



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of International Justice and Peace

Catholic Views on Drone Warfare

These supplementary materials provide Catholic perspective on drone warfare. They are intended to complement the study guides prepared by the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare. Following are details on two films and Catholic teaching relating to drones.

The Religious Community and Drone Warfare

This short documentary discusses the religious, ethical, and moral debates surrounding the use of weaponized drones in targeted killings. Experts also discuss the use of force, self-defense, and just war in religious traditions. The documentary can be downloaded at <https://bit.ly/INDWRreligious>.

An accompanying study guide and additional resource sheet can be found at https://www.interfaithdronenetwork.org/images/Final_-_Religious_Community_Study_Guide_.pdf.

Film Outline

- Intro (0:00–2:00)
- History of Drone Usage (2:01–4:36)
- Religious Perspectives on War (4:37–9:49)
- Drone Warfare’s Unique, Controversial Status (9:50–17:39)
- Moral Perspectives on Drones (17:40–22:31)
- Signature Strikes (22:31–26:33)

Catholic Comments

- Prof. Maryann Cusimano Love (Drone History): 2:14–3:21
- Dr. Stephen Colecchi (Catholic Nonviolence Principle): 6:20–6:48
- Virginia Farris and Prof. Cusimano Love (Civilian Casualties): 10:15–11:28
- Prof. Cusimano Love (Lethal Drones Outside of War Zones): 13:07–14:15
- Dr. Colecchi (Consequences of Frequent Drone Usage): 16:37–17:35,
Extremism caused by Drones): 21:58–22:35
- Virginia Farris (Specialized Targeting/Profiling): 23:30–24:18
- Dr. Colecchi (First Resort versus Last Resort): 24:19–25:45

Moral and Safe?: War, Peace, Drone Warfare & the Religious Community

This short documentary details the history, use and nature of lethal drones as well as the moral and ethical debates around their use and targeted killings. It draws on commentary from diverse religious voices and experts who discuss how religious beliefs affect and shape stances on weaponized drone usage. The documentary can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/INDWmoralsafe>

The accompanying study guide and additional resources can be found at https://www.interfaithdronenetwork.org/images/FINAL_EDITED_Study_Guide_Moral_and_Safe_Final.pdf

Film Outline

- History of Armed Drones: 00:48–3:15
- Civilian Deaths as a Result of Targeted Strikes: 3:15–7:39
- Increasing Number of Nations and Groups Using Drones: 7:40–11:47
- Legal Action and Advocacy Needed: 11:48–14:10
- Secrecy of Lethal Drone Program: 14:11–16:03
- Psychological Impact of Drones: 16:04–17:00
- Need for Transparency: 17:01–17:55
- Democratic Restraint on Drone Strikes and Additional Transparency: 17:56–19:37
- Experience of Drone Operators: 19:18–21:21
- Faith Voices: 21:22–End
 - Jewish: 21:22–21:29
 - Evangelical: 22:00–22:25
 - Catholic: 22:26–23:35
 - Unitarian Universalist: 23:36–24:24
 - Sikh: 24:25–25:09
 - United Methodist: 26:35–27:00
 - Church of the Brethren: 27:01–27:26
 - Muslim: 27:27–28:26
 - Catholic: 28:27–29:16
 - Methodist: 29:17–30:04

Catholic Teaching and Drones

The following are quotes from letters and articles which raise moral questions about the use of lethal drones in targeted killings from a Catholic perspective.

- “We are witnessing a certain proliferation of this (drone) technology and a growing use of it in various conflicts. The challenges are multiple and related to international humanitarian law, to human rights, and to international law. The ethical implications are not insignificant. The choice of indifference in relation to this question is counter-productive. ... There is still time for the CCW (Certain Conventional Weapons) to become interested in drones before they become an additional source of greater destabilization when the international community needs more than ever stability, cooperation and peace.”

Excerpt from Statement by H.E. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi at the Annual Meeting on the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW), Geneva, 13 November 2014. Read full text here

http://www.vatican.va//roman_curia/secretariat_state/2014/documents/rc-seg-st-20141113_tomasi-ccw_en.html

“The lack of military risk and supposed accuracy of surveillance and targeting by weaponised drones may make operators and commanders more willing to execute strikes with greater risk to civilians. greater transparency and clearer accountability in their use is critical.”

Excerpt from Statement by H.E. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi at the CCW Annual Meeting, Geneva, 14 November 2013. Read full text here

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/arms-trade/upload/The-Holy-See-Statement-Lethal-autonomous-weapons-and-drones.pdf>

“...the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) for targeted killings raises serious moral questions. The Administration seems to have focused narrowly on the just cause of protecting citizens, but other elements of the (just war) tradition pose significant questions, including discrimination, imminence of the threat, proportionality and probability of success.

Excerpt from Bishop Richard Pates letter to National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon and Congress on Armed Drones and Targeted Killings. Read full text here

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/arms-trade/upload/letter-to-administration-congress-on-drones-2013-05-17.pdf>

- “International law strongly prohibits the use of force by one state in the territory of another, except during war or with the explicit consent of the other state. Using armed drones for targeted killings should be limited to those areas of intense, active, and protracted conflict where there have been declarations of war, where there is multilateral agreement that such action is needed to counter extreme violence being perpetrated on non-combatants, and when the target is a combatant who is likely soon to launch an attack. Armed drones may be used out of areas of open and protracted fighting if it is determined that the person targeted poses an **imminent** threat, if the use of lethal force is **proportionate** and there is no other means to prevent the threat to life (i.e. “**last resort**”), and if civilian casualties can be avoided as much as possible. Otherwise targeted killings are considered assassinations, extrajudicial kills which the United States has itself condemned since there is a lack of due process.”
- Discrimination: “The Administration’s justification of ‘signature strikes’ in which individuals are targeted by drones, not because of who they are, but because of their behavior or associations, runs contrary to Catholic social teaching on discrimination as it increases the likelihood of more civilian casualties.
- Armed Force as Last Resort: “Unlike standard ground combat or even combat missions flown by an air force, drone operators are physically far removed from any possible retaliation that may arise from firing on targets. This apparent ‘no or low cost’ factor can make it that much easier to use armed drones in conflicts, leading to political decisions to bypass other ways of dealing with security concerns and go directly to an expansion of the conflict zone, increasing the likelihood of war. It is incumbent on a nation’s leaders to recognize that the use of drones can lower the threshold on conflict and take appropriate steps to not succumb to their use, simply because it is ‘easier’ and ‘cheaper.’”
- Probability of Success: “Drones provoke anxiety among populations where there are targets, inflicting psychological damage on innocent civilians who live in constant fear they may be hurt or killed and listed as ‘collateral damage.’ This fear and civilian casualties feed into increasing hostility towards the United States so that many say the use of armed drones in these targeted killings is counterproductive to establishing and sustaining longer-term security relationships with countries where drones are used.”

Above four quotations are excerpts from Bishop Oscar Cantú's letter to National Security Advisor Susan Rice on Policy Framework for the Use of Drones. Read full text here
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/arms-trade/letter-to-nsa-rice-re-drone-policy-framework-2015-05-11.cfm>

- In referring to terrorists, *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (No. 514) states, “the struggle against terrorists must be carried out with respect for human rights and for the principles of a State ruled by law. The identification of the guilty party must be duly proven, because criminal responsibility is always personal.” Force should only be undertaken outside war zones when there is reasonable certainty that innocent civilians will not be harmed. “Collateral damage” in war, when serious efforts are made to use proportionate and discriminate force, may be justified; but innocent civilians living outside war zones should not be subject to attack. Our society would not tolerate “collateral damage” in law enforcement actions in our nation and should not in other nations.

Excerpt from USCCB Backgrounder on Armed Drones. Read full text here

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/upload/background-on-armed-drones-2014-01.pdf>

Additional Online Articles for Study

- 1) *Catholic News Service*. “In the face of secrecy, drone warfare faces barrage of moral questions.”
By Dennis Sadowski, February 15, 2013.
- 2) *America Magazine*. “What Are Drones Doing To Us?”
By Eli S. McCarthy, April 2, 2013
- 3) *The Washington Post*. “Everything you need to know about the drone debate in one FAQ.”
By Dylan Matthews, March 8, 2013

Catholic Books for Additional Reading

- 1) *Drones and the Ethics of Targeted Killing* by Kenneth R. Himes, OFM. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (2015).
- 2) *Can War be Just in the 21st Century?* by Tobias Winright. Orbis Books (2015).