headline-grabbing anti-drone actions have been their protests at drone bases. The annual “Shut Down Creech!” protest event, which is put on in partnership with Veterans for Peace, takes place in Creech, Nevada outside the air base. The stated goal of this action, which has taken place every year since 2015, is to: “nonviolently oppose the barbaric and deadly U.S. drone assassination program at Creech AFB that terrorizes communities around the world.” Figure 2 illustrates protest signage at the 2020 Creech event.



Figure 4.2: Example of Ethical Argument in Anti-War Frame; CodePink’s 2020 Creech Protest

Secular US peace activists directly target military members and drone pilots in particular through ethical arguments. Essentially, these activists are trying to persuade the “tip of the spear” that they are complicit in an immoral practice and to quit their jobs. One example of this approach is the partnered work between KnowDrones and Veterans for Peace Chapter 87. In 2017, these groups created short anti-drone television ads that aired on network news channels in two “drone base communities:” Creech, Nevada and Syracuse, New York. The ads are meant to be “speaking about conscience” to the drone operators according to their creator, and to “bring out the underlying causes of these drone wars and urging drone pilots to not fly.”³¹⁵ Their reasoning for targeting drone operators directly is because the US government has “been so completely supportive of drone attacks that we must appeal directly to drone operators to bring an end to the drone killing.”³¹⁶ Figures 3 and 4 below are screen captures of the ads, which exemplify the morality-based appeals. Figure 3 is a broad appeal to the drone base community, while Figure 4 is directly targeted at the drone operators.



Figure 4.3: 2017 Anti-Drone Television Ad Targeting Drone Base Communities I

³¹⁵ Phone interview with Author, Domestic 3; 18 March 2019

³¹⁶ “KnowDrones,” 2021



Figure 4.4: 2017 Anti-Drone Television Ad Targeting Drone Operators II

Evocative street and protest art is another way in which the US domestic peace activists advocate moral stances on armed drones. It also sets them apart from their transnational counterparts, as can be inferred from the vignette that opened this chapter. Informed by the use of puppetry and effigy during anti-Vietnam protests, anti-drone activists will sometimes use scaled models of drones to provoke emotional responses from onlookers. According to the creator, who works with a team of artisans in upstate New York and western Massachusetts, using the drone models in protests draw crowds who take photos and experience emotional reactions to seeing the imposing prop. The models are meant to inspire a feeling of existential terror in those who see it, and in some installations, the creator includes a recording camera on the drone with a video screen to make people feel repulsed at the surveillance element. Figure 5 below shows one of the drones this interviewee created.



Figure 4.5: Scaled 8-Foot Long Drone Model Created by Interviewee

New York-based artist and political activist Essam Adam Attia's anti-drone work exemplifies the evocative moral framing and garnered some of the most media attention out of all the US domestic activists. Attia is a veteran and the activist who led the 2019 protest at the UN Headquarters discussed at the start of the chapter. In 2012, Attia created posters imitating NYPD posters and signs and posted them all over New York City. These signs were meant to impose upon the residents of Manhattan the same feelings of insecurity imposed upon individuals living in drone-targeted areas. As in Figures 6 and 7, they include pithy slogans like: "drones, protection when you least expect it," and even "Wanted" posters for President Barack Obama, as seen in Figure 8. This drone protest work made Attia a figure in a high-profile local case, as he was charged with grand larceny, criminal possession of stolen property and 56 counts of possession of forged items. Figures 6, 7, and 8 show examples of this anti-drone street protest art.



Figure 4.6: Street Art in New York City I, NY by Essam Adam Attia



Figure 4.7: Street Art in New York City II, NY by Essam Adam Attia

W A N T E D

FOR MURDER AND CONSPIRACY TO FURTHER
THE REVOCATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL
LIBERTIES



MALE / 50 YEARS OF AGE
HEIGHT 6' 01"



MALE / 65 YEARS OF AGE
HEIGHT 6' 02"

The above are sketches resembling Barack Hussein Obama II, and Willard Mitt Romney, suspects sought for the unconstitutional murder of a U.S. Citizen without due process and conspiracy to further undermine American Constitutional Liberties through a widespread foreign and domestic drone campaign.

DESCRIPTION: (LEFT) MALE, AFRICAN AMERICAN, 50 YRS OF AGE, SLENDER BUILD (180LBS), BLACK GREYING HAIR, SUSPECT WORE A BLACK SUIT WITH RED TIE AND AMERICAN FLAG LAPEL PIN. (RIGHT) MALE, CAUCASIAN, 65 YRS OF AGE, MEDIUM BUILD (190LBS), BLACK GREYING HAIR, SUSPECT WORE A CHARCOAL SUIT WITH BLUE TIE AND AMERICAN FLAG LAPEL PIN.

THE ABOVE SUSPECTS ARE WANTED ACCORDINGLY FOR THE CRIMES OF UNCONSTITUTIONALLY MURDERING A U.S. CITIZEN WITHOUT DUE PROCESS THAT OCCURRED IN AL-JAWF PROVINCE, YEMEN ON SEPTEMBER 30 2011 AND CONSPIRACY TO FURTHER CHALLENGE AND REVOKE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERTIES USING PREDATOR DRONES AGAINST INNOCENT POPULATIONS BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC.

Anyone with information regarding the above suspects please notify local law enforcement immediately.

Figure 4.8: Anti-Drone Art by Essam Adam Attia

At first glance, these examples may seem to fit into the same “Ban Drones” frame utilized by transnational advocacy groups like Drone Wars UK – i.e. that the drone itself is inherently problematic. But this would ignore that in targeting US policymakers exclusively, this brand of provocative pacifism has a distinctly American history to it, one that is steeped in anti-war cultural reactions going back decades. Most notable is the connection to anti-Vietnam messaging and the notion that the US is engaging in wars of imperialist, extractionist aggression. At times, this is a direct connection, as a large number of US anti-drone organizers are retirement age and participated directly in anti-Vietnam protests. For example, on its website, one group cites Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “Beyond Vietnam” – which discusses the role of global economic injustice and extractionism – as being directly relevant to the US’s contemporary drone wars. One activist described the Global War on Terror as “definitely [of] the same character that went on in Vietnam: the amount of killing that’s going on, the amount of secrecy, the amount of suppression, the amount of fear.”³¹⁷ For these domestic activists, drones fit into an overall, historically grounded argument about US foreign policy: namely that the country’s foreign wars are imperial conflicts of extraction. This is an inherently different problem conceptualization from the transnational level.

Faith-Based Ethical “Ban Drones” Frames

The US religious community has not been nearly as involved in advocating against the “Global War on Terrorism” (GWOT) as it was involved in the anti-Vietnam movement. However, while it doesn’t reach this threshold of anti-Vietnam mobilization, the armed drone issue has been a standout issue within GWOT that has animated a significant amount of political organizing and agitation from multiple US religious communities. Some of these organizations, such as the Quakers, adopt an ethical stance

³¹⁷ Phone interview with Author, Domestic 3; 18 March 2019

against war all together, folding the issue into their “swords into ploughshares” movement. Other religious organizations – such as the US Conference of Catholic Bishops – are not wholesale pacifists but do proscribe to the “Just War” (Jus Bellum Justum) theological doctrine, which strives to make the conduct of war morally justifiable. Regardless of whether the group adopting the religiously informed approach is pacifist or not, both frame their advocacy in terms of a religiously-grounded ethics. This quote from one of my interviewees drives home the central ontological importance of approaching their advocacy from a faith-based motivation: “There’s a place in the New Testament where Jesus says he wants his followers to be as wise as serpents but as gentle as doves. So [as activists] we’re pretty good at being as gentle as doves but we’ve also got to be wily like a serpent.”³¹⁸

Both types of religious activists frame drones as a particularly insidious and morally bankrupt instantiation of modern warfare. For example, the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare issued a joint statement to the US Congress in 2019 exemplifying this deeply religious moral frame:

As members of the American faith community, we believe that all people have human rights given to us by God, and that there must be transparency and accountability regarding the use of lethal force undertaken on our behalf. Therefore, we are writing to ask you to end the CIA’s use of armed drones to carry out lethal attacks.³¹⁹

From a theological and philosophical standpoint, these religious activists are concerned with the dehumanizing impact that they see drones as propagating. The focus then becomes the drone technology’s unique ability to create what one reverend activist called “moral disengagement” – both in the general US population through a decreased number

³¹⁸ Phone interview with Author; Domestic 1; 25 October 2018

³¹⁹ It should be noted that while this particular statement only mentions the CIA, the Interfaith Group’s members also largely opposes the use of drones by the Department of Defense.

of US casualties and on the part of the drone pilot who has increased distance.³²⁰ This approach also appears in other religious groups' advocacy products. On the Friends Committee on National Legislation's drone website portal, they make the statement that "drone warfare is a moral and ethical issue as much as a legal one." The post elaborates, drawing on this "moral disengagement" framing: "When drones kill for us, with little public awareness or scrutiny, we can more easily avoid thinking about the human life affected by these conflicts and the common humanity we share with those we are targeting."³²¹ The focus on the shared humanity of those killed in drone strikes, while it appears in secular pacifist activism as well, here draws on a deep religious tradition of human solidarity and dignity, which is unfringeable due to the divine nature of a soul. Advocacy projects inspired by this religious ontology of human solidarity is perhaps best demonstrated in the Interfaith Network's global peace quilt, made on behalf of drone strike victims and displayed during their conferences, depicted below in Figure 9:

³²⁰ *Phone interview with Author; Domestic 2; 16 April 2019*; see Enemark, 2019 for a scholarly article on the related concept of "moral injury" on drone pilots, and Dill 2019 for an equally insightful discussion on the role of the moral responsibility of attackers in individualized warfare.

³²¹ Friends Committee Website, 2021



Figure 4.9: The Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare’s traveling “peace quilt”

This focus on the drone pilot herself, as an individual participating in warfare, is also unique to the US domestic context and finds particular focus in amongst the religious activists. As an outcome of “moral disengagement,” one Unitarian Universalist leader cites “moral injury” as a major problem with drone warfare, both on the part of drone operators and the US public. From a theological perspective, “moral injury” occurs when an individual damages their conscience by partaking in an act of transgression – with the concept of a conscience being a religious concept inextricable from a human’s soul. In this way, drone strikes are akin to creating a collective sin of communal complicity and silence, arising out of the individual sin of the drone operator.

The Interfaith Network makes this “moral injury” a central frame. One way they do this is by showing a shortened version of the film “*National Bird*,” which focuses on the moral anguish of the first drone pilot to have her mental illness diagnosed by the VA as PTSD caused by her service. Though put in secular clinical language in the film, the subsequent speakers at the conference then translate the woman’s agony to a more faith-based parlance.

Hosting veteran speakers with firsthand experience of drone warfare is another way the Interfaith Network uses this “moral harm” frame. There is a specific veteran activist, a Unitarian Universalist Minister, who associated with both the Interfaith Network as well as Veterans for Peace. The Rev. served for five years in the US Army Chaplain Corps and was deployed to Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan in 2012. During a 2018 interview, they described their dilemma of conscience over drones during their deployment as follows:

I saw drones for the first time and it was no longer on the peripheral – it was right there in front of me. And I was really confronted with a decision... Essentially in terms of what I was seeing and what I was learning about, and who I am in terms of what I represent.

Faced with what he considered a moral dilemma, the Rev. addressed what they were perceiving about drones in a sermon in front of freely gathered servicemembers and contractors. They described this moral responsibility in a 2018 interview as follows:

I was there [Afghanistan] as an Army chaplain and it was my responsibility to provide spiritual leadership for the institution of the military, and it was my responsibility to be a moral compass to the institution and to the soldiers and servicemembers in my care. And for me, that meant addressing the moral dimensions of what we were doing.

During our conversation, the Rev. was quick to clarify that they did not see this sermon as a “protest” action, but rather as bearing “prophetic witness.” According to them, “prophetic witness has to do with standing up for moral commitments out of a sense of religious obligation.” Unfortunately for their career in the US Army, their

superiors perceived this sermon as “politically inflammatory,” and it resulted in the issuing of a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand and a release from active duty in Afghanistan.³²²

While the secular peace activists in the US may hold some messaging affinities with the technologically-focused transnationals, it is much easier to observe the stark differences in messaging when observing the religious groups’ ethical frames. Again, these ethical frames are grounded in a focus on banning the drone technology, but with a uniquely American flavor that does not translate well outside of this domestic context. Just as defense and politics have historically been more intertwined in the American context than in the European context, so to has religion and politics. Returning again to the importance of the Vietnam War, we can observe the role of the US religious community in attempting to sway foreign policy through moral messaging. Again, as with the secular peace activists, we can see that drones fit into a more historical advocacy concern that the US’s militarism is oftentimes not guided by “just” causes.

Ethical Frames Facilitating and Complicating Partnerships

When looking at domestic US activists, two patterns are visible in terms of how productively they work with other stakeholders. First are the connections between activists *within* this subsection of the network, which are relatively robust and sustained overtime. Second, however, are the connections between this subnetwork and the overall network, which are quite detached and with fleeting partnerships.

The first part of this chapter focused on detailing the two types of ethical framing of drone advocacy amongst the US domestic activists. While it would seem intuitive that there might be a hard wall between secular and religious activists, this is not the case in

³²² In 2013, Rev. Antal called a Congressional inquiry that found the military command had no grounds for disciplinary action on the grounds that this action had been government interference in religion.

terms of drone activists. For both groups, there is a baseline understanding of war as being morally repugnant, and of drone technologies being a particularly insidious expression of violent conflict. Due to this comparatively hardline stance towards war in general, these domestic activists are willing to adopt radical framing; namely, a “peace” approach that is inflected with a heavy sense of anti-militarism.

Tracing the drone models offers an illustrative example of how these groups work with one another under overlapping ethical anti-war frames as well as a baseline appreciation for how they relate to one another in a horizontal, non-hierarchical manner. As stated earlier, the issue entrepreneur who creates the scaled models distributes them to various groups around the US, including Code Pink and the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare. The Code Pink staffer who designs the organization’s advocacy products identified the drone model as fitting with their approach to protest and acquired one of these models from its makers in 2013. The group still uses it in their Washington DC protests. In addition to utilizing the model, Code Pink and this specific entrepreneur engage in joint speaking tours on “killer drones,” in which they proselytize the need to ban the technology. The issue entrepreneur describes admiring Code Pink’s “insight and tenacity” as an anti-war group, saying it was a main reason that they “still do things in cooperation with them.”³²³ Tracing the drone model beyond Code Pink, the organizers of the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare also utilize one during their regional conferences. The importance here is the shared understandings that these groups hold towards the use of the drone model. It is meant to inspire feelings of aversion in people who see them by bringing the “drone wars” – and violent conflict in general – closer to Americans, making it more visceral.

³²³ Phone interview with Author, Domestic 3; 18 March 2018

In addition to sharing resources, such as the drone model, US domestics engage in jointly funded protest events. This is perhaps most evident in the “flows” of likeminded individuals between in-person protests. The “Shut Down Creech!” annual event discussed above is the most obvious example of this, as it is an official partnership between Code Pink and Veterans for Peace. In addition to this partnership, the event itself draws likeminded peace activists from within the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare as well as individual entrepreneurs such as the creator of KnowDrones.com. Even the veteran Rev. discussed earlier, who does take personal issue with the radical “killer drone” anti-militarism framing of the Creech Air Base protest event, opts to attend the related drone speaking events that occur in Las Vegas simultaneously with the peace campout.

These groups all adopt a distinct “peace” framing of the drone advocacy issue. There is also a significant amount of personal admiration – built upon this foundation of “peace”-oriented political ontology and “rebels with a cause” personas – that plays into the intimacy of these sustained relationships and reported satisfaction with the process of coalition-building. For example, when asked how they choose to form partnerships in their drone work, one activist stated that in addition to auditing the potential partner’s history, they ask themselves: “how do they view the United States and the world and the conduct around military?” They then described partners from within Creative Voices for Non-Violence who have “gotten arrested around drones” as the type of “people I really respect and really like to work with.”³²⁴

However, the factors that help the US domestic network cohere with each other – the shared broad “peace framing” of the technology and reported perceptions of mutually respectful partnering procedures – seems to repel it from the transnationals.

³²⁴ Phone interview with Author, Domestic 3; 18 March 2019

This repulsion goes in both directions, with the transnationals opting not to partner with the domestics, and vice versa. Where processes of internally vetting fellow peace activists resulted in a productive partnership between US activists, vetting processes between US domestic activists and transnationals had the opposite effect. The one example of sustained cooperation within the DC-based working and policy group — offers useful analytical leverage to see the conditions under which these groups with different frames may more readily unify and cohere.

Transnational activists cite the general anti-militarism and radicality of the peace groups as being conversation-stoppers in the halls of power that the transnationals try to influence. As one activist from a prominent humanitarian disarmament organization described their perception of the domestic peace activists' reach: "those groups had less purchase within the political arena than the human rights community."³²⁵ They continued, describing the "rituals" of transnational campaigning — such as compiling a well-researched report that you can "make it thump on the table" of policymakers. They note that this rational approach to data collection sets aside the peace groups from the transnationals: "I think it's kind of crucial that politics has these rituals and processes— that, I think, is common between human rights and humanitarian disarmament [groups]."³²⁶

Complicating the relationship far beyond matters of professional rituals and practice, many transnational human rights groups — such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International — have a foundational position that they will not take stances on issues of war and peace. Put plainly by a Human Rights Watch employee when asked about their position on the armed drone technology: "we do not oppose the use of any

³²⁵ In-person interview with author, New York, NY, *13 October 2017*

³²⁶ *ibid*

particular weapon, other than the ones that are illegal.”³²⁷ The logic behind this approach is that facilitates better access to governments in order to hold them accountable on human rights issues, because discussions about pacifism are “conversation-stoppers” with states and foreign policymakers.

The drone issue itself is particularly complicated when it comes to maintaining this stance of not weighing in on matters of war and peace. This is due to the perception amongst policymakers and military officials that advocating against drones has become inextricably linked with pacifism in civil society circles. This official perception leaks down to some transnational groups as well, as can be seen in this transnational interviewee’s statement:

“A lot of the people within the military ... suspect that a lot of people that are advocating against armed drones are just broadly anti-war... They don’t really like war and therefore they definitely don’t like drones – when they’re trying to campaign against drones, what they really want is for the war in general to stop.”

This link to pacifism is problematic, because according to the transnational activist:

“what it has done to a certain extent is create kind of a bit of a myth, I would say, within the military that the NGO community [as a whole] doesn’t understand what the actual questions *are* in warfare—rightly or wrongly, because they [the military] were like: “drones are no different than any other military technology than we’ve ever used.””

This “myth” about the anti-drone-activism-equals-anti-war appears to over-emphasize both the size and influence of the domestic peace groups within the overall network. This heuristic error appears to impact some transnational groups as well as state officials. For example, the fear of anti-drone advocacy acting as a “conversation-stopper” amongst the key targets of transnational advocacy has actually led some transnational groups to touch on the topic of drones more surreptitiously, in order to completely avoid the stigma of being “anti-war.” In the words of the same activist: “we’ve found actually

³²⁷ Phone interview with Author, Transnational 3; 17 June 2019

that specifically *not* talking about drones has been one of the reasons why we've been able to make such good contacts and connections within the military... And we bring drones into that a lot as like a facilitation method.”

This “myth” of pacifism and the desire to avoid the taint can be seen in a direct example from a US domestic activist’s rejected attempt to partner with Amnesty International. The veteran Rev. discussed above ultimately resigned from the Army Chaplain Corps out of protest over drones and wanted to “capitalize” on the publicity surrounding it. They described wanting “to see if Amnesty would kind of stand behind that and help publicize it and generate some kind of media around it.” Even though they met up with Amnesty International in DC, their attempt to connect was unsuccessful: “At the end of the day they couldn’t really offer much for reasons I still don’t quite understand...” They continue, describing their perception of why this missed connection was the case:

“Amnesty was under some interesting kind of restrictions. Like they don’t – I don’t want to misrepresent them – but they don’t take positions on war or a particular conflict. So part of our messaging in the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare Amnesty couldn’t stand behind because it goes beyond the scope of what they do. So it was complicated politics that seemed to obstruct that.”³²⁸

All of the above being said, it is important to note that the US Domestic are not without connections to the transnationals. These connections have generally been fleeting. For example, returning again to the drone model as a way to trace connections, Amnesty International America contacted the maker in order to acquire and use one for a prop in its educational university speaking tour on drones. This 2013 national speaking tour was named “Game of Drones,” and was coordinated by and conducted through Amnesty’s National Youth Program. After the speaking tour ended – which had been timed to correspond with the release of their high-impact human rights report on a

³²⁸ Phone interview with Author; Domestic 2; 16 April 2019

specific Pakistani drone strike – Amnesty International America stopped using the drone model and no longer kept in contact with the domestic issue entrepreneur. Figure 10 shows its use in a campus visit. As can be seen in the banner, the messaging around the “Game of Drones” tour was to address the specific legal issue of extrajudicial executions, which is notable because the individual who created the drone model is a pacifist who wants to see a total ban on the weapon technology.



Figure 4.10: Banner from Amnesty International 2013 “Game of Drones” Tour

But in addition to these one-off interactions, there has also been at least one example of more sustained domestic-transnational cooperation. As described above, the Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare is a related but separate wing of the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare – specifically, where the Network is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit based in Princeton, New Jersey, the Working Group is a dedicated policy lobbying group based in DC. This working group has maintained thin but sustained ties to the transnational drone activists’ policy group that meets monthly. This transnational working group is the same one described in the previous chapter and has

members from organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Human Rights First..

Observing the flows between these two DC-based groups through their monthly meetings offers some insight into the nature of US domestic-transnational connections. First of all, the ties between these two separate groups are sustained through two key network brokers from the faith-based US domestics' side: an individual well-known in the advocacy circles for their work on the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), and another well-connected individual from the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). Second of all, the flow of information is unidirectional. This is because while the transnationals accept the ties with the nationals, the nationals still maintain a facilitating role, in that their role is to “report back from the policy meetings to the faith groups on how they can help” support the transnationals in their work.³²⁹

Important to note in this example is that the most sustained contact between the transnationals and the US domestics hinges on the professional reputations of two individual faith-based activists. Put simply, this relationship is perceived to “work” because of the trust that these two domestic activists earned amongst transnational activists by participating heavily in the anti-torture campaigns of the early 2000s. Both individuals were heavily involved in the torture advocacy issue during the Bush Administration years, which was a campaign that both the religious organizations and the large transnational organizations easily rallied behind. For the religious organizations, torture was viewed as an affront to humans' God-given dignity and was therefore an “obvious” issue that could sustain heavy faith mobilization.³³⁰ For the transnational organizations, torture was also an obvious issue, but instead due to its absolute

³²⁹ Email interview with Author, Transnational 1; 3 March 2021

³³⁰ Phone interview with Author; Domestic 1; 25 October 2018

prohibition under international law.³³¹ Put plainly, these two activists “earned” the reputation as “serious” issue campaigners worthy of partnering with, thus escaping the anti-militarism orientation to activism that can oftentimes be perceived as “unserious” – and by extension an organizational liability – by the large professionalized INGOs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The previous section detailed the distinct frames adopted by two types of US domestic activists. Where the US domestic activists were able to bring two different types of groups – religious and secular peace groups – under one unifying frame of “armed drones are unethical,” these same groups did not come together with the transnational activists to create an overarching campaign frame. This was not due to a baseline desire from either the domestic or transnational activists not to partner with one another, either. Again, as in Chapter 3, we can see that relational processes between activists occupying different hierarchal points in the transnational network played a part in determining the overall cohesiveness of the anti-drone network’s messaging.

These vetting processes went both ways. For example, the Rev.’s disappointing meeting with AI – when they did not follow up with him – as an example of the traditional elite vetting model, as a gatekeeper did not want to appear too radical.³³² However, we can also see an inverse vetting effect in play, with the US activists who primarily wanted to work with other activists that shared their politically radical stances and horizontal approach to campaign organizing – such as CodePink’s “peace bonding” approach that allows activists to create personal relationships with one another. .

The differences in frames between the US Domestic and the Transnationals center around the radicality of language and messaging around ethics that each

³³¹ Notable here is the difference between torture and armed drones as advocacy issues—drones require a much more nuanced legal and ethical considerations than something as “black-and-white” as torture.

³³² Carpenter 2014

subnetwork is comfortable adopting. This is not to claim, at all, that the work the transnational activists undertake is unethical, or not inspired by a deep understanding of ethics. This is instead referring to the willingness of groups to wear their ethical orientations on their sleeves, through their public advocacy messaging.³³³ Whether religious or secular, the US Domestic activists place their foundational ethics front and center, whereas the transnational activists place their rationality, credibility and methodologies at the public forefront.

The comparison of these two subnetworks and how they relate to one another offers analytical insights about power. In keeping with the insights from the previous chapter, the groups that adopt a more radical framing on drones tend to be the ones that are the most marginalized from both the rest of the network and the policymakers. What sets the US domestic activists apart from the less-powerful activists within EFAD however is their enthusiastic embracing of this “rebel with a cause” identity, with the intentional arrests and lawbreaking as in the case of graffiti and trespassing. Indeed, this “rebel with a cause” identity factored into some domestic activists’ partnering decisions, as they preferred to work with others that they deemed as unwilling to “give in” to power. Again, this radical “anti-war” approach to armed drone advocacy can be couched in a historical tradition of leftist direct political action, and in the drones case, is directly linked to the anti-Vietnam movement.

But the discussion of power would be incomplete without acknowledging the relative power of the US domestic activists to the activists in Pakistan, who are the subject of the next chapter. Stroup reminds us that the host state can exert significant conditioning roles over the nature of advocacy.³³⁴ As activists based in the country whose

³³³ See Rosert and Sauer 2019 for an argument in favor of strategically using an ethical frame to ban killer robots in transnational advocacy

³³⁴ Stroup. 2012

military is conducting the bombing, no matter how pacifist and grassroots these US domestic activists may be, they still enjoy a considerable amount of geopolitical power relative to Pakistani activists. And while the “myth” of the pacifism approach to armed drone technology may be viewed as locking the peace activists out of the halls of power (sometimes to the domestics’ pride, sometimes to their chagrin), the activists still have the ability to participate in the electoral politics of the belligerent country and formally present their government with grievances and requests for information on the drone program, by virtue and privilege of their US citizenship. Equally salient is the fact that many activists at the US domestic level, due to their identities as veterans, have at one point directly served as the “sharp end” of militarized US foreign policy—whether they participated in the US’s contemporary drone wars or a past conflict like Vietnam.

Again, the US domestic activists come the closest to adopting the Neocolonialism Frame, specifically in the discussions of the US’s foreign wars being waged for imperialist, expansionist purposes. But, crucially, these contextual understandings are very dissimilar. When they discuss the violence-affected population in Pakistan, it is through a “give voices to the victims” approach that is actually a more populist mirror of the type of carefully gathered victims testimonies that the transnationals utilize in their reports. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the advocacy frame adopted by some Pakistani activists is much more complicated and nuanced due to their proximity to the violence and experiences of historical dispossession.

CHAPTER 5

Vetting the Boomerang:

Advocating on the Armed Drone Issue from Pakistan

Introduction

In Summer of 2018, I met with Ibrahim³³⁵ in an Islamabad cafe to talk about his NGO's past work on US drone strikes. Ibrahim heads up a small organization in Pakistan, which focuses on social, political and development issues in what was formally called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA; now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or KP).³³⁶ According to The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ), the most reliable source for drone-related casualty recording, drone strikes in this region reportedly killed between 2,500-4,000 people and injured around 1,100-1,700 between 2001 and 2021. Between 424-966 amongst those killed were civilians, and that between 170-200 of these were children.³³⁷ These strikes by the US were accompanied by the Pakistani state's increasingly invasive counterinsurgency operations in the areas, which included activities such as housing demolitions and forced disappearances. Local civil society organizations found these conflict dynamics difficult to address in through advocacy, because at this time the Pakistani state also passed sweeping restrictions on NGO activities. It was in

³³⁵ Given the sensitive nature of the topic, interviewee's names have been changed and identifying information has been largely omitted, unless stories about their advocacy are already publicly available. Due to participant requests, I exclude identifying information about INGOs that communicated or collaborated with these local activists. I rely on broad descriptive accounts of each group, fictional names, and focus more attention on networking processes than exact mapping.

³³⁶ All of my Pakistani interviewees still call KP "FATA" colloquially – this explains the anachronisms in my interview data

³³⁷ "Strikes in Pakistan," n.d.

this hostile domestic environment that a well-known international NGO based in the Global North contacted Ibrahim and proposed that they partner together to work on a project related to the drone strikes. Despite this menacing domestic opportunity structure, and despite the fact that he wished to address the issue of drone strike victim compensation, Ibrahim told this powerful INGO “no.” In the face of all these domestic challenges towards his advocacy work, why would Ibrahim say “no” to linking up with a powerful partner that could have amplified his impact?

Pakistan’s civil society is heavily monitored; issues related to national security are particularly controversial and prone to government interference into advocacy activities. This was especially true in the country’s northwestern tribal areas during the height of the drone strikes. Despite the presence of these factors – conditions that should presumably kick off a boomerang throw – overt instances of local groups and individuals reaching out to the international community to circumvent stagnation on drones have been relatively rare. Given the extreme domestic blockages Pakistani actors faced in addressing drones during the height of the strikes, why didn’t more issue entrepreneurs attempt to connect with powerful international gatekeeper organizations like Human Rights Watch that were *already* advocating on the subject in order to form a unified campaign? What has the drone advocacy network looked like in Pakistan? And how has it related to the grassroots and transnational activism in the North?

Grassroots hesitancy to accept powerful transnational advocacy support is puzzling from an international relations theory standpoint. As described in Chapter 2, the conventional advocacy boomerang model posits that less resource-rich groups link up with better endowed international organizations in situations where political opportunity structures are inconducive to domestic advocacy.³³⁸ Local groups are thought of as

³³⁸ Keck and Sikkink 1998

kicking their grievances up to better known European and/or American organizations, who then popularize the given issue, and advocate on the behalf of or in partnership with their domestic stakeholders. Of course, not every would-be issue entrepreneur's cause gains elite attention, as international gatekeeper organizations carefully "vet" the advocacy topics they undertake.³³⁹ As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, more recent scholarship deepens unidirectional models of transnational advocacy processes by demonstrating that "inverse boomerang" throws also exist, as well as "double boomerangs," "rebounding boomerangs," and even "catapults."³⁴⁰ The inverse boomerang in particular occurs when the larger advocacy groups in the Global North face international policy blockages on their issue of choice, and then seek out partners in the Global South to bolster the legitimacy of their intended campaign.³⁴¹ While useful, none of these models fully explain the dynamics of advocacy surrounding the US's use of armed drones in Pakistan. In this chapter, I show how inverse vetting contributes to this body of theorizing on how actors in the Global South enact agency and impact in transnational advocacy networks.³⁴²

In the previous two chapters, I have considered how relational processes between activists at the transnational level and US domestic level has affected the overall network's ability to cohere around a unified anti-drone campaign frame. In this chapter, I turn to the grassroots political mobilization against armed drones in Pakistan. Drawing on a text and picture dataset of 300 advocacy documents and 13 in-person, semi-structured interviews with key informants in Islamabad, I argue that the local activists who held fundamental differences in how they frame the "problem of drones" from the

³³⁹ Carpenter 2014; Bob 2009

³⁴⁰ Pallas 2017; Almagro 2018; Irvine 2013; Temper 2019

³⁴¹ Pallas 2017

³⁴² Capie 2012; de Almagro 2018; Hertel 2006; Irvine 2013; Pallas 2017; Pallas and Nguyen 2018; Pallas and Urpelainen 2013; Schramm and Sändig 2018; Temper 2019; Wajner 2017

transnational activists either rebuffed or renegotiated networking proposals through a process of “inverse vetting.”³⁴³ In this chapter, inverse vetting occurs when less powerful local actors decide for themselves whether or not to accept a partnering proposal by a transnational group based on the perceived merit of the organization and/or its project. The effect of this refusal complicates the overall campaign’s ability to unify around an impactful advocacy message and to demonstrate the involvement of affected populations – a feature IR theorists point to as bolstering campaign legitimacy.³⁴⁴ Taken together with the findings of the previous two empirical chapters, we can see that inverse vetting within the Pakistani anti-drone advocacy case offers yet another possibility for why the overall anti-drones transnational campaign did not settle on a unifying umbrella frame.

While I have shown similar patterns of less powerful groups resisting the frames and partnerships of more powerful network actors in the previous two empirical chapters, here inverse vetting process is especially central to understanding why certain Pakistani activists chose not to link up to the transnational level. Again, this process is based on these activists’ descriptions of their goals, interests and strategies, with these descriptions being operationalized through frames. Crucially, this refusal to work openly with international partners was not unanimous. The two Pakistani groups that did form open partnerships with transnational organizations – the Foundational for Fundamental Rights (FFR) and Pakistan Body Count (PBC) – share similar framings of armed drones

³⁴³ My interviewees from this chapter were sampled differently than in the previous chapters for reasons of access and security. My initial contact was an individual I personally know through professional associations; they had a preexisting network amongst the individuals I needed to speak with in Pakistan. While I initially attempted to contact the founder of FFR as my first point of contact and snowball sample from there, this individual has since gained a prominent position in the Pakistani government and I was unable to interview them. The interviewees come from diverse occupational backgrounds in order to represent the loose epistemic communities that have worked on drones in Pakistan, including activists, attorneys, NGO personnel, journalists, and data scientists, and were gathered using a snowball sampling technique.

³⁴⁴ Arensman, van Wessel, and Hilhorst 2017; Wong 2012; Stroup and Wong 2017

with their transnational partners. Interestingly, multiple activists who fall into the Neocolonialism frame viewed FFR with similar levels of skepticism as their transnational partners.

The chapter proceeds with a brief case background of US drone strikes in Pakistan, the domestic challenges facing activists, and what mobilization around drones has looked like both transnationally and within Pakistan. I then move into an analysis of this mobilization in Pakistan, detailing how these local activists inversely vetted potential transnational partners. I conclude by considering what this case not only reveals about how actors with varying levels of geopolitical power navigate a network, but also what it reveals about grassroots resistance in the face of national and international state-sponsored violence.

Theorizing Relationships Between Global North and South Activists

As discussed in previous chapters, much of the institutional politics of INGOs literature takes a traditional understanding of “the political,” in that actors’ interests are relatively fixed and rational and that politics primarily happen within formal channels of organizational structures and through official communications.³⁴⁵ This focus centers scholarly attention on the actions and motivations of large, traditional advocacy organizations that are generally headquartered in the Global North.³⁴⁶ This present chapter builds on this literature’s insights, by asking how the grassroots actors’ framing of their work influence their connections and relationships with activists working on the same issue from different transnational sites.³⁴⁷ Framings do not float free from context in transnational space and network positionality is integral to campaign construction and mobilization.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Barnett and Finnemore 2004

³⁴⁶ Epstein 2012; Moreira et al. 2019; Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007

³⁴⁷ For example, see Cloward, 2016

³⁴⁸ Pallas and Urpelainen 2013

Relationships between activists in the Global North and South are characterized by hierarchy.³⁴⁹ For example, the boomerang model of advocacy contends that activists in the Global South maneuver around difficult political opportunity structures and/or lack of resources by reaching out to groups in the Global North.³⁵⁰ This model can also be reversed when global campaigns seek out partners in the Global South to bolster their legitimacy.³⁵¹ The “inverse boomerang” is theorized as creating a paradox, in that Northern partnership with Southern NGOs may boost campaign legitimacy, but it simultaneously undermines meaningful stakeholder input.³⁵² The initial goals and strategies of the Southern groups can be coopted by more powerful groups, who retranslate their frames to sit better with policy relevant audiences – producing the type of “vanilla victories” discussed earlier.³⁵³

A diverse number of actors and professional identities have mobilized around the issue in Pakistan over the past decade. Given this complexity, I adopt a wider conceptualization of who constitutes an “activist,” beyond an NGO-centric professionalized understanding. This approach includes individuals from loose epistemic communities like legal fraternities, data scientists and journalists, all of whom saw themselves at some point during the height of the strikes as doing political work on drones. According to some activists, popular perceptions in Pakistan of local NGOs as being corrupt, funding-driven and/or mouthpieces of powerholders means that a lot of political activism in Pakistan has occurred outside traditional spaces.³⁵⁴

Transnational advocacy issue networks are deeply impacted by broader geopolitical power dynamics. This chapter focuses on one of the processes through

³⁴⁹ Cipleit 2019; Hauf 2017; Duncombe and Dunne 2018: 30; Thayer 2010; Hertel, 2006

³⁵⁰ Keck and Sikkink 1998

³⁵¹ Ibid: 282

³⁵² Ibid

³⁵³ Joachim 2007:136; Stroup and Wong 2017

³⁵⁴ Interview by Author, Islamabad (5 August 2018)

which actors with varying levels of power navigate a civil society network – through inversely vetting more powerful organizations. The inverse vetting concept builds on and extends a growing body of literature examining patterns of activism in the Global South, as well as the fragmenting of civil society more broadly.³⁵⁵ These studies consider the work of grassroots activists at the “other end of the boomerang,” and how less powerful network actors might exert influence on a transnational level.³⁵⁶ The inverse vetting process may show another path through which activists based in the Global South enact agency.

Case Selection Logic

I now turn to a case study on anti-drone mobilization in Pakistan, in which local activists, at least in part, determined the broader transnational issue network’s ability to unify around a clear advocacy message. Pakistan is just one of several countries affected by U.S. drone strikes. The U.S. undertakes lethal drone strikes in six other countries, all with varying levels of intensity, visibility and local conflict levels. Given the diversity of these settings, closely examining any one of these contexts would almost certainly reap different insights. I selected Pakistan as a single most-likely case for transnational advocacy networking for this chapter. This is because while Pakistan is not considered a fully democratic society by sources like Freedom House and the Fund for Peace, it does still have a vibrant – albeit heavily monitored - civil society.³⁵⁷ Under these domestic conditions, we would expect to see local advocacy efforts boomerang.³⁵⁸

U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan

³⁵⁵ Pallas 2017

³⁵⁶ Pallas and Nguyen 2018

³⁵⁷ Freedom House rates Pakistan 38/100, or “Partly Free” (“Freedom in the World 2020: Pakistan” 2020), while the Fund for Peace’s Fragile State Index metrics rates Pakistan at 90.5, with a metric of 120 being the most unstable state in the international system (“Country Dashboard: Pakistan” 2021)

³⁵⁸ Of course, the presence of strong human rights campaigning does not ensure results, especially in states with repressive governments (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007)

While Chapter 1 broadly covers the transnational armed drone issue, it is useful here to specifically and more closely examine the US's history of using armed drones for targeted killings in Pakistan. The US-Pakistani partnership in the Global War on Terrorism has been fraught and generally untrusting.³⁵⁹ On the Pakistani side, this distrust is in part due to the U.S. censure of its nuclear program in the 1990s, and the general perception that the US uses and abandons Pakistan for its own gain.³⁶⁰ U.S. frustration stems mainly from supposedly ongoing Pakistani deep state support for militants like the Haqqani network, despite civilian government assurances to the contrary.³⁶¹ Coupled with the US's perceived strategic importance of Pakistan's tribal areas as an extension of the Afghan battlefield, this uneasy alliance heavily influenced the US's decision to rely on targeted killing by armed drones as its key counterterrorism tactic in Pakistan.

On 18 June 2004, the first recorded drone strike in Pakistan reportedly killed Nek Muhammed Wazir, an individual classified as a target by the US, and his 8- and 10-year-old children, alongside 2-5 others.³⁶² This was one of 51 strikes undertaken during George W. Bush's Administration, which culminated in a final strike on 2 January 2009, just 18 days before President Barack Obama took office. Between 2004-2009, estimates from lowest to highest report that 410-595 people were killed in the Pakistan strikes during the Bush years, with anywhere from 167-332 of these being civilians, and 102-129 of these numbers being children.³⁶³ An additional 175-255 people were reported injured, and during Bush's tenure, the U.S. drone program was never officially acknowledged.

³⁵⁹ Tellis 2008

³⁶⁰ Afzal 2018

³⁶¹ These covert relationships are documented in journalistic sources like Coll 2018

³⁶² "The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

³⁶³ Because the drone program is classified, numbers regarding deaths/injuries are estimates, and are typically reported in ranges from lowest to highest credible numbers. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism cross-references reports from the US and

22 January 2009 - just five days after his inauguration – marked the first strikes under President Obama in Pakistan.³⁶⁴ These strikes heralded in a new phase in US drone warfare in general – one that was much expanded in frequency, intensity and deadliness.³⁶⁵ This new chapter was especially relevant to Pakistan in particular, as dramatically increasing the number of attacks in the tribal regions was a hallmark of the Obama Administration’s strategy – indeed, all 54 drone strikes in 2009 alone took place in Pakistan.³⁶⁶ Between January 2009 and January 2016, Pakistan’s tribal areas saw a minimum of 375 reported strikes, 2,095-3,415 overall reported deaths, and 990-1,474 reported injuries.³⁶⁷

The increasing number of strikes in Pakistan was matched with a greater institutionalization of target killing outside active battle zones into the framework of US foreign policy.³⁶⁸ This legalization – the process of bringing this new practice into preexisting legal frameworks through Office of Legal Council (OLC) memos – focused in large part on strikes outside the active zones of hostility in Iraq and Afghanistan, in order to encompass the Obama Administration’s pivoted focus to Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.³⁶⁹ Alongside this institutionalization, or perhaps as part of it, the Obama Administration offered the first official U.S. acknowledgement of the drone program in

Pakistani governments, credible local and international media and at times INGOs. Some contest the accuracy and reliability of NGO reporting on drone casualties (Fair 2014; Taj 2010)

³⁶⁴ Undertaken in two separate attacks, these strikes killed 14-19 people, all of whom were reportedly civilians. (“The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009.”)

³⁶⁵ Within Obama’s first two terms in office, the number of drone strikes increased six times over, and deaths quadrupled (Jameel 2016: 6)

³⁶⁶ Purkiss and Serle 2017

³⁶⁷ “Strikes in Pakistan,” n.d.

³⁶⁸ Kaag and Kreps 2014; Savage 2015; Scahill 2016

³⁶⁹ Jameel 2016; Zenko 2017

2012. The Administration was slow to reveal its legal justifications for the extra-territorial strikes – leading many to criticize the government’s use of “secret law.”³⁷⁰

Pakistan’s Ambiguous Stance on U.S. Drones

The Pakistani government found itself in a delicate situation regarding its stance on the U.S. strikes,³⁷¹ something that deeply complicated local activists’ attempts to seek redress. The Pakistani government has been reluctant to take ownership – or to even discuss cooperation with the US – in the strikes occurring within its northwestern territories. Admitting complicity would open a floodgate of questions domestically, most controversial of which being why the government cooperated with Americans to kill Pakistanis in Pakistan.³⁷² Public support and endorsement would also raise questions of the government’s responsibility to compensate victims for collateral damage caused by the attacks and could possibly serve as fodder for anti-state groups.³⁷³

On the other hand, the government was also cautious not to disavow *all* responsibility for the bombing. One of the more pressing reasons for this is likely a desire to avoid framing the strikes as an unchecked foreign military incursion into Pakistan’s sovereign territory – something that would portray the state as weak and unable to govern its own territory in an area of crucial strategic interest. The government’s political tightrope walk resulted in what was likely an intentional public stance of ambiguity towards the drone strikes. As former President Pervez Musharraf reportedly told a CIA employee regarding plausible deniability: “in Pakistan, things fall out of the sky all the time.”³⁷⁴ Activists cite this quote as revealing the extreme challenges they face on the issue.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ Jameel 2016

³⁷¹ Byrne 2016

³⁷² Interview by author, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

³⁷³ Ibid

³⁷⁴ *The New York Times*, 6 April 2013

³⁷⁵ Akbar 2017

Pakistani Civil Society Mobilizing Against Drones

Pakistani nongovernmental groups face significant challenges regardless of which issues they work on, and government regulations at times impedes operations. The 2011 Save the Children controversy – in which a CIA agent used a vaccination program to gather intelligence on Osama bin Laden - served as the inciting incident for a broad and lasting crackdown on international organizations within the country.³⁷⁶ Subsequent legislation regarding INGO license registrations has made it difficult for some organization to continue operations and has resulted in the expulsion of at least 20 INGOs on the basis of suspected anti-state activity.³⁷⁷ Working with INGOs has also become more difficult for domestic groups under these restrictions, as the domestic groups bring more government scrutiny on themselves in attempting to register international partners, or to receive international funding.

Despite this difficult operational landscape, domestic mobilization against the drone strikes did exist in significant ways during the height of the bombings between 2010 and 2017. Islamabad has been a key hub of Pakistani anti-drone activity. It houses the headquarters of organizations that have worked on drones, such as the Foundation for Fundamental Rights, the Conflict Monitoring Center, the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies and others. It is also the location of relevant law and media offices of notable attorneys and journalists, who have at times acted as individual issue entrepreneurs from within loose epistemic communities. Since it is Pakistan's political capital and is relatively close to the drone-affected tribal regions, Islamabad also served as a base for significant

³⁷⁶ This resultant vaccine hesitancy out of feared CIA involvements continues into 2021, complicating COVID-19 vaccination programs in the country. Since the Osama bin Laden raid, childhood vaccinations have declined 23-39% in areas with high levels of support for religiously extreme political parties in Pakistan (Uildriks 2021). See also Matejova, Parker, and Dauvergne 2018 for a discussion on how domestic environmentalist activists with connections to the transnational level can be viewed as foreign agents in repressive domestic contexts

³⁷⁷ Associated Press, 2018

drone protest activity, especially outside of the National Press Club. Indeed, popular protest was one of the three primary strategies of drone strike resistance in Pakistan, with the other two being litigation and data advocacy (or, the collection of statistics on casualties).

Protests and public demonstrations were a key form of domestic mobilization against drones in Pakistan. These protests occurred both in the targeted areas of the tribal regions where they blocked NATO supplies from entering Afghanistan, as well as large cities like Peshawar and Islamabad.³⁷⁸ These protests typically coincided with specific strikes, such as the 2011 bombing that killed at least 38 people gathered for a tribal dispute resolution meeting.³⁷⁹ The most notable of these demonstrations was led by Pakistani politician Imran Khan in 2012, when he tried to lead a convoy of 100 vehicles from Islamabad to South Waziristan to bring international attention to the strikes; international activists from Code Pink and Reprieve UK were amongst the delegation.³⁸⁰ Khan served as a prominent, key voice against drones before his election as Prime Minister in 2018, oftentimes condemning the policy in speeches and rallies.³⁸¹

Litigation advocacy was also a key tactic for trying to address the damage caused by drone strikes in Pakistan. Indeed, a large number of individuals who worked on the armed drone issue were attorneys at various levels of the Pakistani courts. Litigation advocacy primarily focused on individual victim compensation by the Pakistani government, and these suits took place both on individual levels and also through NGOs. In one case filed on behalf of the Rehman family at the Supreme Court of Pakistan, advocates petitioned Pakistan's interior ministry to provide compensation for

³⁷⁸ Guerin, 2012

³⁷⁹ *BBC News*, 2011

³⁸⁰ Khan and Mullen, 2012

³⁸¹ Some experts see that Khan's involvement was for electoral purposes only (Interview with Massoud, Islamabad, 5 August 2018).

the deaths of ten kinsmen in a single drone strike.³⁸² The most (in)famous of these cases – a victim compensation suit for KP resident Kareem Khan – resulted in the intentional outing of the CIA station chief in Islamabad, as he was named as party to the suit.³⁸³ The CIA employee was recalled from Pakistan, something that Shahzad Akbar – Khan’s attorney – attributed to a desire not to appear in court, since he might not qualify for diplomatic immunity.³⁸⁴

These compensation cases were difficult to argue and nearly impossible to win in Pakistan for several reasons. First, as discussed earlier, the Pakistani government wanted to avoid inadvertently admitting complicity by granting victim compensation. Second, before 2018 the drone-affected population – all residents of the tribal regions – were unable to petition the Supreme Court under a law called the Frontier Crimes Regulation. Lastly, the ultimate responsibility of a foreign government for the killing complicated attempts to litigate victims’ cases domestically.³⁸⁵ Due to these challenges, the cases were elevated to the international level for publicity. In 2013, the Rehman family traveled with Akbar (their attorney) to Washington D.C. to testify in front of the U.S. Congress.³⁸⁶ This publicity event took the collaboration of Akbar’s Foundation for Fundamental Rights and the U.K.-based organization Reprieve.³⁸⁷ In a separate international publicity campaign, a Pakistani journalist brought the family’s young girl Nabila, her father, and Khan to Japan in order to discuss the fallout of the drone program with the Japanese government and media.³⁸⁸

³⁸² Dearden, 2016

³⁸³ For an example of this litigation advocacy, see the Reprieve UK case summary page on Kareem Khan (“Kareem Khan,” 2015)

³⁸⁴ Mehsud and Narayan, 2014

³⁸⁵ Akbar, 2017

³⁸⁶ McVeigh, 2013

³⁸⁷ See the Amnesty International report for details on this specific strike (“Will I Be Next?: U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan” 2013)

³⁸⁸ Singh, 2016

Lastly, data advocacy was another significant way that Pakistani issue entrepreneurs confronted U.S. drone strikes. Since the early days of the war on terror, transnational data activists in large part focused on casualty counting. This tactic became popularized amongst activists specifically during the 2003 Iraq War, with groups like Iraq Body Count (IBC) creating a public database on the number of people killed during the conflict.³⁸⁹ With transparency and accountability being two primary concerns of data advocacy, the opaqueness of the drone war in Pakistan alarmed many national and international activists.³⁹⁰ Since the drone program is classified, official data on drone-related deaths has been hard to come by, and White House reporting on the numbers has been widely criticized as being too low.³⁹¹ The group Pakistan Body Count (PBC) – headed by data scientist Zeeshan Usmani – followed the model of IBC. PBC recorded deaths caused by both U.S. drone strikes as well as terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Given the controversial nature of measuring Pakistani attitudes on drone strikes, other data advocacy groups conducted public opinion research in the tribal regions.

Negotiating the Boomerang

Individuals and groups that held significantly divergent understandings of the “drone problem” tended to avoid overt ties with transnational civil society. A closer look suggests that rather than just being a product of different understandings, the local actors who chose to rebuff or renegotiate partnering overtures with transnational groups reportedly did so because they did not assess them as worthy partners. These inverse vetting processes sometimes resulted in a refusal to work on drones with international partners at all, or resulted in processes of re-negotiation so that the proposed partnership better represented their interests.

³⁸⁹ See Iraq Body Count’s website for information on analytics (“Iraq Body Count,” n.d.)

³⁹⁰ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism’s website portal on drones describes its major concerns with covertness and lack of transparency

³⁹¹ Serle, 2018

Rather than falling into the “Ban Drones” or “Lawful Usage” frames described in Chapter 1 and explored in Chapters 3 and 4, many of these local actors fall into the third frame category: the “Neocolonialism” frame. The “Neocolonialism” frame is more complex than the other categories, because it does not easily mesh with professionalized understandings of transnational advocacy. Here, technology, policy, state control, colonial legacies, and even hierarchy in transnational *civil* society are all imbricated problems. This differing frame, explored through interview evidence below, included a general distrust of INGOs as institutions and the problem conceptualization of drones as being merely one of many human security issues in KP. Indeed, due to a hostile political opportunity structure, activists described having to be extra cautious when choosing international partners in order to make sure the groups were trustworthy and would not betray their confidential assistance. In these ways, after making offers for partnership, gatekeeper organizations were subjected to vetting processes by these grassroots actors according to internal standards of ethicality and efficacy.

All of that being said, there are prominent examples of Pakistani issue entrepreneurs and NGOs that *did* form robust and public ties with transnational civil society. These organizations – Foundational for Fundamental Rights and Pakistan Body Count – present similar problem conceptions and engage in the same advocacy repertoires as their transnational partners – they more easily fall into the “Lawful Usage” and “Ban Drones” frames. The analytical portion of the chapter is structured around exploring the unique dynamics present in these two clusters: groups that either avoided or heavily renegotiated relationships with transnationals, and groups that formed relationships with international partners.

Skepticism towards INGOs and Transnational Society

According to several informants, the perceived untouchability of the drone issue in Pakistan and the possibility of INGO complicity with perpetrating governments or

methodological carelessness with confidentiality was a key reason that they cited for vetting transnational partners. Rather serving as a key impetus for reaching out to gatekeepers, the unique challenges of advocating on a national security-related issue from Pakistan led these actors to either renegotiate or circumnavigate the conditions of partnering in transnational advocacy. According to these activists, this was because the dangerous conditions made finding reliable partners essential. For example, this perception of danger for activists, at least in one important incident, led a local group to insist on renegotiating a collaborative proposal made by a large international organization.

In addition to their career as a journalist, Ibrahim headed up a human security organization during the crescendo of US drone attacks. Ibrahim explained to me how in his opinion, the external dangers made the need for caution in conducting anti-drone advocacy and by extension choosing international partners very real. When I asked him to elaborate on these consequences for not being cautious with anti-drone advocacy in Pakistan, Ibrahim elaborated:

Author: Because the government could block funding? Or block the project?—

Ibrahim: They can block *us* (*Ibrahim laughs darkly*).

Author: Yeah? The organization?

Ibrahim: They [Pakistan's security forces] can do whatever they wanted, you probably would be no more, if they don't like you to be. To be no more ... That's an easy job for them. So why should we be taking on things this way?"³⁹²

According to Ibrahim, the knowledge of these potential consequences factored into the need to vet potential international partners for reliability. It was in this security context that a large, well-known INGO that I will call Human Security

³⁹² Ibid. Anti-drone activists have been disappeared in Pakistan (Mehsud and Narayan 2014). Additionally, the Pakistani security force's legacy of enforced disappearances and government hostility towards NGOs corroborates this perception of danger. See "We Can Torture, Kill, or Keep You for Years," 2011.

Champions (HSC)– which is primarily focused on accountability, transparency and human rights – first made contact with his group, according to Ibrahim. Given a desire to keep both his staff and organization safe, he rebuffed HSC’s initial proposal.

Ibrahim described the outreach as such:

“Human Security Champions worked quite closely on this very issue [armed drones]... and they were ... asking for someone to partner with [so they] could get the issue published. But we were again, not willing and not able to do that under our name because it involves quite a bit of sensitivities, and here in Pakistan you know it’s impossible to talk- to get that published. So, we couldn’t do that ...³⁹³

Ibrahim rebuffed HSC’s initial proposal to partner, because they originally wanted to use his organization’s name for transparency purposes. He ended up negotiating a partnership with HSC that better suited his group’s unique position.

They describe this negotiated compromise below:

“We reached an understanding with [HSC] that we gather data from the people [in FATA]. We gathered some data about people, pictures, some evidences, and then we had some interviews and video evidence from the ground, um but again we were not able to get that published [under our name].

That was the understanding, we had the data on the numbers, how much was the number of the drone attacks, where were these drone attacks ... So that was the understanding, that we would do that [share information] but not under our own name. I have been providing them some input on that very issue, but when it would come to my name, uh, putting me- or for that matter doing that under *my* name, I would say no.”³⁹⁴

This was indeed a process of negotiation between two actors with differing interests and vastly differing levels of power. Like other powerful INGOs, HSC puts a premium on accountability and transparency of information and sources, an operational procedure arising from their reputational need for credibility.³⁹⁵ According to Ibrahim,

³⁹³ Ibid

³⁹⁴ Ibid

³⁹⁵ Stroup and Wong 2017

HSC even suggested that they could work in an open partnership if he conducted the work under the mantle of a different domestic institution he was also affiliated with, in order to avoid naming his NGO. Ibrahim still “said no” to this revised proposal, and the partnership remained anonymous. Ibrahim’s NGO facilitated the fieldwork, while HSC used the information gathered to launch an influential report at the transnational level. In his words, Ibrahim had only agreed to partner after HSC could reliably demonstrate that they would take steps to protect their local partners and not merely benefit by extracting information and labor.³⁹⁶

A healthy skepticism towards the motivations, efficacy and methods of transnational society. In addition to questioning the ability of INGOs to keep local partners safe, some respondents described to me that distance from the problem and a supposed lack of understanding of the tribal region’s conflict dynamics made INGOs poor potential partners. In light of these positions, the implementation of local actors’ goals and strategies resulted in a process of rigorous inverse vetting – in which external project proposals were measured against specific internal standards of quality and ethicality.

For example, one reason that this inverse vetting process ended in rejection, according to what a local actor explained to me, was because they assessed a would-be transnational partner’s project as being poorly designed. HSC was not the only

³⁹⁶ As an aside, Ibrahim’s intuition regarding the project’s contentiousness was borne out. HSC faced swift backlash from the Pakistani government upon the publication of the collaborative report. The document contains damning information about civilian harm caused by drones, evidenced in the interviews collected by Ibrahim’s organization. It also focuses criticism on both the US and Pakistani governments for not only failing to compensate drone strike victims, but also for perpetuating the poor human rights conditions in the tribal areas. In reaction, the Pakistani government banned the report’s lead author from returning to the country. The local chapter is now heavily observed; it requires prior approval for all its activities and had to abandon the drone issue altogether. In Ibrahim’s words on the backlash, “all that we were expecting, happened” Author interview with Ibrahim (7 August 2018).

international organization to reach out to Ibrahim's group. An equally influential and more widely recognizable human rights gatekeeper organization that I will call International Human Rights Defenders (IHRD) also contacted Ibrahim as part of its wider drone-related advocacy. However, Ibrahim was much less enthusiastic about this INGO's work, as they detail below:

“IHRD worked a lot on the issue, and they would reach out to me from time to time, but that was not a properly designed study. That would be from, sort of project to project or say, for an article, or for that matter for the research ... they would be just reaching out, asking for some questions, asking for some input I would be providing to them, and that's not a properly designed study”³⁹⁷

Ibrahim clarified that where their confidential work with HSC was a real “partnership,” the type of collaboration IHRD proposed was a much less desirable parachuting in method. According to him, HSC's desire to “get the story in FATA right” through intensive, on the ground fieldwork was a key difference between the two international groups' approaches:

“HSC did the project the way it should be. We filtered our people on the ground; we sent them out to FATA, South Waziristan, and everywhere we had these drone attacks on. They gathered the data; they collected the evidences [sic]; they did the whole tour on the ground; and we got that collected.”³⁹⁸

The grievance that led Ibrahim to rebuff IHRD's proposal – that internationals do not want to take the time to get FATA's story correct “from the ground” – threaded through several interviews I conducted in Islamabad. The animating assumption of this grievance is that transnational civil society's geographic and symbolic distance from Pakistan's tribal regions breeds misperceptions over the human security problem in the area. For example, another interviewee named “Saeed” characterized INGO work on drones in Pakistan as primarily occurring from a “safe distance.” When asked about

³⁹⁷ Author interview with Ibrahim (7 August 2018)

³⁹⁸ Ibid

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch’s work on the subject in the country, Saeed – an attorney based in Punjab – interrupted:

“Where?! Drone strikes were happening *in* Pakistan! Alright? Maybe they were raising voices against... They were raising voice against [drones] at UN...”
[They continued by clarifying why this distance is insulting, stating:] “...my point of view is, that even when your own government is silent, who will speak on your behalf? And who will speak on behalf of the people of FATA?”³⁹⁹

In addition to appraising the methodology of a proposed project, this inverse vetting also extended to scrutinizing the funding agency behind INGO projects. This is evidenced in ‘Fahad’s’ decision to reject an offer of project partnership with a third INGO, which I will call Global Development Coalition (GDC) due to the fact that the project was funded by USAID. Fahad is the former president of a development-focused NGO that works in FATA, while GDC is a large international organization that focuses primarily on development in conflict and post-conflict zones, including projects on countering violent extremism. GDC contacted Fahad and proposed that their organizations collaborate on a rehabilitation project focused on civilians injured by the war on terror in what was then FATA. This project included working with victims of explosive remnants of war more generally, but also with civilians specifically affected by drone strikes. Fahad describes the project below, as well as the reason for rejecting it:

“...that [project] was particularly for the bomb blast, you know, victims’ families and those who were injured in the bomb blast. It was funded by USAID, so we refused to partner. We received an offer from that organization [GDC]... [but] the funding was from USAID, so I refused. I said: ‘it’s just hypocrisy.’”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Author Interview with Saeed 6 August 2018

⁴⁰⁰ Author Interview with Fahad, Islamabad, 13 August 2018

Where Ibrahim had rejected an inverse boomerang throw for methodological reasons, Fahad rejected the gatekeeper's overture for ethical reasons. The partnership GDC proposed would have certainly amplified the type of work Fahad's group was already conducting in FATA. However, for Fahad, the proposed project's monetary connection to very state perpetrating the violence was a red line he would not cross.

Drones as Only Part of a Bigger Problem

Individuals that I spoke to who were from the drone-affected areas tended to view the security situation in the tribal regions much more broadly and historically than any single military tactic like drone strikes. For context, the legitimacy of the Durand Line – drawn up by colonial powers in 1893 to separate Afghanistan and Pakistan– has fomented ongoing conflict between both state and nonstate actors in the area. The border divides the region historically inhabited by Pashtun tribes – an ethnic group indigenous to the region that is now southern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. This diaspora led to intense anti-colonial sentiments amongst the Pashtuns towards imperial Britain, and the continued recognition of the border motivates ongoing Pashtun nationalism that sees itself as oppositional to the Pakistani state. These pre-existing tensions came to the fore post-9/11, when the U.S. war in Afghanistan pushed militants deep within Pakistan, inflaming pre-existent domestic extremism issues. The post-9/11 period has proven a bloody one for residents of the tribal areas, who are squeezed between terrorist attacks and extortion by extremists, and counterinsurgency operations by the state.

My interactions with “Massoud” offers an example of how some local actors view drone activism as fitting into this complex human security situation. Massoud is a Pashtun rights activist. Their work on the drone issue began early– according to them, they organized and led one of the first large protests against the policy in Islamabad. Massoud was quick to note that their involvement in protest activities was *specifically*

against the deaths caused by the 2011 *jirga* strike, that this activism was not in tandem with international groups' or Imran Khan's work on the subject, and that the extrajudicial killing of the targeted militants was not his concern:

“When I was protesting, it [the motivation] was drone attack on civilians. The village council – the *jirga*... Many of the elders were just killed in that drone. That's why I came out. Otherwise I was very loud against these armed groups. From the jihad and all the things. I denounce [militants] openly in my writings and speeches. But when that happened on *jirga*, I said no. That's not the way.”⁴⁰¹

This qualifying language about drone protests being disconnected from support for militants gets to the heart of what Massoud thinks outsiders supposedly do not understand about FATA's political situation. Namely, that the tribal area's residents are not only killed in occasional drone strikes by the US government, but that they are also constantly subjected to terrorist attacks by militants and large-scale military operations by the Pakistani military. And, importantly, that many Pakistanis outside the tribal regions supposedly do not know much about the tribal regions due to its lack of coverage in the mainstream domestic media. Massoud continued, explaining to me his opinion that INGOs do not grasp this unique conflict situation:

“Massoud: And by the way, the international organizations, the NGOs, are not very much aware of the dynamics. Because they are not aware about the relationship between the state and the tribal region. They don't pay any attention to see how the state – you know what are the rules of business of the state in the region.

Author: Could you go into that more? What don't they understand?

Massoud: Okay, uh, this region, the people of this region, they used for the Afghan war in the 80s. It was a very groundbreaking process for militarizing everything. Once they successfully militarized, then every action on them was justified. In Pakistan and internationally. And even the US, the Americans,

⁴⁰¹ Author Interview with Massoud, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

considered these peoples savages. They considered the people savage, not -you know- human. There is no civilization, people are still living in tribal situations, its lawless, and no-man's land. It's lawless, so we *have* to do this [intervene militarily].”

‘Shoaib’ (another interviewee present): *Ilaqa gher* means the land of others. It is the *ilaqa gher* of Pakistan. It is a state word used for the tribal area.”

Massoud: The people within Pakistan, the policymakers and the researchers again they are not familiar with the dynamics in the tribal areas. How can international NGOs be? They are just imposing things. It is counter-productive ... The international organization are not accurate while making opinion.”⁴⁰²

As seen from this exchange, the perception of distance and power asymmetries between themselves and transnational civil society arises largely from this region's difficult human security situation. This attitude was most pronounced in interviews with individuals from the tribal regions, like Massoud. This exchange also highlights how some local actors closest to the conflict think that transnational actors do not understand the conflict dynamics of the tribal regions enough to represent their interests. Of course, these are statements of opinion by specific individuals, and merely represent a perception and not necessarily objective reality. For example, as described earlier, the report that Ibrahim and HSC collaborated on did focus significant attention on the totality of the tribal area's challenges.

That being said, this “Neocolonialism” frame's broad framing of human security threats is generally very different from how transnational civil society groups work, since professionalized organizations tend to focus on rigidly delineated issues. For example, both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch focus on concepts such as the legality of targeted killing, as well as the proportionality of civilian casualties in drone strikes. Activists like Massoud are more concerned with a broader tapestry of civilian

⁴⁰² Ibid

harm in the tribal areas, including civilian casualties by drones, but also internally displaced peoples, cultural discrimination, economic justice, and how both historical and modern colonial underpinnings perpetuate these problems. Out of this unique security situation arises the perception that the extrajudicial killing of terrorist suspects is not a problem with drones, but in fact a potential benefit. Additionally, given the general antagonistic attitudes towards the state within ethnic nationalist circles, concerns over state sovereignty are also non-issues. The “problem with drones” for these individuals then mostly surrounds lawful usage – civilian deaths, societal harm, cultural sovereignty, and the potential that the Pakistani state is complicit in the U.S. operations.

“Afzal,” an author who has published on these conflict dynamics in the tribal areas, explained his perception of these operational and ideational differences between the local and transnational:

“So the international NGOs that are protesting, they are right in their own place because drones are used against humans. And whosoever is targeted by drones is killed extrajudicially. And this is wrong. That is against human rights, that is against fundamental rights, it is against anything that stands in this world. Whether it is religious or secular. So that is the major issue. We have another understanding... In Pakistan, Taliban are the vanguard of the Pakistani military establishment. So they [the Taliban] go there, and the military will follow.

When they [INGOs] are speaking against the drone they ... actually want peace. And when there is drone - the use of weaponized drone - that means there is no peace. It is disturbed. And so at their level they are right.

But when it comes to the ground realities, when it comes to the common people, the affectees, so the people who are affected by the existence of these militants... If there are Taliban, and the drones are targeting, they will feel relieved. But the people at the international level, when they are campaigning against the drones at the international level, they actually want peace. They are against the extrajudicial killing of any individual; citizen of any country.

So they are right at their own level. People here are right at their own...

... We do respect those [INGO] people who are against drones [targeting suspects]. But the people would certainly see that how drone is used ... usually a common man, is *least* concerned with international politics.”⁴⁰³

These differences in problem conception seemed to be a major reason activists like Massoud was uninterested in initiating ties with transnational groups, even when they were resisting drone strike casualties through protest with no response from the government. According to them, a focus on just one tactic like drones – rather than the entire portrait of dispossession, explained by Afzal above – is a simplistic understanding of the human security crisis the tribal areas face. For example, it was Massoud’s interpretation that many individuals in the tribal areas regard the militants who terrorize their villages and families with much more hatred than the drones. Again, in this context, drones are a problem when they hit and terrorize the wrong people – the legitimacy of extrajudicially killing a ‘combatant’ is a non-issue, since these may be the same individuals perpetrating violence in their communities. According to Massoud as well as another interviewee named ‘Shoaib,’ this was to the extent that some locals came to call the U.S. drones *ababil* – a reference to great Quranic birds that would drop tiny stones from the sky onto the approaching enemies of Mecca to kill them instantly.⁴⁰⁴ Massoud continued, elucidating how some individuals in FATA perceive the “biggest” threat in the wider humanitarian crisis to be the Pakistani state:

“Those who are in favor of drone attacks were actually looking into it as an alternative to a massive military operation. Due to this massive and large-scale military operation, people used to force to move out of their towns, and farms. They forced to stay away from their villages. Larger destruction than drones.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Author Interview with Afzal, Islamabad, 11 August 2018

⁴⁰⁴ Author Interview with Shoaib, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

⁴⁰⁵ Author Interview with Massoud, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

This quote suggests that many closest to the ground are view acts of violence by both state and nonstate according to scale – and that drones are ‘the lesser evil’ in this calculus. A resident of KP who was present during my interview, “Javed,” was quick to agree with this assertion, but warned that “nobody is supporting drone without comparison.”⁴⁰⁶ Indicative of this complicated political context, Massoud informed me of another word locals used to describe drones: *mangana*. *Mangana*, they explained, captured the sound of the drone, but also the psychological terror that the buzz instilled in people at the height of the bombing. Massoud elaborated, comparing the drones to alternative repertoires of violence: “They are both evils, but nobody likes it. It’s [drone strike] a lesser evil... But it *is* an evil.”⁴⁰⁷ Descriptors like *ababil* and *mangana* demonstrate how activists like Massoud, Javed and Shoaib might perceive the focused messaging by INGOs, and even mid-level groups like Code Pink, as frustrating for their own political ends. This is because, in their opinion, the issue-based focus of transnational groups working on drones steamrolls the complicated local conflict dynamics within FATA. Javed’s closing statement eloquently presented this sentiment:

“*We* are the victims. Whether the drones are ‘legal’ or ‘illegal,’ our people suffer, our children suffer, our schools and institutions suffer... So we are the victim. If someone says [under international law] it was militant who was the victim, it is not right. *We* are the victims.”⁴⁰⁸

Making Connections

While all of the above suggests how differences in framing might kick off inverse vetting processes and ultimately hamper relationships with transnational NGOs, two outlying examples of close partnering between transnational and Pakistani NGOs merit closer examination. These Pakistani NGOs – the Foundation for Fundamental Rights

⁴⁰⁶ Author Interview with Javed, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

⁴⁰⁷ Author Interview with Massoud, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

⁴⁰⁸ Author Interview with Javed, Islamabad, 5 August 2018

(FFR) and Pakistan Body Count (PBC)– collaborated with transnational activists to differing extents.⁴⁰⁹ The anti-drone frames that both organizations chose cohered with the hegemonic framing at the transnational level – the “Lawful Usage” frame. Since frame choice is a key factor that goes into whether or not a group engages in inverse vetting, these frame similarities between these two Pakistani NGOs and their transnational partners may have made their relationships less conflictual. In their own ways, both of these organizations’ presentations of the “drone problem” map onto their transnational counterparts’ “Lawful Usage” framings, unlike the groups discussed above who fall into the “Neocolonialism” frame.

Founded by barrister Shahzad Akbar, FFR is a Pakistani human rights NGO that advocates on issues such as lethal drone strikes, state torture and capital punishment. Attorneys affiliated with the NGO represented compensation cases for drone strike victims in national courts with the aim of holding responsible both the Pakistani and US governments. For example, FFR filed a case on behalf of families affected by the 2011 *jirga* strike in which the Peshawar High Court ruled that US drone strikes were illegal, and that the Pakistani government must provide legal redress to the victims. Explaining the case, FFR argues that “the strikes constitute a serious breach of the Geneva Conventions,” and that “the U.S. Government is bound to compensate all the victims’ families and that the Pakistani Government should take steps to ensure that this happened immediately.”⁴¹⁰ For an example of the “Lawful Usage” Frame on FFR’s website, see Figure 1:

⁴⁰⁹ These network ties were qualitatively tracked through two different approaches. First, these domestic NGOs were mentioned, without prompting, in interviews with transnational activists. Second, these qualitative mentions were corroborated through documentary evidence, like website linking, joint reports and co-signed statements.

⁴¹⁰ Foundation for Fundamental Rights. Drone Litigation. Available at http://www.rightsadvocacy.org/drone_litigation.html

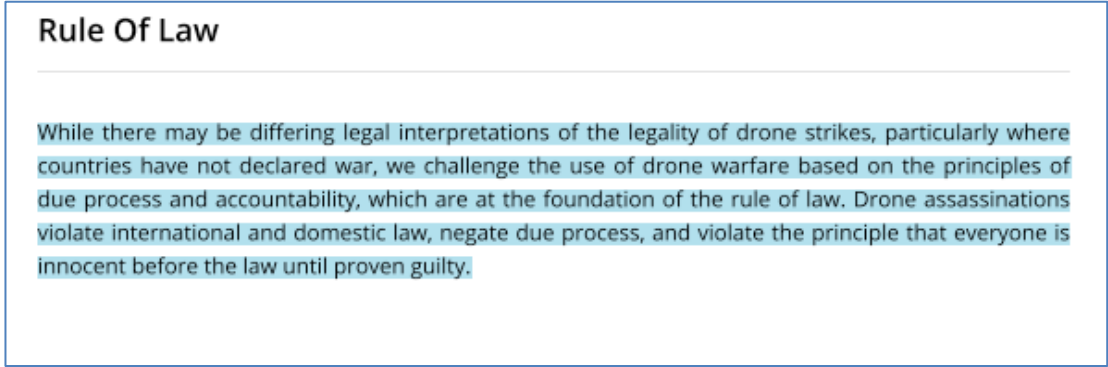


Figure 5.1: “Lawful Usage” Frame on FFR’s Drone Portal

The most (in)famous of these cases was the one filed on behalf of Kareem Khan, in an attempt to bring a criminal case against CIA officials in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, Akbar purposely outed the identity of the CIA station chief in Islamabad by naming him as a party in the lawsuit, stating that the US had no “legal authority” to conduct lethal strikes within the country.

Data scientist Dr. Zeeshan Usmani founded PBC in 2006 in order to create a dataset of terrorist bombings for his doctoral dissertation. Frustrated with the lack of credible casualty numbers in what was formerly called FATA, Usmani later expanded his initial advocacy project to include the armed drone issue to his website’s database. PBC collected this data from media sources and hospitals and published the numbers on their website in order to publicize the “intensity” of the human security situation in Pakistan. As an academic and data scientist, Usmani has published research on drone deaths in venues such as Brown University’s Cost of War project.⁴¹¹ While he stopped updating the project’s online presence in 2014, PBC offers several models of data presentation, from charts with granular details of individual strikes to interactive maps that allows visitors to see the exact location of the strikes.

⁴¹¹ Usmani and Bashier 2014

Unlike the individuals and group discussed in the previous subsection, FFR and PBC have partnered openly with multiple international groups, including both national- and transnational-focused groups. PBC is a member of the transnational casualty recorders network called Every Casualty, which also includes international NGOs like members of the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) Article 36 and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ). In terms of nationally-focused NGOs, Akbar and CodePink founder Medea Benjamin share both a close professional relationship. In 2012, by invitation of Akbar and Imran Khan, CodePink members travelled to Islamabad in order to participate in a planned anti-drone protest, called The Waziristan Peace March. The CodePink delegation of 35 Americans met with Shahzad Akbar in Islamabad, where they hosted a joint news conference for their planned march. This protest was planned as a caravan to South Waziristan but was blocked at a checkpoint before it could enter the tribal areas. Both groups' stated purpose of the march was to bring visibility to the civilian casualties caused by drones, and the illegal lethal targeting by the US government.⁴¹²

In terms of the transnational level, Akbar himself is a key network broker within the wider drone issue area. While running FFR, he also held a long-term visiting research fellowship at Reprieve – a UK organization and EFAD member. In this partnership, FFR has played a largely facilitating role, brokering meetings with people impacted by US drone strikes in Pakistan across Europe and the US. He also speaks about the human rights implications of drone strikes in international forums well-attended by policymaking audiences, such as a side event on armed drones at the UN in 2017, and an event in

⁴¹² Foundation for Fundamental Rights. March to Waziristan. Available at: http://www.rightsadvocacy.org/campaign/march_waziristan.html

Islamabad where he hosted a UN Special Rapporteur.⁴¹³ Figure 2 below shows a visual example of these transnational linkages from FFR’s website:

<p>FFR Hosts UN Special Rapporteur Ben Emmerson QC</p>	<p>Waziristan Peace March With CODEPINK And Reprive (UK)</p>
	
<p>FFR hosted the inquiry held by UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson QC who launched a formal investigation into the civilian impact of the use of US drones and other forms of targeted killing, focusing on the applicable legal framework, and a critical examination of the factual evidence concerning civilian casualties.</p>	<p>As part of our anti-drone campaign, the Foundation for Fundamental Rights along with the legal charity Reprive (UK) and PTI Chairman, Imran Khan invited CODEPINK and foreign filmmakers to take part in the Waziristan Peace March on 6th- 7th October 2012 against the use of US drones in Pakistan which have killed hundreds of civilians to date.</p>

Figure 5.2: FFR’s Anti-Drone Campaign Partner Page

FFR also maintains an organizational presence at international advocacy summits like the Humanitarian Disarmament Forum, which is also attended by representatives from gatekeeper organizations like HRW and AI.⁴¹⁴ Akbar also authored the chapter discussing drones from a human rights law perspective in the 2017 Humanitarian Impact of Armed Drones report, a key advocacy document from the transnational humanitarian disarmament community.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ United Nations Side Event on the Humanitarian Impact of Drones Flier 2017

⁴¹⁴ Humanitarian Disarmament Forum Roll Call Sheet 2017

⁴¹⁵ This document was authored from individuals from various transnational civil society groups, and was produced by Reaching Critical Will and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (“The Humanitarian Impact of Drones” 2017)

While several factors likely explain why FFR and PBC maintained open partnerships with transnational civil society when other Pakistani groups did not, these two groups' preferred anti-drone frames may be an important part of the story as to why an inverse vetting process did not cut off these relationships.

As a casualty counting NGO, PBC taps into a wider transnational community that puts a premium on transparency and accountability surrounding wartime deaths. These organizations, such as TBIJ, focus not only on counting the dead but also call for clear targeting criteria in order to assess the policy's guidelines for using lethal force – a frame that falls into the “Lawful Usage” category. Usmani similarly argues that the main “problem of drone warfare” is the opaqueness of the policy's targeting procedures.⁴¹⁶ He counters the U.S. government's official precision-strike narrative, arguing that “while drone technology may be able to reduce a building to a debris field [and] leav[e] the one next to it standing,” the government's wide targeting criteria cannot reap precise outcomes.⁴¹⁷ This type of argumentation is in line with many member organizations in the Casualty Recorders Network.⁴¹⁸

As a human rights advocacy group, FFR engages in the parlance of universal human rights law.⁴¹⁹ FFR's “problems with drones” are primarily legalistic, in that they are concerned with extrajudicial execution, rule of law and sovereignty, as exemplified in this official statement: “drone assassinations violate international and domestic law, negate due process, and violate the principle that everyone is innocent before the law

⁴¹⁶ Usmani and Bashir 2014: 8

⁴¹⁷ Ibid

⁴¹⁸ PBC also presented its work and methods in a way that resonates with the strict professional standards of transnational data advocacy groups. In the same mold as Iraq Body Count and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, PBC's website includes a detailed description of analytics and methods. PBC presents its findings in a way that is replicable and publicly accessible by other actors, standards that are considered best practices in the wider community.

⁴¹⁹ Akbar 2017

until proven guilty.”⁴²⁰ International human rights groups have consistently framed the problem of drones as one of policy – whether the US’s use of targeted killing is legal or not. Akbar’s contribution to the 2017 Humanitarian Impact of Drones report adopts this same legalistic language, with terms like “targeted killing,” “collateral damage.”⁴²¹ This is echoed on the organizations’ website, which argues that contrary to the strikes killing mostly militants, “mostly civilians have been killed with some militant “collateral damage” resulting.”⁴²²

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored how relational processes between local grassroots actors and international activists influence the overall formation of cohesive transnational advocacy, and suggests the need for greater attention to coalition-building processes at the “other end” of the boomerang throw. In the anecdotes above, we can see that a number of local Pakistani actors engaged in inverse vetting processes to determine if their potential international partners perceived legitimacy of INGOs. In this analysis, according to my interviewees, INGO legitimacy rested on two specific criteria for local anti-drone activists: project methodology and ethicality. Opinions on the true human security issues in the drone-affected areas and a perceived misalignment of interests with and distrust of international NGOs reportedly factored into some local actors’ decisions on how they pursued relationships with transnational partners. This was contrary to the instances in which outlying groups formed ongoing relationships with transnational partners.

This chapter also offers support for the existence of broader inverse models of transnational advocacy, like Pallas’s (2017) inverse boomerang. Indeed, in the anecdotes

⁴²⁰ “Drones Advocacy,” n.d.

⁴²¹ Akbar 2017

⁴²² “Client Stories,” n.d.

shared above, it was the large gatekeeping NGO that first reached out to the local NGO with specific partnership proposals, rather than the other way around as existent theory suggests. Building from Pallas's (2017) work that characterizes INGOs as desiring partnership with smaller groups for legitimacy, the above case study also suggests that local groups form relationships with international activists over the perceived legitimacy of International NGOs as well. This dissertation's original concept of inverse vetting constitutes an expansion of this "inverse advocacy processes" literature, by suggesting that the decision of local actors to work with large gatekeepers may also shape transnational advocacy processes like cohesive campaign messaging formation.

Importantly, however, this inverse vetting pattern should not be read as a celebration of unconstrained agency on the parts of grassroots actors. Advocacy dynamics take place over an uneven terrain of power, and the ability to vet actors does not have the same weight at both ends of the boomerang throw. Where vetting processes by gatekeepers have a very real impact on whose ideas get representation in global governance, vetting processes by less powerful actors should perhaps be thought of as more acts of resistance, with both symbolic and material power. The unwillingness to partner with a larger organization may influence the overall network's cohesion and legitimacy but the gatekeeper organizations, with their hegemonic understandings and resources, ultimately remain the governors. In the face of this asymmetry, it is then the willingness to say "no" that becomes an important symbolic form of power; one which allows the local actor to create a momentary disruption to make their voices and interests heard. Here, inverse vetting process should invite scholars to think of the ways that less powerful actors still matter within networks and to further explore the multiplicity of ways that they influence global processes like transnational advocacy.

Finally, scholars interested in norm effects – and more specifically, their "shadow" effects – may also find the case of drones in the Pakistani context useful.

Many see that norms surrounding civilian protection in armed conflict strengthened over the course of 20th century warfare, with governments increasingly facing heavier censure for using indiscriminate military tactics and weapons.⁴²³ This censure may extend to domestic constituencies as well as international ones— public opinion of foreign policy has proven a potentially important variable in democratic elections.⁴²⁴ In part due to an increasing sensitivity to the civilian protection norm, the ability of a weapon to deliver precise, sanitized warfare with minimal casualties factors into American citizens' support for a specific weapon.⁴²⁵ Given these conditions, drone warfare might constitute a case of norm shadow effects, in that it could be viewed as an evolution in military strategy that is actually becoming more sensitive towards civilian deaths, albeit in ways many international activists would not approve of. Interestingly, the actors closest to the violence in the above case seem the *most* aware of this possible drone shadow effect, in that they deem it preferable to the largescale destruction wrought by Army raids.

⁴²³ Thomas 2000

⁴²⁴ Tomz and Weeks 2013

⁴²⁵ Walsh 2015

CHAPTER SIX

Implications and Conclusion

Introduction

As part of the adjacent events for the 2017 Humanitarian Disarmament Forum, participants had the option to attend a gala party on a cruise ship-sized vessel, called The Peace Boat, docked in Manhattan. The Peace Boat is a Japanese NGO focused on sustainability and human rights; it holds a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The organization uses its boat to conduct most of its activities, including international voyages to promote the UN sustainability goals. The gala itself was very formal; with tray-passed appetizers, bars, champagne and sake toasts. I attended this event as part of my fieldwork to watch (and participate with) the transnational activists I had just spoken to the previous day about their work on drones. I discussed the intricacies of international law and politics with a champagne flute in my hand, on the deck of the boat, with the late-night Manhattan skyline as a backdrop. I remembered these discussions especially vividly when I was in Pakistan conducting fieldwork for this project a year later. The sheer disconnect between the two locations was startlingly obvious; I felt impossibly far away, in every way, from that glitzy night in Manhattan meant to celebrate the accomplishments of the activists in attendance.⁴²⁶

At first glance, this stark difference between the transnational and violence-affected levels of anti-drone activism seems to be a strong instantiation of IR theories

⁴²⁶ This dislocation – while disorienting - was useful for me as an analyst, since multi-sited fieldwork brings into focus that there is no one position that grants the researcher privileged perspective (Pachirat, 2012)

that point to the power of INGOs in determining transnational advocacy. For example, Carpenter's (2011) elite gatekeeping argument discusses power within an advocacy network by showing how well-resourced and well-connected actors set the agenda. The implication here is that smaller actors are unable to affect a given advocacy issue network independently in a significant way. This gatekeeper vetting hypothesis seemed very much mirrored in the power asymmetries I witnessed during fieldwork as reflected in the opening vignette, because there was no mention of the less dominant anti-drone frames amongst transnational activists attending the gala or during the weekend-long forum. These gatekeeping effects are certainly sometimes operative in specific instances within the anti-drone network, most apparently in Chapters 3 and 4.

The notion of elite vetting is largely based on studying organizations with varying levels of power that are all based in the Global North. But this focus on the Global North does not tell the full story. Scholars who study transnational advocacy participation by actors in the Global South have shown us that it is equally important to consider how the less powerful act in a network.⁴²⁷ For example, as I showed in Chapter 5, smaller and less connected groups not only have their own ways of defining the stakes of a security issue, they also actively resist the frames of larger civil society groups and base their partnering decisions on this calculus. As I showed in Chapters 3 and 4, this inverse dynamic exists within the Global North as well. Taking a grounded approach, which is better suited to studying power "up" - rather than down or horizontally - shows that otherwise "less powerful" actors are politically significant within the network.⁴²⁸

As argued in the theory chapter of this dissertation and demonstrated in the empirical chapters, assuming that power is exercised only by powerful actors risks overlooking or undervaluing how smaller actors present their goals, how they resist

⁴²⁷ Pallas and Nguyen, 2018

⁴²⁸ *ibid*

hegemonic power within the network and how their actions can have political effects that exceed their intentions. Specifically, as both smaller actors in the Global North and South use their own frames for the drone issue, refusing to work with or heavily renegotiating the terms of partnering with larger actors, the drone network becomes less cohesive and with fragmented messaging. In short, geographically and culturally dispersed actors resist and exert their own power by seeking to determine what the issue is to begin with. These diffused exercises of power produces the unintended effect of hampering the overall network from coming together in collaboration to create an overarching anti-drone umbrella frame.

In the remainder of this conclusion, I unpack these theoretical concepts in greater detail, specifically through the lens of the dynamic I have called inverse vetting before discussing the implications of this concept for the efficacy and possible futures of transnational advocacy networks.

Inverse Vetting and Power in Transnational Advocacy Networks

The concept of inverse vetting is used throughout this dissertation as a way to explore how power is operative in transnational advocacy networks and its effects. In doing so, inverse vetting shows us how smaller, non-gatekeeping actors produce their own discourses and positions on a human security issue and at times actively assess whether the position of larger groups fits with their own advocacy goals. In the subsections below, I will detail how this dissertation has discussed these dynamics in terms of how actors with varying levels of political power have navigated the anti-armed drones advocacy issue network.

Vetting Dynamics Between the Global North & South

In Chapter 5 I examined how drone-affected populations –people living closest to the violence – frame the issue as an imperialistic project. Their assessment was a product of a perceived experience in which a distinct group (Pashtuns) inhabiting a

particular geographic area (Northern Pakistan and Southern Afghanistan) had historically been the subject of both colonial and post-colonial pacification projects. Crucially, these grassroots actors saw transnational actors associated with the Global North – such as Human Rights Watch – as themselves being part of a larger globalist project of domination and cultural erasure. This globalist project includes both international states as well as their own national government of Pakistan. This perspective, engrained by these historical experiences and interpretations, gave these actors the discursive tools with which to justify *not* working with powerful organizations in the drone issue network. This is despite the fact that these larger actors were working to mitigate and or regulate the very drone violence grassroots actors were enduring.

Vetting Dynamics within the Global North

Inverse vetting is not just an argument about a difference in culture and a corresponding disagreement on how to advocate as a result. The Global North/Global South divide and the historically mediated power asymmetries it entails gives grassroots actors significant reasons to vet the transnationals – even though traditional IR theory stipulates that they should want to work with powerful partners.⁴²⁹ But inverse vetting also occurs *within* the Global North between activists with differing power, where activists share the same cultural sensibilities at least on a broad level. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, some US domestic groups refuse to work with larger groups based on the latter's lack of perceived radicality. This is because they see drones as a particularly insidious expression of warfare and violent conflict, something that makes war more efficient and one-sided. Their opposition to drones, unlike Human Rights Watch (HRW), is not just a concern with legality but with war in general. As I further showed, this opposition to transnational framing was grounded in a perception of the US as a

⁴²⁹ Keck and Sikkink, 1998

perpetrator of “endless wars,” including past conflicts like the Vietnam War. Again, the anti-war discourse made it possible for these groups to define the drone issue in their own way and assess the larger groups’ position as deficient in achieving their advocacy goals.

However, it would be inaccurate to say that the US domestic actors – unlike the violence-affected actors – largely rejected working with the transnational level. Indeed, there were instances in which discerning actors did see partnering with large gatekeepers as useful. Furthermore, we can also see the traditional gatekeeper vetting model at work in this level, as Human Rights Watch purposely avoided partnering with groups it perceived as taking too strong of stances on issues of war and peace. Nevertheless, whether or not US domestic actors chose to work with larger groups on particular occasions, they continued to use their own frames and internal discourses to vet those opportunities. In short, in instances where partnerships seemed useful, domestic actors came to that decision based on their own goals and frames.

When we focus on the transnational level of the network itself, we can see similar patterns. More specifically, we can observe examples of less powerful groups not simply kowtowing to their more powerful counterparts. In Chapter 3, I used the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) as a case study within a case study in order to explore how actors at the same level of the network, but with differing levels of power from one another, make partnering decisions. While EFAD from the outside appears to be a cohesive network with a comparatively consolidated guiding frame, tracing the processes through which this “unity” was achieved reveals unique elements of inverse vetting. Specifically, it shows us some of the conditions under which actors with fundamentally differing frames agree to work with one another.

The EFAD case reveals that, according to what my interviewees reported, the perception of meaningful inclusion on the part of less powerful actors is an important

component that can determine the result of an inverse vetting process. For example, smaller and more radical groups initially did not want to work with the gatekeepers within EFAD because it was their opinion that the gatekeeper's approach to drones was too bland. But through a variety of sustained, process-based consensus building activities, the less powerful actors described attaining a level of satisfaction with the process high enough to buy into the collaborative project. These lengthy deliberations and sustained back-and-forth's between EFAD members created a model flexible enough to promote heterogeneous membership. Again, key to reaching this collaboration was the idea that the less powerful actors' concerns were taken seriously by the gatekeepers, *even if* their frames were not reflected in the final group advocacy project.

We can compare this transnational-to-transnational process to the transnational-to-violence-affected processes. Far from experiencing such a process-based collaborative advocacy model, the Pakistani activists described that they perceived the transnationals as merely "parachuting in," an approach they said felt insulting and delegitimizing to their lived experiences. In the EFAD case, the sustained and at times grinding commitment to make all its members feel respected in their heterogeneous views on drones led the smaller actors to accept ties with the gatekeepers in their inverse vetting processes. Contrarily, this described lack of inclusion and respect on the part of transnationals led the violence-affected activists' inverse vetting processes to result in refusal to partner.

Implications of Inverse Vetting for Advocacy Networks

As with elite agenda vetting, the complex process of inverse vetting has potential consequences for transnational advocacy, both in terms of how it is conducted and who can participate in it. At the most basic level - at least as demonstrated in my findings specifically on the drone issue - inverse vetting might impact the contours of a network; put simply, how the overall network "looks" and the cohesiveness of its overall messaging. On a more nuanced level, inverse vetting processes stand to complicate

conceptualizations of political and social power within networks. Below I explore these two implications, which I see as the primary theoretical and empirical imports of the inverse vetting dynamic I have defined and described throughout this project.

First, inverse vetting processes may lead to more disconnection within advocacy networks. For example, in addition to exploring the lack of an anti-drone umbrella frame, another animating empirical puzzle of this dissertation has been why there was so little connection between the violence-affected level and the transnational level; a dynamic that theory may have predicted as existing in a more robust manner. Finding that the elite agenda vetting argument was not applicable in the drone case, a ground-up approach to explaining this gap pointed to the internal decision-making processes of the violence-affected actors themselves as rebuffing or heavily renegotiating ties to transnationals, even when powerful organizations sought ties. Just as elite vetting keeps certain human security issues off the agenda, inverse vetting may have a similar impact, with the key difference being the origin of the actors who erect barriers to partnering. Put simply, inverse vetting expands the number of actors who can say “yes” or “no” to partnerships and issue framings within a network.

Second, inverse vetting expands our understanding of how power is operative within transnational advocacy networks. This expansion of agentic actors may mean that coalition-building in human security issues is even stickier and more conflictual than once thought, especially when considering the importance of discourse. The occurrence of inverse vetting at different levels of the transnational network means that gatekeeper organizations do not entirely control the contours of the network and that they do not entirely control the discourse on a given issue. On a basic level, these findings expand big theoretical questions in international relations regarding who can participate in global civil society, and to what effects. More specifically, looking through the lens of inverse vetting demonstrates the largely diffused nature of power in an advocacy network. This is

especially evident when we consider how seemingly small actions and decisions within the drone network – such as a comparably tiny Pakistani group’s refusal to partner with a gatekeeper organization over distaste of their framings – have large consequences when scaled up to the overall transnational network.

These power asymmetries I observed in the network are characterized by actors’ context-specific and historical experiences of conflict that pre-date the use of armed drones. The most obvious and tangible connection here is between the Pakistani activists and their constant contending with legacies of colonialism and state domination. But grassroots actors in the US, such as the most radical anti-war demonstrators who willfully got arrested during Vietnam protests, also bring their experiences of conflict to armed drone advocacy. These histories are crucial, because they determine the prisms through which each actor create their framings and conceptualizations around armed drones. These distinct, historically informed differences – operationalized through advocacy frames – allows these actors to claim space in the wider drone issue network that more powerful actors must contend with. Here, we see that it is not just power asserted that matters, but also power *resisted* – which itself is a result of unique histories. The drones case invites us as scholars to perhaps rethink advocacy not by strictly delineated issues, as the most powerful political actors do, but rather as stretching well beyond into the realms of history, morality, and policy.

These implications raise important questions, both empirically and theoretically, about efficacy and egalitarianism in transnational advocacy. As detailed in the introductory chapter, the armed drone activists were not able to create a concerted campaign under a guiding umbrella frame such as the one that coalesced around landmines and nuclear weapons. Instead, the drone network remains loosely connected and fractured around three different meta-frames, which themselves have disagreements within them. Interestingly, several activists in Pakistan defined their idea of success more

around the concept of “resistance” to globalist projects, which is mutually exclusive to transnational civil society’s definition of success. Taken together, the empirical chapters of this dissertation show that one large campaign unified by concise messaging did not emerge. This is in large part because the three meta-frames actually at times act as three distinct anti-drones campaigns—ones that are sometimes working at cross-purposes with one another. While the influx of funding from Open Society Foundation on global anti-drones work did not make these groups competitors for funding, by approaching the issue in contradictory ways, these actors still ended up competing for policy attention nonetheless.

This dissertation also brings up the question of egalitarianism and efficacy in transnational advocacy networks, and where these two concepts may have an opportunity to overlap. From a traditional view, the agency of less powerful actors who might inversely vet their agendas may be frustrating, as this lack of cooperation is “ineffective” and “inefficient” in terms of civil society politics. Deep differences oftentimes exist between actors seeking to advocate on the same human security issue. As it stands, gatekeeper groups tend to approach this difference by either trying to iron them out to achieve an advocacy message digestible to state actors,⁴³⁰ or by bringing on a group from the Global South in a “token” role to boost campaign legitimacy without including their voices.⁴³¹

But the armed drone case shows that there is potentially another route that might expand participation in transnational advocacy in a meaningful and inclusive way. This potential is evidenced in the fact that the majority of the less powerful actors were willing – on their own terms – to work in coalition with other actors, but ultimately opted not to when the gatekeepers did not demonstrate their willingness to take their partnership

⁴³⁰ Stroup and Wong, 2017

⁴³¹ Pallas, 2017

seriously. Put simply, the opportunity for connections were there and the armed drone advocacy issue was not predestined to reap suboptimal results. Distinct decisions made at key junctures, by a variety of actors with varying levels of power, led to the disconnectedness of this issue network. For example, the Pakistani activist who rebuffed and refused two gatekeeper organizations ultimately ended up renegotiating a partnering proposal by a third and joined into a meaningful and productive relationship with that group.

Perhaps the prospect for more egalitarian and effective advocacy lies in embracing the messiness of this renegotiation through a more reflexive approach to advocacy – one that entails the gatekeeper organizations recognizing their own positionality and complicity in geopolitical power structures.⁴³² Of course, this sort of deep self-reflection on the part of a large and entrenched institutional actor is daunting and will likely take scarce resources. But given the ultimately normative goals of these institutions in the area of promoting human security, such self-reflection is a necessary and worthwhile investment for realizing their goals.

Looking Forward

The current state of the drone advocacy issue does not bode well for its future. This is evidenced from both an empirical standpoint, looking at how many advocacy products are created on the topic, as well as from the perceptions of activists. Nearly every activist I spoke to, when asked about the *current* state of the anti-armed drone advocacy issue, described it as “dead,” “done,” or “dying,” even if they themselves still worked on the issue and described it as being a “very important” topic for human security. This is despite the fact that more countries and nonstate actors than ever before are researching and developing their own armed drone technologies. This pessimistic

⁴³² Nader and Savinar (2016: 52) discuss the possibilities for INGOs to “decolonize” their approaches

outlook is also reflected in my own observations on the issue's evolution over three and a half years.

During the latter part of my time researching for this dissertation, organizations are making key shifts away from the topic altogether. For example, where ReThink Media has been publishing a weekly bulletin of drone-specific updates for years called the "Drone Roundup," at the end of 2020 the listserv title was changed to "ReThink Roundup," and now focuses on an array of national security issues. EFAD itself, which I have described as one of the most active and well-connected hubs, are currently having internal end-of-life discussions for the network, which includes decisions on how to back away from the issue but still perhaps keep their website archived. The Interfaith Network on Armed Drones is also ending its national conferences within the first few months of 2021. Perhaps most ominously, one of the largest funders for drone work, Open Society Foundation, is stepping away from the issue in a significant way, according to an employee in a management position.

There are several reasons for this move away from the anti-drone advocacy issue. First, many smaller groups are either ending or slowing their anti-drone work because their primary source of funding – OSF – is stepping away from the issue. Second, activists have blamed the Trump Administration's chaotic approach to foreign policy as dropping the armed drones issue far down their list of priorities. In the words of a HRW activist, the drones topic stood out as problematic under the Obama Administration, but "when so much is broken" under the Trump Administration, she said it is hard to justify focusing closely on one small piece of the puzzle.⁴³³ Third, at least according to the activists I spoke with, there is issue fatigue within the community over armed drones. This arises from a perception that the anti-drones activists "missed the boat" in terms of

⁴³³ Phone interview with Author, Transnational 3; 17 June 2019

getting states to regulate drones early on, and that proliferation and use has gone too far to reel back in. Some activists even suggested that seeking a preemptive weapons ban on autonomous technology would be easier now than achieving regulation of armed drones, since drones have been too “normalized” now.

This dissertation has focused on advocacy on armed drones as it has existed in transnational space for about two decades. As has been discussed previously, practices, technologies, acquisitions, and policies on armed drones have evolved relatively unabated, making armed drones an entrenched feature of contemporary conflict during this timeframe. Of course, a counterfactual here – what would have happened if the drone issue network cohered early on – is impossible to make confidently and perhaps unfair to the activists who have worked consistently on the issue from its inception, given the increased resources the military hegemon has poured into distanced and remote warfare. But just as the drone issue network wasn't a foregone conclusion, neither was the trajectory or character of state use.

Despite these disheartening developments from within the network, after twenty years there may finally be some movement on the part of the US government on rethinking the 2001 Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF). Again, the AUMF has been the guiding foreign policy doctrine that has served as the legal basis for some of the most controversial aspects of the US drone program (such as conducting strikes outside warzones) and counterterrorism operations more broadly. It is important to remember that the AUMF is much bigger than drones, as it opens questions about executive war powers. The significance of the fact that the Biden Administration is considering changing the legal framework for the war against terrorists cannot be overstated in terms of the effects it would have on US foreign policymaking.⁴³⁴ Whether this potential switch

⁴³⁴ Wertheim, 2021

in foreign policy direction is a product of domestic war fatigue, an opportune juncture to rethink big policy questions opened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the one term presidency of Donald Trump, the result of decades-long work from activists and critics, or hard-headed Executive Office realism to pass the buck to Congress on foreign wars⁴³⁵ are all empirical questions ripe for future research. It is very likely a mixture of all these factors.

Returning to this dissertation's implications in this changing security environment, the drone advocacy issue network case stands to teach transnational activists important lessons that they can take forward to future human security campaigns. Regardless of external policy developments on the advocacy issues, inverse vetting exists and should be taken seriously. Because as we can see from the drone case, a failure to create an inclusive advocacy platform resulted in fragmented advocacy.

⁴³⁵ Walt, 2021

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