

“Hitting the Target?” How New Capabilities Are Shaping Contemporary International Intervention

12 July 2012 - 13 July 2012

Workshop Report

This international, multidisciplinary, workshop was hosted by cii – the Centre for International Intervention - at the University of Surrey and was sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University. The following is a brief summary of the aims of the workshop, the key themes that emerged, plans for follow-up, and intended impact.

Aims of the workshop

The workshop’s objective was to explore how new selective precision strike capabilities available to military and intelligence forces are shaping approaches to international intervention. It aimed to be a forum for dialogue between different academic disciplines, as well as between academia and policy-makers/practitioners. Hence papers were encouraged that addressed the subject from behavioural, ethical, legal and politico/military perspectives – or a combination of these perspectives. A further aim was to explore these issues from the viewpoint of those on the receiving end of international intervention as well as those who carry it out. As the workshop took shape, it became apparent that the principal focus would be on the increasing offensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles, or “drones”, a topic of increasing public debate as well as policy relevance.

Summary of Presentations

The workshop comprised five panels of four papers each. In addition there were three keynote speakers, a separate roundtable, and a poster exhibition.

Dr Jamie Shea, Deputy Assistant Secretary-General of NATO, opened the workshop with a talk on *“The political and strategic consequences for NATO of the evolution in the way wars are perceived and fought”*. Professor Jason Ralph, Professor of International Relations at the University of Leeds, started the second day with a lecture on *“Preventive military action and the politics of US norm revisionism”*. Mr Geoff Loane, Head of Mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the UK, spoke at the end of the workshop and shared his reflections on the issues raised.

The round table was on *Social and Ethical Dimensions of New Technology* and featured inputs from nanotechnology, medicine, digital communications, and protection science. Speakers were asked to illustrate the issues from the perspective of technological advances in their own areas. The poster exhibition featured [artwork](#) by Carl Gopalkrishnan, imagining the hidden narratives that drive political decisions, and drone strike photographs from

Pakistan by Noor Behram. The panels were structured around the following themes:

- *Theorising the Drivers and Consequences of Precision-Strike Capabilities*
- *The Psychological and Cognitive Implications of Precision-Strike Capabilities*
- *Precision Strikes, Protecting Civilians, and Counting the Cost*
- *The Legality of the Use of Drones in International Law*
- *The Tactical, Operational and Strategic Potential of Precision-Strike Capabilities*

Key themes from the workshop

The workshop's greatest value was in bringing together very different perspectives on the ethics and utility of drone strikes. Thus one of the panels included a paper from the perspective of the US military on steps taken to mitigate collateral damage alongside one given from a journalistic perspective on 'the fiction of zero casualties'. Another panel contrasted the quest for 'legal and autonomous unmanned aircraft' with the possibility of intervention using drones becoming a crime of aggression. An examination of how military technology can be used to provide a justification for intervention contrasted with insights into the psychological factors and systems limitations affecting the operators of unmanned aerial systems, and the implications of this in terms of international law. The place of targeted killing as an instrument of foreign policy was examined alongside the possibility of using drones to protect civilians and support the work of the humanitarian community.

There were many other fascinating examples of why the subject of drones arouses very different reactions from different sectors of society and academia. An attempt to encapsulate the essence of the discussions, which concluded that the only thing that is precise about "precision strikes" is the machine that delivers them, can be found [here](#).

Next steps

Plans are well advanced for an edited volume incorporating some of the contributions to the workshop and also for a policy brief to be produced in conjunction with RUSI, the Royal United Services Institute, which will be launched at an event in London in early 2013. Through these it is hoped that both the academic community and policy-makers in the UK and beyond will be exposed to the ideas surfaced at the workshop and persuaded of the merits of an inter-disciplinary approach to a complex question. It is also hoped to secure research funding to allow us to take forward further work in this area.

Acknowledgements

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the unstinting support given by Mirela Domic at the Institute, to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude. Special thanks to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Sir Christopher Snowden, for opening the event, and to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, Professor Phil Powrie, for chairing the roundtable and for his overall support. Most of all, the organisers would like to thank all the presenters who made this such a stimulating and refreshing event and for helping us to hit our target!

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