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## Why the Rise in Drones

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WHY THE RISE IN DRONES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

By

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Bachelor of Arts, The Ohio State University, 2012

2015  
WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

JULY 17, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

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Why the Rise in Drones

What are the reasons for the increasing number of drone strikes between 2002 and 2012 by the United States? This study examines the various aspects of the United States government which led to this increase in the number of strikes. Specifically, this study examines the military capabilities, the military leadership bureaucracy and presidential aspects of drone use. Through the division of this time period into three sections, this study seeks to find explain the events which led to the increase in the use of drones by the United States. This study concludes with a discussion on what the future may hold for the United States Unmanned Aerial Combat Vehicle program.

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## **List of Acronyms**

UCAV – Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle

UAV – Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

USAF – United States Air Force

FATA – Federally Administrated Tribal Area

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer what has led to the increase in the number of Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAVs), more commonly known as drones, weapon strikes by the United States in warfare during the time between November 2002 and December 2012).

Table 1.1. Number of Drone Strikes from 2002-2012<sup>1</sup>

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Strikes	1	0	1	3	2	5	38	55	128	104	123

("Get the data: Drone wars | The Bureau of Investigative Journalism")

In order to answer this question I examine the various capabilities of the military throughout the War on Terror, the bureaucracy surrounding the drone program, as well as the presidential aspects to see which, alone or together, result in an increasing number of drone strikes. It is necessary to understand the reasoning behind the increase in drone strikes due to the possible policy implications for not just the United States and its War on Terror but for other nations who are choosing to wage a similar campaign through the use of drones. The results of this research will bring an understanding as to why drone strikes are happening and the likelihood of their continued use.

The drones of today may seem like something out of science fiction movies like *Terminator* and *I, Robot*, but the United States has a long history of developing and using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). However, it is the prospect of using this technology to kill, that has raised concern in the international community and the American foreign policy debate,

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<sup>1</sup> The data for this table and the tables that appear throughout the rest of thesis are based on data compiled by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. While this thesis focuses solely on the military side of UCAV use, the data does not make the distinction between the strikes conducted by the United States military or those conducted by U.S. clandestine services. The purpose of the data is to illustrate the increasing number of drone strikes from 2002-2012.

as seen through the filibustering of the nomination of John Brennan by Senator Rand Paul over the transparency of the program and the United States' closest allies calling for more transparency over civilian deaths by drone (Woods, 2013). I hypothesize the rise of drones, and their potential use in the future, combines aspects of U.S. air power and military capabilities, bureaucratic politics, and the perceived American public's sensitivity to combat casualties. Additionally, I explore aspects of drone use which differ between President Bush and President Obama which must be taken into consideration when explaining drone use.

This chapter proceeds with a chapter by chapter outline of how the thesis ensues. Then this chapter reviews literature of the American air power debate, the debate over casualty sensitivity of the American public, current counterterrorism practices and presidential aspects of drone use. Finally, I provide the four hypotheses that I seek to test and the methodology that I plan to use in order to test them. I discuss the justifications for choosing process tracing case study analysis, and note the potential drawbacks that could occur in the research of this thesis.

Chapter one will serve as an introduction to this study. This chapter will review literature pertaining to the issue of drone strikes, as well as reviewing the history of the United States' past use of drones and military doctrine in order to set the stage for the studies taking place from 2002 to 2012. It is important to see where the United States national security policy was before the use of drone strikes began in order to gain a clearer picture of the environment from which drone strikes are authorized. The direction that U.S. foreign policy took after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and with the subsequent War on Terror has had a large influence on the use of UAVs and UCAVs. Both the armed and unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles have the ability to provide surveillance deep in militant territory, where United States troops are unable to go and monitor areas for hours on end. The addition of the UCAVs made it possible to immediately act

on this information and terminate targets without having to wait for that delayed strike. In a time where previous strikes have been reported to have missed key militant targets by a matter of minutes, this proved crucial. This background information will aid in the explanation and discussion of the use of drones throughout the rest of the chapters.

### **Prevailing Research on the Use of Weapons**

The literature being examined in this review cover United States air power, casualty aversion, counterterrorism, and presidential approval and decision making. These four topics are important to understanding the thinking behind the uptick in UCAV use. The literature on Air Power is important to review because all of the drone strikes covered in this study have taken place from the air. Casualty aversion is important to look at because of the large outcry by the American public during the Afghanistan and Iraq war and the use of drones allows American forces to operate without the risk of casualties. Counterterrorism is important to look into when studying the use of UCAVs due to the possible risks of killing terrorists and militants as oppose to capturing them. Finally, the topic of Presidential Approval and Decision Making is being looked at because how the public affects him will affect the policies put in place by the administration.

There are various UAV airframes which constitute the drone arsenal of the United States. Only two airframes in the whole U.S. drone arsenal are currently carrying and using lethal ordnance, the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator and the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper. These Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles are only the tip of a much larger apparatus which is required to maintain and operate these new weapons of war. The UAV and UCAV systems require not only the airframe but ground control locations and bases in order to successfully operate and

maintain the drones. Additionally, the implementation of drones requires a diverse range of personnel in order to manage the mechanical aspects of the UAVs, pilot them, and analyze the intelligence they provide. In order to answer the question of why there has been an increase in drone strikes, it is important to look at the United States' previous usage of air power.

#### **a. Air Power**

The idea of using air power as a solution to a conflict was cultivated in the years before the Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Lambeth, 2000, p.9).<sup>2</sup> For the duration of the Cold War, the United States saw its “strategic” air power as strictly a part of its nuclear arsenal. Virtually no one in the U.S. defense community gave consideration to the idea that conventional air power had the ability to achieve strategic effects independent of forces on the ground, and determine the course or outcome of a conflict (Lambeth, 2000, p.10). The air campaign waged against Iraq during the war was a short but brutal one. Coalition air forces, led primarily by the United States, broke the back of the Iraqi army over the course of the thirty-eight day air campaign, through the gradual degradation of the Iraqi army and breaking the morale of Iraqi troops. According to Andrew Bacevich, this victory led to policy makers and military leaders believing the pinnacle of U.S. air power had arrived and believed that the Iraq conflict foretold the future of warfare (Bacevich, 2008, p.142). This way of war was not one of overwhelming force but of force protection. In order to minimize the prospect of U.S. losses, the armed services relied on air power whenever possible, as well as, proxy forces whenever ground combat seemed likely

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of air power I am referring to is based on rules by Lambeth. The first is that air power is not merely the combat aircraft but rather the combination of variables which makes it effective such as employment doctrine, concepts of operation, training, tactics, proficiency, leadership, adaptability and practical experience. Another rule is that air power is inseparable from battlefield information and intelligence gathering, the mantra being air power can kill anything it can see, identify and engage.

(Bacevich, 2013). As the 1990s progressed, two more United States air power interventions occurred in Bosnia and Kosovo but the effectiveness of the use of air power in these interventions can be debated. This debate was very prominent in the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo.

During the conflict in Kosovo, NATO forces bombed Serbian forces for seventy-eight days and brought about the surrender of Slobodan Milosevic with a cost of zero NATO lives. Supporters of air power applauded NATO's ability to achieve its goals through air power, without having to commit forces on the ground. These supporters included academics and military commanders alike. However, there were those who felt that air power campaign against Serbia was a failure.

Those who feel that an air power-centric campaign is problematic argue that it paints an illusion of success. According to Martin Aguera, in the air campaign against Serbia during NATO's involvement in Kosovo, a high percentage of military targets were destroyed, leaving a lasting impression in the minds of politicians and military planners that the destruction of military targets via air power can cause an adversary to exit a conflict (Aguera, 2001, p.118). The success of air power in the Kosovo conflict instilled a dangerous idea among policy makers that air power is low risk, high reward. This has the unfortunate side effect of potentially leading to policy makers advocating the use of air power in situations where its application is inappropriate and where the negative consequences are overlooked (Aguera, 2001, p.119). The Kosovo conflict was not the only time where modern air power theory came into being. The current air power doctrine has been in policymakers' playbooks since the Gulf War in 1991. Since then, Bosnia 1995, Kosovo 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003 have all been based around what Robert Pape (2004, 119) refers to as the Hammer and Anvil, with air forces playing the role of

the hammer and the ground forces as the anvil. However, what the United States is unable to do and will continually be unable to do despite the advent of precision weapons is consistently launch consistent decapitation attacks (Pape, 2004, p.119). This is not due to the precision of the weapons involved in the attacks, but the reliance on dependable intelligence to make decapitation attacks on the few leadership targets successful.

Despite this advent of advanced weaponry and the victories for the United States in its past five conflicts, the jury is still out on whether or not air power is effective as it is claimed to be. Using air power as the sole explanation for the use of drones is problematic because it fails to address the need for greater precision in the use of force. With insurgents and terrorists hiding amongst the population the risks for civilian casualties is high, the type of air campaigns waged during the 1991 Gulf War, 1999 Kosovo intervention and 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom would be unsustainable and infeasible due to the type of conflicts the United States is involved with. Additionally, a gap growing in the number of political leaders without military experience and military knowledge makes air power a tempting way to make a show of force (Aguera, 2001, pp. 118-119). In the case of UCAVs, the nonexistence of a pilot in addition to being able to make a show of force is important considering the sensitivity of the United States electorate over combat casualties. This show of force by the United States UCAVs appears to overcome the decapitation attack problem described by Pape by being able to provide the reliable surveillance. Another approach to explain the rise in air power, or drone use specifically, is the phenomenon of casualty aversion.

## **b. Casualty Aversion**

The topic of American casualty sensitivity is split into two different camps. After World War II, as the Cold War began to ramp up, the United States found itself in conflicts which were dramatically different from the two world wars it previously participated in. According to John Mueller, the Korean and Vietnam Wars were more politically complex and militarily limited than World War II and are often seen having put a peculiar strain on the American public (Mueller, 1971, p. 358). Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, mounting casualties in the United States led “War on Terror” could be seen as having put a similar strain on the American public. The first camp argues the reason behind this loss in popularity for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is due to American casualty aversion. As a war progresses, Americans are sensitive to relatively small losses early in the conflict but only to large losses later in the conflict (Mueller, 1971, p. 367). This is important because it revolves around the idea of cumulative casualties alone affecting the public’s support for the war, as well as the way future wars are fought. In the case of casualty aversion with respect to the war in Iraq, the loss of public support led to a loss of public support for the Bush doctrine, unilateralism, preemptive and preventive war which would shift how America continues to fight the War on Terror (Mueller, 2005, p.53). Some scholars believe that there is more to public opinion than just the number of American casualties suffered.

The second camp argues reduced American public support for conflicts is centered on the idea of loss aversion. According to Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler, the American public makes reasoned and reasonable judgments about an emotionally charged and politically polarizing issue such as fighting a war, with military casualties being a cost they are willing to pay as long as the initial decision to fight the war was made for the right reasons and if

the public believes the United States will win (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006, p.7).

Furthermore, the public will weigh the costs of each conflict not solely on the capacity to assure victory. According to Bruce Jentleson, the post-Vietnam public has been much more supportive of the use of force when the principle object was to restrain rather than remake governments (Jentleson, 1992, p.49). However, there are problems with using both of these camps to explain the rise in drone use by the United States.

A problem with using the ideas of both casualty aversion and loss aversion to explain the increase in drone strikes is the War on Terror still remains unpopular as ever, despite drones taking American troops off the front line and out of harm's way. Additionally, the secretive nature of the drone program makes it difficult for the government to inform the American public of the progress being made by the use of UCAVs in counterterrorism operations across the Middle East.

### **c. Counterterrorism**

One way the United States has tried to gain ground against Al-Qaeda and other militant groups in the War on Terror is through leadership decapitation. Some literature suggests the idea of leadership decapitation strikes is beneficial over the long term for disrupting and destroying terrorist and militant organizations. According to Jenna Jordan, the optimism academics and policy makers feel toward the success of decapitation strikes is primarily based on the theories of charismatic leadership (Jordan, 2009, p.722). These theories revolve around the idea that targeted organizations are run by leaders who are indispensable to the running of the organization and if those leaders are removed then the organization would collapse. Scholars debate the effectiveness of these attacks and the possible blowback from the failed attempts.

According to Steven David, a proponent of leadership decapitation, the best response to terrorism is to go on the offensive and eliminate the threat before it can be launched (David, 2003, p.142). This tactic, which has become very popular with Israel after the second Intifada, revolves around the idea that the targeted terrorist organization is in short supply of leaders and operational planners and that they will either be killed by the strike, or the limited resources of the organization will be re-tasked with protecting them from further decapitation attempts (Price, 2012, p.9). The types of groups and age of groups plays a factor in how a decapitation strike will affect it. According to Bryan Price, religious terrorists were easier to destroy than nationalist groups and if a nation is choosing to pursue a policy of leadership decapitation then the targeting of terrorist leaders should occur as early as possible in order to maximize mortality of the group (Price, 2012, p.44). These findings differ from the other camp of scholars who are critical of leadership decapitation.

These scholars who are critical of a counterterrorism strategy which is heavy in leadership decapitation feel that success is being weighed much too heavily and the costs are being overlooked. Patrick Johnston argues that while decapitating the leadership of a terrorist organization is not a silver bullet, neutralizing insurgent leadership significantly increases the government's chances at defeating insurgencies, but the costs of a failed attempt do outweigh the benefits of a successful attack (Johnston, 2012, p.77). Part of the reason for these failed attempts and lack of benefits from attacks is due to improper group targeting. Contrary to Price, Jordan finds religious groups to be highly resistant to attacks on leadership, while ideological organizations are much easier to destabilize through decapitation (Jordan, 2009, p. 722-723).

While leadership decapitation strikes did occur before 9/11, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 opened the floodgates for leadership decapitation as the United States tried

to hunt down the masterminds of the attack. Using leadership decapitation as the explanation for the increasing use of drones is problematic. While the United States government does engage in the killing of individuals it deems High Valued Targets (HVT) by drone, known as personality strikes, it more commonly engages in signature strikes. Signature strikes are the killing of low level suspected militants based on behavioral patterns (Living under Drones, 2012, p.12). Due to this large amount of signature strikes carried out, leadership decapitation cannot be seen as driving the rise of drones alone. Another issue with attempting to use leadership decapitation as a way to explain the rise in drone strikes is the secretive nature of killing high value targets. There is not enough information available to be able to determine how the United States decides to kill with drones over putting kill teams on the ground, to attempting to allow proxy forces to carry out the attack.

#### **d. Presidential Approval and Decision Making**

One aspect of drone use which has only been briefly touched on is the contribution President Obama has made to its rise. The literature on the presidential aspect of drones is quite rare with much of the current literature discussing the legality and ethical concerns of the use of drones. According to Michael Boyle, when President Obama took office he promised to end the War on Terror and restore respect for the rule of law into American counterterrorism (Boyle, 2013, p. 2). President Obama instead took American counterterrorism in a new direction. The Obama approach to counterterrorism emphasizes few troops on the ground and avoids nation building. The Obama administration reinforced this stance as being efficient and morally necessary, given the state of the U.S. economy and the war-weary public (Boyle, 2013, p.2). This approach has been highlighted by the increasing use of drones. During his first term he

launched more than six times the number of drone strikes than President Bush did during his whole presidency (Boyle, 2013, p.2). Boyle equates this to a misunderstanding in the Obama administration between the tactical and strategic tradeoffs of using these unmanned kill platforms as a means to eliminate terrorists.

The use of the Obama administration as the sole explainer for the increase in drones is useful, but lacks in the understanding of the previous administration's policies. In order to fully understand why drone use has increased, all administrations which have been known to use UAVs to kill, need to be looked at and analyzed for differing views on drone use. Another problem with looking at the effect of the president on the drone program is that it attempts to find a surface level solution to a much deeper problem. The creation and implementation of the drone program was the product of bureaucracies in the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense. These bureaucracies have existed longer than the presidents they serve under so in order to find an answer to the drone question, these bureaucracies must be investigated.

## **Hypotheses**

Based on the literature review, I believe that this study could have several potential outcomes, all of which would have further research implications. It is important to understand the reasoning behind the rise of the drone program in order to see where the military and CIA plan to take this program as each operate their drones independently from the other. From the literature review, I have assembled four hypotheses below.

H1. Hypothesis One: Air Power and Military Capability. I hypothesize that the increase in the number of drone strikes is due to the increased technological capability of the United States military. I expect to see as the technological evolution of the latest generation of drones, the MQ-1 General Atomics Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper combined with doctrine of

U.S. air power, mature from their initial use in 2002 to the height of their use through 2012 to be the reason behind the increasing number of drone strikes.

H2. Hypothesis Two: Bureaucratic Politics. Another hypothesis is that the increase in the number of drone strikes is based on the current leadership in the Department of Defense. The Secretary of Defense sets the doctrine of the armed forces for his tenure, and I expect to see drone use vary based on leadership in the Department of Defense.

H3. Hypothesis Three: Presidential Public Approval. I hypothesize that the increase in the number of drone strikes is due to a strain on presidential approval by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I expect to see an inverse relationship between the number of drone strikes and the approval rating for the president currently in office.

H4. Hypothesis Four: Obama's Way of War. I hypothesize that the increase in the number of drone strikes is due to the way President Obama is choosing to fight the War on Terror. I expect to see the reasoning for more drone strikes under the Obama administration, versus the Bush administration, due to Obama being constrained by promises he made to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq but maintain a strong counterterrorism stance at the same time.

## **Methodology**

In order to conduct an analysis of the United States use of drones, I performed process tracing case study analysis. The three case studies I plan to use to conduct this research are the period of time where Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense for the Bush administration, the period of time where Robert Gates was Secretary of Defense for the Bush administration and the first term of the Obama administration where Robert Gates was Secretary of Defense. I chose these case studies in order to illustrate the variance in military capabilities, governmental

bureaucracies, presidents and presidential public approval. This will enable me to paint a more defined picture of the implementation of the United States drone program as a whole from 2002 to the end of 2012.

In addition to the case studies, I reinforce my finding with descriptive statistics. For the dependent variable, the primary statistic I will use to show how the number of drone strikes has increased from 2002-2012, is a compiled list of all the United States drone strikes. This dataset is broken down by location of the drone strike, president at the time and sitting Secretary of Defense at the time. This data will be displayed in each of the chapters in order to illustrate the rising number of strikes at the time went on. Another statistic I will be using is the acquisition numbers released by the United States Air Force with regards to how many drone fired missiles have been purchased in a given year and how many General Atomics MQ-1 and MQ-9 airframes have been purchased. This information will be used to help show what the policies being put into play at the bureaucratic and presidential level. In addition to displaying descriptive statistics regarding the number of drone strikes and drone fired missiles I will also show public opinion polling data in order to highlight presidential approval during a given year in order to test hypothesis three, detailed in the above section.

### **Methodological Justification**

When looking at drone strike data it is important to note the only available sources. The data available for statistical analysis is of a third party nature making its reliability and validity questionable. However, out of this pool of unofficial drone strike data there is one source which stands out better than the others. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism is the best and most reliable source of drone strike data available and thus will be used to illustrate the

increasing number of strikes. With the data available, on American drone use process tracing will provide an excellent way to follow the evolution of drone use in the Bush and Obama administrations. According to Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, process tracing takes the form of a detailed narrative presented in the form of a chronicle that purports to throw light on how an event came to be (George and Bennett, 2005, p.210). While primary sources may prove difficult to find, secondary sources, such as newspaper articles, press releases memoirs and histories can help create as much understanding as possible. Due to this lack of primary sources I will be using process-tracing to construct a general explanation of drone use in both the Obama and Bush administrations (George and Bennett, 2005, p.211). However, as King, Keohane and Verba (1995, 478) suggest, I plan to make my process-tracing testable and falsifiable, by making descriptive or causal inferences, thus seeking explanation and generalization.

### **Drawbacks**

There is a downside to studying the topic of UAVs and the UCAVs operating in a lethal capacity. This drawback results in the possibility of information published on this topic being very scarce. This is due to the CIA running the drone program and the secretive nature of the CIA and the intelligence community as a whole. This means that budget information, official information on number of strikes committed, information on official number of those killed and information on who was killed is unavailable on the CIA side of drone operations, greatly narrowing the direction and amount of detail in the research. Instead, with the exception of the number of military casualties, which is listed by the military, third party sources such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism are being relied on for information on the drone strikes themselves. As long as the collection methodology of these third party sources is subjected to rigorous review, the results obtained from the research should be considered valid and reliable.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter two will focus on the military capabilities, governmental bureaucracies in Washington and the presidential aspects of drone use from 2002-2009. This chapter will look at the United States Air Force acquisition of UCAV assets which include but are not limited to, MQ-1 Predator drones, UCAV fired Hellfire missiles as well as ground stations and specialized personnel. Additionally, it will seek to analyze and point out Air Force doctrinal change. The governmental bureaucracies will be analyzed through looking at the leaders in the Pentagon to determine where they stand on this type of foreign policy intervention. The presidential aspects of drone use which will be examined during the 2002-2009 period will include public support for the President and presidential involvement in the use of drones. .

Chapter three will focus on military capabilities, governmental bureaucracies and presidential aspects during the time period 2009-2012 which is during the presidency of Barack Obama and Robert Gates is his Secretary of Defense. The point of this chapter is to analyze the evolution of the drone program under President Barack Obama's first term, whose term was filled with over 300 reported drone strikes. Additionally, it is important to look at the bureaucratic politics of the Pentagon by reviewing and analyzing Robert Gates' two years as Secretary of Defense as well as the term of his replacement, Leon Panetta.

The fourth and final chapter will tie together the ideas and information from the previous chapters to highlight the findings of this thesis and make a prediction on the future of United States drone strikes. This chapter will recap the three periods of time which were covered in chapters two, three and four which illustrate the evolution in military UCAVs from the first strike in Yemen during 2002 to frequent use of the UCAVs in 2012. Additionally, this final

chapter will recap the change in governmental bureaucracy and whether the change in mid and upper-level personnel in the White House, Pentagon and the CIA influenced the frequency in which strikes occurred. Ultimately, this chapter will determine whether or not one of the three aspects covered over the course of the research was more influential in increasing the number of drone strikes.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Drone Policy under Bush, Rumsfeld and Gates, 2002-2009**

The first instance of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle using lethal force took place November 3, 2002, inside the country of Yemen. An experimental CIA RQ-1 General Atomics Predator UAV armed with Hellfire Missiles was tracking Al Qaeda leader Qa'id Salim Sinan al-Harithi, one of the masterminds behind the *USS Cole* attack. While it was the CIA's drone which released the missile that killed the six militants being tracked, Lt. General Michael Delong of Central Command was the one who gave the final go ahead on the kill order (Woods, 2012). This use of a UAV to kill al-Harithi can be initially seen as a one-time occurrence, primarily as a way to remove a dangerous individual from a place he normally could not be touched. Little did the military leaders of the United States know that this strategy would become widely adopted as the "War on Terror" ran its course. During this time period with George W. Bush as President and Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense only seven drone strikes were conducted, one being the first strike which took place in Yemen and the other six taking place in the Federally Administrated Tribal Area of Pakistan (FATA). However, On November 8, 2006, Donald Rumsfeld, the man who ruled the Department of Defense with an iron fist, resigned after five years into his second tenure as Secretary of Defense. His replacement was a man who used to run the CIA, Robert Gates. At the same time the insurgency in Iraq was pushing United States and Iraqi forces to the brink with massive amounts of casualties, not to mention the Taliban and its Al-Qaeda allies in Afghanistan began to make a resurgence due to the Bush administration's neglect for the Afghan campaign. All the while, President George W. Bush's approval rating was in a free fall and would remain so for the last two years of his presidency. The resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put the UCAV program in a very precarious position.

While the program had been active for years, it still was not yet engrained into the military apparatus which meant that if the wrong person was chosen for the Secretary of Defense position the whole program could have been scrapped or at the very least prevented from expanding the way that it did. However, the chosen Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates saw the potential thatUCAVs had for the United States military and in combination with introduction of the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper shaped defense policy to better integrate and engrain drones in the United States military apparatus. During the time Secretary of Defense Robert Gates operated under President Bush, forty-sixUCAV strikes took place, thirty-nine more strikes than what took place under Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld.

Table 2.1. Number of Drone Strikes under President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Strikes	1	0	1	3	2

Table 2.2. Number of Drone Strikes under President Bush and Secretary of Defense Gates

	2007	2008	2009
Number of Strikes	6	38	2

("Get the data: Drone wars | The Bureau of Investigative Journalism")

The following chapter covers the technological and logistical aspects of the Air ForceUCAV program from the years 2002 to 2009. It discusses and evaluates the initialUCAV used by the Air Force, the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator and the introduction of the newest airframe in the United StatesUCAV arsenal, the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper. It then covers Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s involvement in the creation of the drone program. Additionally, this chapter covers the importance that the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld and the selection of Robert Gates for the office of Secretary of Defense played on the shaping the destiny of the United States drone program during the final two years of the Bush administration. Finally, it ends with a discussion on President George W. Bush’s approval ratings during the

time of the first drone strike all the way to the end of his presidency. These three sections are providing evidence for the hypotheses discussed in chapter one.

### **The Creation of UAV Technology for War, 2002 - 2006**

During the 2002-2006 time period, the USAF and CIA only possessed one model of UAV which was capable of fielding AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, and at the time of the November 2002 killing, it was considered experimental for drones to carry these missiles ("Mq-1b predator," 2010). This UAV, the RQ-1 General Atomics Predator was selected for use by the Air Force in 1996 as a way to gather intelligence and provide real-time surveillance for warfighters. The Predator found itself being used in conflicts such as Kosovo and Bosnia with varying degrees of success. It was not until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 that it evolved beyond its exclusive role as an intelligence gatherer. During the 1996 to 2001 time period the USAF never made an effort to acquire the Predator on a scale greater than just a handful of airframes per year. Instead the acquisitions were kept between six and seven RQ-1 airframes a year with only active members of the Air Force being trained in the operation of the Predator, and no Predator Hellfire missiles being stockpiled ("Statistical Digest," 2005).

After the first drone strike in November 2002, numerous things took place. The first thing was that the USAF changed the designation of the Predator from RQ-1 to MQ-1 in order to signify that its role has changed from a reconnaissance aircraft to a multirole aircraft capable of not just tracking, but engaging and destroying a target if the need arises. Despite this one successful strike in 2002, no subsequent strikes were reported until 2005. At that time USAF officials began drastically increasing its acquisition of not only MQ-1 Predator airframes but also

UAV capable AGM-114 Hellfire missiles. According to the Air Force Statistical Digest, the United States Air Force acquisitions increased from seven airframes in 2003 to fifteen airframes in 2004 and twenty-seven and twenty-six airframes in 2005 and 2006 respectively ("Statistical Digest," 2010). The increase in Predator Hellfire missiles began in 2003 with 137 missiles. Acquisitions then jumped to 320 missiles in 2005 and 401 missiles in 2006 ("Statistical Digest," 2010). These acquisitions represent a massive increase in not just Air Force capability but also show a dedication to a new type of strategy during a time when the War on Terror was beginning to take a turn for the worse, with the insurgency starting to come to the surface in Iraq and the Taliban and its Al-Qaeda allies beginning to make a resurgence in Afghanistan. For this the United States would require a more advanced airframe, one designed from the ground up with the sole purpose of annihilating America's enemies.

### **The Creation of UAV Technology for War, 2006 - 2009**

The technological upgrades and acquisitions which occurred during the 2006 – 2009 time period are crucial for understanding the future use of UCAVs by the United States and as a catalyst for the rampant drone strikes which the Obama Administration would go on to conduct. While the MQ-1 Predator was used in five strikes from 2002 to 2006, the airframe suffered from numerous drawbacks that really limited the use of the program. The first drawback was that it was never designed to carry munitions, so its payload was limited to carrying two AGM-114 Hellfire missiles or a payload of 450 pounds. While in some cases this armament might be enough, it limited the amount of targets which could be engaged by the airframe before it was forced to fly back to base and rearm. Additionally, the Predator had a rather low flight ceiling at

25,000 feet and only had a maximum range of 770 miles ("Mq-1b predator," 2010). This made it vulnerable to certain types of anti-aircraft weapons and required that the base of operations be somewhere close, especially when operating in the FATA region of Pakistan or in Yemen. What the United States needed was a UAV which was purpose built for combat operations with longer range, larger payload and a higher flight ceiling because the technological limits of the MQ-1 Predator prevented large scale drone operations from being carried out.

The Reaper provided the capabilities that the Predator was lacking and answered the call for a dedicatedUCAV, not an adapted reconnaissance UAV. The General Atomics MQ-9, named the Reaper, was initially deployed in October 2007 and is the United States first UAV designed with the tracking, engagement and destruction of targets in mind ("Mq-9 reaper", 2010). The MQ-9 airframe can be seen possessing vast improvements over its smaller, older MQ-1 brethren. The MQ-9 Reaper has a largely increased payload that allows it to carry 3,750 pounds of munitions. This means it can carry not only AGM-114 Hellfire missiles but is also able to carry GBU-12 Paveway II and GBU-38 Joint Direct Attack munitions ("Mq-9 reaper", 2010). This allows theUCAV to be equipped to attack various types of targets and is not just limited to using Hellfire missiles to attack these targets. The increased weapons payload also allows the MQ-9 to attack and eliminate more targets before returning to base and rearm. Additionally, the flight ceiling of the Reaper has been increased to 50,000 feet which will allow it to avoid all but the most dedicated anti-aircraft fire and the maximum range of operation has been increased to 1,150 miles, enabling its pilots to control it further away from the area of operations.

When the Reaper was first introduced for operational capability in October 2007, it was the first purpose built UAV designed and manufactured with a combat role in mind. Its creation

signified that the United States deemed the use of UCAVs in the War on Terror a necessity and by evolving technologically, it shows a dedication to the program which may have been questioned had the MQ-1 Predator continued to remain the sole combat airframe in the United States fleet. The Air Force solidified this commitment by purchasing twenty-six General Atomics MQ-9 Reapers in 2008. If the roll out of a purpose-built war UCAV was not enough evidence of a commitment towards the use of UCAVs in the War on Terror, the United States Air Force purchasing of MQ-1 Predators more than doubled from the twenty-six airframes purchased in 2006 to sixty purchased in 2007 ("Statistical digest," 2010). This indicates that the United States was trying hard to grow its drone fleet and that the current model was proving inadequate for the role that the Air Force and other military planners at the Pentagon had in store for it. In addition the acquisition of Predator fired missiles more than quadrupled from four hundred and one missiles purchased in 2006 to one thousand eight hundred and forty seven missiles purchased in 2007 ("Statistical digest," 2010). The acquisition of both the Hellfire missiles and the Predator airframes mark a concrete commitment by the United States to a military whose future will in some way be augmented by UAVs and UCAVs.

This advancement of UCAV technology from the experimental UAV in 2002 to the designated kill platform of the MQ-9 Reaper are only as good as the men who oversee and help cultivate the programs under which they operate. Both defense secretaries under President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates each contributed greatly to the creation of the United States UCAV program and helped spawn an entity which would eventually take on a life of its own.

## **Bureaucratic Politics under Donald Rumsfeld**

Military technology acquisition and doctrinal changes are propelled by not just what the military needs to fight the enemy in the field, but is greatly influenced by those who reside in powerful positions in the Department of Defense and intelligence community. These offices are occupied by people who are shaped by prior experiences, emotions and self-interest. In the case of Donald Rumsfeld, after entering the Office of Secretary of Defense for the second time in his career embarked on crusade to reinvent the United States military from the massive force that existed during the 1980s-1990s and whose basis for getting involved in conflicts was the Powell doctrine to one that was based on the exact opposite. The military Rumsfeld wanted to create was one that did not revolve around overwhelming force but instead wished to create a leaner military whose primary focus was based around mobility and outmaneuvering the enemy (Kurth, 2007). However, in order to achieve his vision of the new military, Rumsfeld was forced to either convert or remove all of the “Clinton Generals” (Boyer, 2003). These were members of the old military, many of which who served in Vietnam and applied the lessons learned from there to the military they were in charge of. After the election of George W. Bush, Rumsfeld began removing generals who were committed to the Powell doctrine from areas of high importance and replaced them for those who were committed to the new doctrine of mobility. Additionally, projects such as the Crusader next generation mobile artillery had no place in Rumsfeld’s vision of a new military and were subsequently cancelled (Kurth, 2007). In addition removing to the reliance of heavy artillery from the military in order to make it more mobile, Rumsfeld also wanted to change it from the Powell doctrine military of not acting without strong American public support to a military which did not need to rely on support from home.

Donald Rumsfeld's transformation of the American military was only one piece of the bureaucracy which helped engrain the use of UCAVs as one of the primary weapons in the War on Terror. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks the United States began to reach out to nations in the Middle East in order to try secure partnerships for the War on Terror.

The first of these partnerships came in the form of a deal with an unlikely ally, Yemen. President George W. Bush initially put Yemen high on the list of targets for the War on Terror but a visit by President Ali Adullah Saleh to the United States in November 2001 quickly changed that around (Scahill). Instead of finding himself threatened and coerced by the United States President Saleh found himself presented with an aid package worth \$400 million in addition to more money from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Scahill). In exchange for this aid package, President Saleh agreed to allow the United States to open a secret counter terrorism camp run by the CIA, United States Marines and Special Forces. This counter terrorism camp would assist in training the military of Yemen in counter terrorism tactics as well as run counter terrorism missions by themselves. The most important thing to note about this deal is that President Saleh agreed to allow the United States to fly Predator drones around the country uninhibited. The United States would then go on to mark Yemen as an official combat zone in the Afghan theater which would lead to the November 3, 2002 drone attack that killed Qa'id Salim Sinan al-Harithi. Yemen was only the first country to allow United States drones to operate with impunity. Pakistan proved to be yet another location where al-Qaeda and the Taliban were operating from and that the United States wanted to access for counterterrorism operations.

In 2004, CIA director George Tenet approached the Pakistani government with a deal. In exchanging for killing Nek Mohammad, a member of the Pakistani Taliban who recently led a

Tribal uprising and was marked as an enemy of the state by the Pakistani government, the CIA would gain uninhibited access to Pakistan airspace which would be used by the United States to conduct drone strikes (Mazzeti, 2013). This bargain consisted of the CIA being able to only fly in narrow parts of the FATA. The reason for this was to ensure that the United States to stumble across Pakistan's nuclear facilities or the mountainous training camps of the Kashmiri militants. In addition the Pakistani government would either take credit for strikes or would just remain silent on the matter ("The Bush Years," 2011).

These strategic partnerships were important in establishing the basis for the use of UAVs in the War on Terror and the bureaucracy of the United States government made that happen. While Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld may have established doctrinal change in the United States military and helped established the use of weaponized UAVs, mismanagement of the War on Terror led to his resignation November 8, 2006. He was replaced by Robert Gates, the man who would take the drone program to new heights.

### **The Legacy of Rumsfeld's Mobility Doctrine**

November 8, 2006, was an important day for the Bush administration, the Department of Defense and the drone program run by the United States military. Donald Rumsfeld, the man who ruled over the Pentagon with unquestioning leadership, who removed the "Clinton Generals", and shaped the United States Military to his vision of mobility was no more. After mishandling the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he resigned from his post as Secretary of Defense and was replaced by Robert Gates. Gates was previously the Director of Central Intelligence, Deputy National Security Advisor under President George H.W. Bush and President of Texas

A&M. While Rumsfeld can be credited to being the catalyst for the United States to begin adopting Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for combat roles, Gates during the last two years of President George W. Bush's final term can be seen as acting as the guiding hand for the United States military's use of UCAVs, which would help solidify the program into United States military culture.

When Robert Gates entered the Pentagon as Secretary of Defense, the United States military was under a lot of pressure from the insurgency in Iraq and the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Commanders in the field were not getting the equipment they needed while money was still being funded into conventional weapons that had no value in the War on Terror. Secretary Gates saw that conflicts like the one in Iraq and the one in Afghanistan were going to be the future conflict that the United States would find itself embroiled in and while the military Rumsfeld created was leaner and faster, it was not prepared for the type of war that the United States currently found itself involved in, nor the small "asymmetric" wars Gates saw as the future of conflict (Schactman). Secretary Gates saw the previous work done by UCAVs during Rumsfeld's tenure as Secretary of Defense as excellent tools to utilize in the unconventional conflicts of the present and the future.

It was not just the fact that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates liked drones as the weapon of choice for the War on Terror, but he seemed frustrated that the previous staff in the Pentagon was not doing more to increase the numbers of deployed UAVs and UCAVs, not just in the Air Force but in other branches of the military as well (Fung, 2010). This deficiency in the number of drones available caused Gates to begin two initiatives in order to try and fix that issue. The two initiatives involved increasing the number of UCAV airframes purchased by the Air Force and beginning a large drone pilot recruitment program in order to ensure that the newly acquired

UCAVs would have operators. Before firing the military and civilian chiefs of the Air Force for their failure to secure nuclear weapons, Gates publicly spoke out against the military's failure to acquire and deploy more UCAVs (Air Force must do more for war, Gates says). While the comment was directed at the military overall, the struggle to keep the United States drone program growing was very real, as acquisitions and deployments were not up to the standard wanted by Gates. In addition the nomination of General Norton Schwartz to the position of Air Force Chief of Staff was seen as a shift in Air Force Leadership as he was the first non-fighter or bomber pilot to head the Air Force since World War II. While this replacement was due to the failure of the previous Air Force chief to properly secure nuclear weapons, this can be seen as Secretary Gates trying to take the Air Force in a new direction, more in line with the future he saw (Barnes). These actions showed Gates' commitment to the UCAV program which had been operating underneath the surface for the last four years of the Bush administration. When he took office amidst the failing War on Terror the United States was stuck in, he saw the potential that UCAVs had in providing assistance for counter terrorism operations. The increase in UCAV acquisitions and pilot recruitment were the primary events which occurred during Gates' first two years as Secretary of Defense, which immediately put the drone program on the road to what it became today. However, these reforms were only the first of many policy changes Gates would call for which positively affected the drone program. His other, more drastic policy reformations would not occur until Gates was asked to stay on as President Obama's Secretary of Defense which will be discussed in the next chapter. These early changes showed that Gates believed in the drone program and believed that the use of UCAVs were the future to continued success by the United States military.

## **The American President and Public Support**

Before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush ran on a platform of nonintervention and working together with other countries to handle the problems of the world. When the events of September 11 unfolded, this initial foreign policy championed by President Bush turned into something that would lead the United States into a global campaign against terrorism that continues to drag on to this day.

The Bush presidency from the time of him taking the oath of office in January 2001 until September 10, 2001, was rather uneventful in terms of measured public support fluctuation. Public support for the president sat right around the 50% mark which is where it stood when Bush was elected in the contentious 2000 Presidential election ("Bush and public," 2008). When the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 took place, the public image of the president and public approval of President Bush shifted. By the time late September rolled around, George W. Bush's approval rating stood at 86% with the American public willing to support military endeavors to combat terrorism ("Bush and public," 2008). This high level of public support was perceived as a mandate by the Bush Presidency as means to pursue terrorism wherever it was deemed necessary. This mandate would later be put into effect on November 3, 2002, when al-Harithi in Yemen was killed by a Hellfire missile delivered from a drone. While there was mention in the news about al-Harithi being killed, the nature of the attack was kept very much under wraps, thus not helpful to bolstering the image of President Bush.

The news of the UAV strikes conducted under the Bush administration in Yemen and Pakistan during this time was kept so under wraps that there was no possibility aside from a leak which could have resulted in the public catching wind of the strikes. Additionally, the

controversy of the decision to invade Iraq, as well as variety domestic issues, were responsible for the decline of President Bush's public approval rating in the months and years following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter suggest that 2002-2009 was can be broke down into two periods of the UCAV program, the Rumsfeld period and the Gates period. On one side you had the Air Force and presumably CIA who were still getting used to having drones as weapons. The acquisition records from the time show that the current supply of Predator UAVs were inadequate for the new mission that the Air Force and CIA were undertaking. Additionally, while the Predator UAV that killed al-Harathi was equipped with Hellfire missiles, they were just experimental in nature and more specially designed Predator Hellfire missiles had to be purchased for future strikes. The 2002-2006 time period also shows that the government bureaucracy had to negotiate with Yemen and Pakistan in order to secure permission in order to use UCAVs inside those countries. The nature of the deals reportedly made with each country were out of a desire to target specific individuals linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban. These strikes were not expanded to the signature strikes which would be heard about later in the coming years. The most important aspect which led to the use of drones to kill, while encouraged by the vision Donald Rumsfeld had for the military and the perceived mandate of using for to protect the United States, ultimately came down the technological advancements and the success of the November 3, 2002 experimental strike which showed the viability of using drones to smite America's enemies, despite appearing out of reach. Like many defense technologies, the Predator only performed so well. The drone program failed to take off and become a larger portion of the military at this point in time because the MQ-1 Predator proved inadequate for a

sustained air campaign. The limited number of airframes and small payloads did not provide adequate coverage for the type of campaign the United States was trying to wage. That all changed when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld resigned and Secretary Gates took command of the Pentagon.

When Rumsfeld left office he left an uncertain future about the drone program, a future which may never have come if Robert Gates did not take over as Secretary of Defense. It was Robert Gates who realized that unconventional wars were the future conflicts of the United States and in order to avoid the lack of preparation that the United States suffered with Iraq and Afghanistan, Gates decided to keep the drone program. Through his reorganizing of key Air Force personnel and his increase in drone pilot recruitment, combined with the introduction of the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper and the greatly increased acquisitions of General Atomics MQ-1 Predators and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles showed the commitment to the use of UCAVs made by the United States military and marks the most important time frame in the United States drone program. What is important to get from this chapter is during the two years covered by this chapter are a transition and preparation period. While drone use did go up by some degree before President George W. Bush left office, this technological and doctrinal changes being put in place by Secretary of Defense Gates would have affected whichever of the candidates who were running in the 2008 election. This also begs the question as to what would have happened if Secretary of Defense Gates was not chosen to be Rumsfeld's replacement and instead someone who did not understand the current military situation was chosen. The technological hypothesis and bureaucratic hypothesis are linked together with one not being able to go far without the other. The presidential approval rating hypothesis would be a good explanation, the other events occurring during the UCAV strikes of the Bush presidency make it difficult to distinguish what

precisely caused lower approval ratings. While the use of drones being Obama's War looks like it could be less about President Obama pushing more strikes and more leaning towards the idea that whoever is president at the time is just the front man to an apparatus which operates on its own.

### Chapter 3:

#### The Reaper Presidency- Drone Policy in the Obama Administration

In the 2008 presidential election, the United States of America elected Barack Obama as President of the United States. The American public began to grow tired of the war in Iraq with almost 60% of Americans viewing the decision to send troops to Iraq as a mistake, according to a Gallup poll conducted in November 2008 (Iraq). After his election President Obama saw the Iraq war to a close for U.S. troops and began increasing United States counterterrorism operations in the region, not limited to increasing Special Forces operations and drone strikes. President Obama came into office surround by people who were well versed in the art of conducting drone strikes.

Table 3.1. Number of Drone Strikes under President Obama and Secretary of Defense Gates

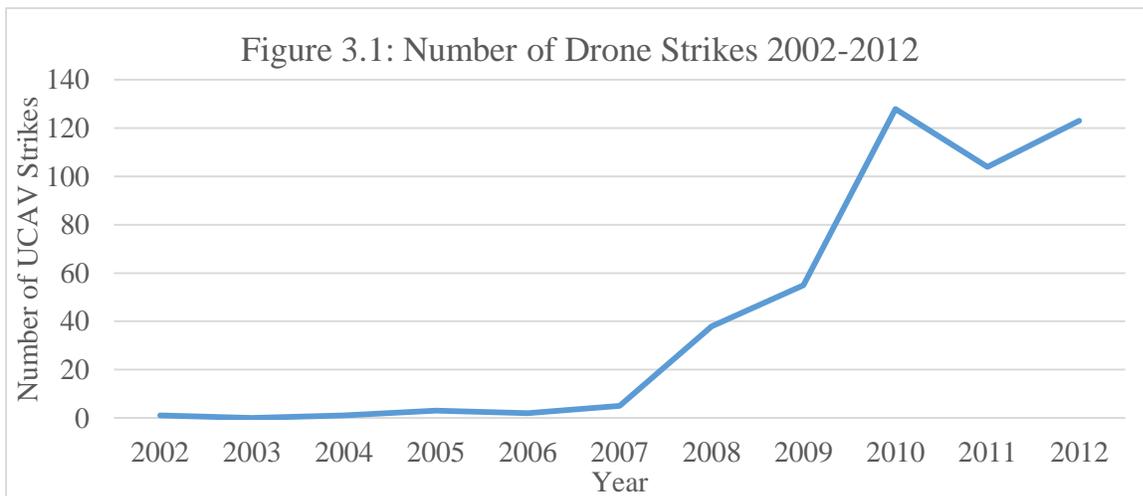
	2009	2010	2011
Number of Strikes	53	128	53

("Get the data: Drone wars | The Bureau of Investigative Journalism")

Table 3.2. Number of Drone Strikes under President Obama and Secretary of Defense Panetta

	2011	2012	2013
Number of Strikes	51	123	18

("Get the data: Drone wars | The Bureau of Investigative Journalism")



Robert Gates would continue his tenure as Secretary of Defense for the first two years of the Obama presidency. He would continue to cultivate the military side of the drone program during his remaining two years at the Pentagon. During this time his successor, Leon Panetta would grow and increase the scope of the CIA run drone program as Director of the CIA. This chapter discusses the UCAV program and the doctrine and technology it uses now. It also discusses the role Secretary of Defense Robert Gates played in shaping the Obama administration's use of drones for the duration of the first term and the involvement his replacement, Leon Panetta, took in the drone program. Finally, this chapter discusses the fallout of the large amount of information regarding the United States drone program being released and how President Obama responded.

### **Presidencies and Drone Use: Bush v. Obama**

During his time in office President Bush conducted approximately fifty-three drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia (The Bureau Investigates). By comparison these numbers are minimal when looking at the over three hundred drone strikes conducted during President Obama's first term. A cause of such a large differential in strikes can be seen in the differing levels of maturity of the drone program under the Bush and Obama administrations. The MQ-1 Predator did not have nearly the range nor the payload that the MQ-9 Reaper does. It was not until late 2007 that the MQ-9 Reaper was available for acquisition, leaving Bush only a year to acquire them. By the time President Obama took office in January 2009, there were already veterans of the UCAV program and a wide array of MQ-9 Reapers were acquired, giving President Obama a very capable UCAV program capable to going to work immediately.

During the Obama administration the final eighteen MQ-1 Predators were purchased by the Air Force during 2009. By this time the MQ-1 Predators were completely replaced by the MQ-9 Reaper as the airframe of choice by the Air Force and CIA. The Air Force proceeded to purchase twenty-five in 2009, twenty-four in 2010 and then forty-eight MQ-9 Reapers in 2011 ("Statistical Digest," 2011). Additionally, Predator Hellfire missiles were purchased on the order of 1263 in 2009, 1175 in 2010 and nine hundred and thirty-eight in 2011 ("Statistical Digest," 2011). President Obama wasted no time putting this drone force to work either. During his first four years in office, the Obama administration was responsible for three hundred and thirty strikes in Pakistan alone (Table 1). However, it was not Obama's doing for inheriting an apparatus that had grown extremely efficient at eliminating targets, rather it was those around him who were more experienced and more involved with the drone program and who encouraged the new President to throw his support behind it.

### **UCAV consistency among Bureaucratic leadership change**

When President Barack Obama took office in January of 2009 he was faced with a dizzying array of foreign policy issues that needed to be addressed immediately. The United States' involvement in the war in Iraq was winding down and there was a Taliban resurgence happening in Afghanistan which needed addressing or the Karzai government was at risk of being overthrown. In the midst of all of these foreign policy issues President Obama removed almost all of the old cabinet and brought in an entirely new group except for Secretary of Defense Robert Gates who was the only member of the Obama cabinet with experience in the drone program, due to him previously being President Bush's Secretary of Defense. It was during the first two years of the Obama administration that Secretary of Defense Gates took it

upon himself to transform the United States military once more. While former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld changed the military to suit his vision of mobility focused warfare which could be used against conventional or unconventional foes, Secretary of Defense Gates saw the United States military moving in a different direction. In order to mold the United States military into a fighting force which would better be able to handle counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in the future Secretary of Defense Gates decided that certain programs needed to be cut in order to make room for other programs which were better suited to modern warfare (Fung, 2010). Funding for the F-22 was cut in July 2009 with Gates citing the newer, cheaper F-35 Lightning (also known as the Joint Strike Fighter), he also eased out the Navy's DDG-1000 stealth destroyer, cancelled the Airborne Laser aircraft and the Multiple Kill Vehicle and called for a reevaluation of the Army's Future Combat Systems program (Kaplan, 2009). While all of these programs were cancelled or had funding reduced, Secretary of Defense Gates made a pledge of two billion dollars towards the bolstering of the United States UAV program (Kaplan, 2009). This is important to note, because with conventional weapon systems on the receiving end of the budget cut and money being pledged to drones, Secretary of Defense Gates was continuing to shape the United States Military into a force that is was prepared to fight bush wars in the third world.

Robert Gates was responsible for transforming the United States drone program into the force it is today. However, Robert Gates left the office of Secretary of Defense in 2011 and with it he left the future of the drone program up in the air as any replacement Secretary of Defense who did not believe in nor conform to the idea of using drones in the capacity Gates had envisioned would certainly overturn any changes he had made. Luckily for drone advocates in the military, the new Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta did not have it out for the drone

program, in fact he supported the program whole heartedly as he assisted in developing the CIA's own drone program as Director of the CIA from 2009-2011.

Leon Panetta took the office of Secretary of Defense on July 1, 2011, and only served until the end of President Obama's first term ("Leon E. Panetta"). Panetta seemed to be cut from the same cloth as former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, having been a support of UCAVs during his time as Director of the CIA. However, Panetta could not focus his attention to the military's drone program because, he as soon as he entered office, the extensive military budget was under fire and legislators were looking to trim and cut whatever they could from it (Whitlock, 2011). In order to try and preserve as much of the military's budget as possible Secretary of Defense Panetta constantly spoke against the cuts, saying things that the United States would lose its global edge and that the military would suffer from degraded readiness. Secretary of Defense Gates however spoke of cutting military overhead and restraining the rampant military spending that plagued the Pentagon years before he took office. Yet despite the distraction of trying to defend the rest of the military from budget cuts, the drone program prospered. Airframe and weapons acquisitions continued at similar levels under both men and UCAV strike levels remained comparable (Table 4).

The continuation of Robert Gates' tenure as Secretary of Defense from the last two years of the Bush administration to the first two years of the Obama administration was very important in turning the drone program into what it is today. By being part of the Obama administration Gates was able to continue the work he did under President Bush and to keep the drone program headed in the direction that he felt appropriate. By the time that he left the office of Secretary of Defense the drone program was so ingrained in the military structure that it did not require the constant management and avocation which of which was previously required. Even the years in

which Leon Panetta was Secretary of Defense, the acquisitions of the MQ-9 Reaper did not show signs of fading and actually increased in the year 2011.

### **The Public, Obama and Drones**

President George W. Bush suffered from many public opinion nightmares such as the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, the mishandling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the economic crash of 2007. The one thing he managed to avoid having to discuss in public was how he was president during the creation of the Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles program whose purpose was to track down and kill potential terrorists in the Middle East. Instead, that burden fell to President Barack Obama, who despite running on the platform of acquiring and using Predator UCAVs to help keep America secure took a large amount of criticism for allowing this to happen (Democratic Platform 2008).

It became known to the public soon after President Obama's inauguration in 2009 that the administration was going to continue the former Bush administration's policy of conducting drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia. While this should have been expected as President Obama was surrounded by Secretary of Defense Gates and his team, all of whom were of continuing the policy of drone strikes as a primary strategy during the War on Terror, the public was less than optimistic about using drones to conduct strikes against militants in foreign countries, especially when the number of civilian casualties inflicted by these strikes was something was disputed and something the Obama administration had no intention of releasing. The admission that the Obama administration was continuing the Bush era program put it on notice with many members of the public and journalists who would use this as grounds to begin digging into the secret history of American UCAV use.

After the 2009 admissions of the existence of the drone program, the program stayed in the back of the mind but pieces of the story were missing such as the claim civilian casualties were nearly non-existent and extreme care was being given to the targets of the strikes, however only a year later would more secrets regarding the drone program come to fall on the ears of the public and they would have negative things to say about the administration. In 2010, reports came out about the Obama administration and its approval to add the radical American Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki to the targeted kill list (Greenwald, 2010). This led to large public outrage at the fact the President could order the assassination of an American citizen despite later claims by the Obama administration that al-Awlaki had his citizenship stripped before his subsequent assassination by a UCAV fired Hellfire missile in September 2011.

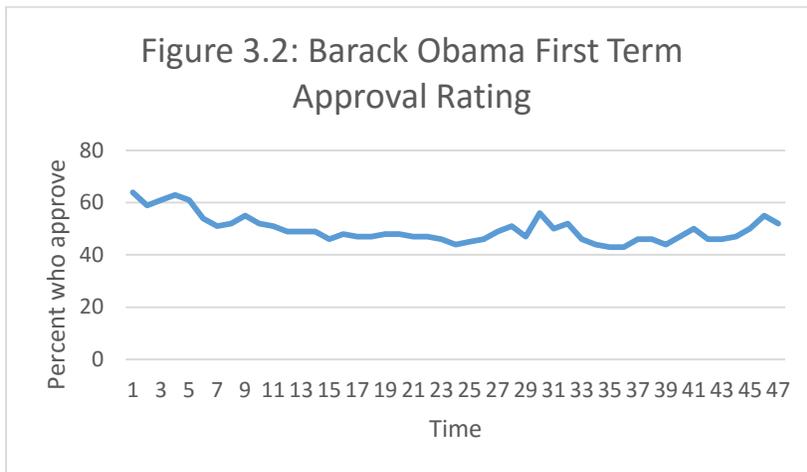
Finally the rest of the picture regarding UCAV use by the United States government was acknowledged by the Obama administration at the end of January in 2012. President Obama admitted that many of the drone strikes conducted by the United States were conducted in the Federally Administrated Tribal Area (FATA) region of Pakistan and that the targets of the strikes have been Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters (AFP, 2012). This news opened the floodgates as investigations of the administration's claim that civilian casualties were low to non-existent turned out to be false as hundreds of civilian deaths appeared to have been covered up by the CIA and military during the strikes.

These revelations about the administration's use of UCAVs and vast amount of news articles detailing the backroom deals made with foreign countries and secret government kill lists with the names of potential targets were met with large amounts of visible outrage not only with the public but also in the government itself. However, while it was previously thought President Obama's approval rating would suffer at the hands of those who were less than optimistic about

the use of drones but in actuality, the approval ratings have suffered less than previously thought. President Obama entered the White House during a tumultuous time for the country, the global economy was in shambles and the economy of the United States was contracting at an extremely rapid pace with thousands of jobs being lost every day during the crisis. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the Economic Stimulus Bill in order to try and save the economy. It was there that his approval rating stood at the highest it would ever be, sixty four percent ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013). However, during the first year of his presidency his approval rating plummeted to forty nine percent despite successes such as announcing the end of combat operations in Iraq by August 2010, nominating Sonia Sotomayor to the United States Supreme Court, and being nominated and winning the Noble Peace Prize ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013). While the admission of United States drone program under President Obama in 2009 did cause public outrage and created some unpopularity among the public, due to the job loss from the economic crisis hitting its peak at the same time it is hard to determine which event caused the drop in President Obama's approval ratings. During the final months of the Bush administration the job loss was fifty thousand to seventy thousand a month whereas during President Obama's first three months in office over one and a half million jobs were lost and 4.9 million jobs were lost over the course of 2009. The lack of noticeable public disapproval of the drone program can be seen as being completely negated by the disapproval President Obama faced for the poor performance of the economy.

The 2009 admission to the existence of the drone program can be seen as the least controversial of the information concerning UCAVs that the public was made aware of during the first term of President Obama. While the 2009 dips in approval rating were due to the poor performance of the economy and not the open admission of the existence of the drone program,

2010 approval ratings sank to forty four percent and no new information regarding United States drone use was released. 2011 was an interesting year for President's Obama approval rating because there was a large fluctuation due to two key events that caused substantial boosts in his approval ratings and other events that caused approval to sink by years end. The first event which caused his approval rating to shoot up to fifty one percent was the Arab Spring and the democracy movements taking place all across the Middle East ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013). However, his approval sharply dipped again following that slight spike in the early months of 2011. The second major event and a slight minor event of 2011 that caused his approval rating to shoot up to fifty six percent were the release of his Birth Certificate, thus disproving the 'birther' movement and the announcement of the successful raid which killed Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013).



President Obama's approval ratings slipped from that fifty six percent about as quickly as it climbed there. As economic difficulties and disappointments reared their ugly heads once again, as Congress was unable to compromise on the budget and almost caused the United States to breach the debt ceiling, and as Solyndra, the solar panel production company which was the poster child for receiving bailout money to help jump start the economy in 2009 declared bankruptcy ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013). All this occurred within a couple months of the

September 2011 strike which kill radical American Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki was killed via UCAV fired Hellfire Missile in Yemen. That alone sparked outrage against the President for having a drone kill a citizen of the United States. However, the Obama administration still was struggling with the secrecy of the drone program and an even larger part of the truth came out in the beginning of 2012.

At this point, the American public knew drone strikes were being carried out in Yemen and Somalia, even being used overtly in warzones like Afghanistan and Iraq. However, at the end of January 2012 the Obama Administration admitted that deals were made with the Pakistani government to allow United States drones to launch strikes inside the Federally Administrated Tribal Area of Pakistan (AFP, 2012). This caused immense public outrage at the secrecy and the lying by the President and his administration, especially since nothing was released all at once. All the secrets regarding the drone program kept intensifying from bad to worse. It was this admission by the Obama administration which resulted in a possible observable drop in public approval for the President. According to Pew Research Center polls, President Obama's approval rating was sitting at forty six percent, primarily due to the successful mission in Libya and the death of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi ("Obama's approval ratings," 2013). As 2011 ended and 2012 began President Obama's approval rating slipped slightly from that forty six percent to around forty-four percent. This was around the time of the admission concerning the FATA region drone strikes (AFP, 2012). However, since the decrease was so slight and occurred around the time of the State of the Union as well as 2012 being an election year, it is difficult to discern the cause and importance of the drop in public opinion. Due to this difficulty the administration would have no reason to believe that, despite public outcry against the use of

drones, that they were the cause of the drop in public approval and would have no reason to cease or reduce the number of strikes conducted.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this chapter suggest that 2008-2012 was when the UCAV program reached the pinnacle of its operations effectiveness. Under President Obama the last of the MQ-1 Predators were acquired for military use and the quantities of MQ-9 Reapers which were being purchased at the end of the Bush administration was being met or even increased during 2009-2012. These MQ-9 Reapers were designed for tracking and engaging multiple targets while being able to fly farther and faster than its smaller MQ-1 counterpart. However, what made the UCAVs under President Obama so effective and the number of strikes conducted during his first was the heavy influence of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and his vision for drones in the United States military. Robert Gates was willing to kill certain defense projects which were extremely popular with military high command and reallocate those funds to the improvement and the enlargement of the drone program. While Secretary of Defense Gates' reign only lasted two years under President Obama, the influence and prior experience with UCAVs under the Bush administration were the most important aspect of allowing the use of drones to kill to reach the levels it did under President Obama.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Analysis and Conclusion of the United States Drone Program**

The United States UCAV program has grown from an experimental strike against a well-known target in November 2002 to a multifaceted enterprise with two independent operations run by both the United States Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency. As the program grew in size and scope with the addition of new technology and more experienced personnel, the operation is engraining itself deeper into the culture of the United States foreign policy and counterterrorism as an option for waging war without the direct involvement of United States troops on the ground. The idea of this engraining and the deeper involvement was a core finding of this study.

This fourth and final chapter will showcase the findings of this study, evaluate the hypotheses presented in chapter one and forecast the future of the United States use of UCAVs and the program as a whole.

### **Hypothesis Evaluation**

In Chapter One, I outlined a number of different hypotheses which were to be examined in this thesis. First, I hypothesized that the increase in drone strikes from 2002 -2013 was due to the change in military capability and the technological evolution of the UCAV airframes. Additionally, I hypothesized that the increase in drone strikes would have been influenced by the change in American air power doctrine which occurred after the 1991 Persian Gulf War as the United States began to adopt a more air power focused strategy following the successes displayed in the 1991 conflict against Iraq. While important as a catalyst of the UCAV program,

the change in American air power doctrine does not explain the perpetuation and growth that the program experienced from 2002-2012.

This hypothesis was analyzed through process tracing and the examination of United States Air Force acquisition records beginning in 2002, the year of the first drone strike, and proceeding all the way until the end of 2012 which was the end of President Barack Obama's first term as President. This analysis was further broken up into two different sections based on the President at the time and the Secretary of Defense who served beneath them. The factors which were most likely to yield meaningful data were the military capabilities and a comparison of the policies of former secretaries Rumsfeld, Gates and Panetta.

Regarding the importance of military capability, this study found that the evolution in military technology proved crucial in maintaining an increasing number of drone strikes from 2002 through the end of 2012. Additionally, this study found that it took the success of the initial drone strike in order to kick start the acquisition ofUCAVs andUCAV firedAGM-114 Hellfire missiles by the United States Air Force. The Air Force records analyzed for this study showed that drone acquisition was performed solely for the benefit of active combat troops, as records indicate that USAF reserves have no record of ever acquiring UAVs capable of being equipped with weaponry, which indicates that theUCAV technology is still trying to permeate through the active combat troops in order to meet their needs. This study asserts that while the technological advances, such as the evolution from theMQ-1 Predator to theMQ-9 Reaper, are important to the increasing number of drone strikes conducted by the United States the acquisition of such technology is also important because if the airframes are not rolled out fast enough to meet the demands of the warfighters in the field, then the impact of the technology is quite limited. The analysis of the acquisition records shows that the United States Air Force pursued an aggressive

acquisition policy when acquiring the latest UCAV airframes for their active combat forces. This aggressive acquisition policy, enacted once the use of drones was deemed viable by the Bush administration, crossed presidential administration lines and remained in effect throughout the 2002 -2012 time period.

The evolution UCAV technology from the experimental RQ-1 Predator fitted with modified AGM-114 Hellfire missiles to the technologically advanced, multifaceted weapons platform of the MQ-9 Reaper was crucial in the United States increasing the number drone strikes it was performing. This dual policy of technological advancement and acquisition show that the United States is committed implementing ideas that it has about changing how wars are fought.

Second, I hypothesized that due to the bureaucracy inside various government agencies the drone program would grow, independent of which President was in the oval office. Due to the secretive nature of the CIA drone program, this study was unable to analyze how the bureaucracy affected that program so sole focus was placed on the United States military and the Secretary of Defense. Following the evidence found in chapters two, three and four the conclusions this study can make are the following. While Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense during the time which the drone program got underway, the adoption of UCAVs by the United States military can traced to two linked events that Rumsfeld instituted under his tenure as Secretary of Defense. The first event was the instituting the change in United States military doctrine from the AirLand Battle doctrine, developed for Cold War use, to a new doctrine of a lean, mobile military. This was an idea that would help pave the way for drone use in the United States Military. Rumsfeld's push for the new mobility doctrine led to the second event during his time as Secretary of Defense, the firing of the "Clinton Generals." By firing the generals who

were devoted to the Powell Doctrine and AirLand Battle, Rumsfeld was able to remove those who would have resisted his doctrinal shift of the United States military. This study finds that the bureaucratic overhaul undertaken by Donald Rumsfeld during his tenure as Secretary of Defense under President George W. Bush helped lead to a bureaucracy more accepting of using UCAVs to wage war.

The tenure of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates under both President Bush and President Obama further support this finding. Secretary of Defense Gates under President Bush oversaw the evolution of the drone program as it took a large evolutionary jump forward with the rollout of the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper. Secretary Gates was asked to remain Secretary of Defense for the Obama administration and would do so until 2011, however he would perform actions during those two years in the Obama administration that would help strengthen the United States drone program and leave it in a self-sustained state by the time of his departure.

Early in his tenure as President Obama's Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates found himself already confronted with how the future of the United States military should proceed, be it adapting to a future of unconventional conflicts like Iraq and Afghanistan or continuing to prepare possible conventional conflicts with nations such as Russia or China. When faced with this decision, Secretary of Defense Gates chose to prepare the United States for unconventional warfare. This would lead to Secretary Gates successfully cancelling the F-22 Raptor, the airborne laser aircraft and the multiple kill vehicle. Gates would then call for two billion additional dollars to be pledged to the drone program, in order to purchase more airframes and train more pilots. This action combined with the fact that when Gates donned the mantle of Secretary of Defense, the United States drone program was already underway so Gates got to spend four years training these individuals further and embedding the culture of drones deeper into the United States

military. This embedded drone culture really showed itself when Leon Panetta took over as Secretary of Defense in 2011 and his term was primarily defined by the United States budget crisis and efforts to stave off budget cuts by Congress who sought to strip money away from the Defense Department in an effort to balance the nation's budget. Secretary of Defense Panetta's focus was primarily towards saving military programs from getting cut. In addition, his rhetoric told the story that he was focused on saving the nation's ability to wage conventional warfare, not unconventional warfare despite having led the CIA and its program before assuming the post of Secretary of Defense. Yet, even with the hands off approach by Panetta, the drone program continued to grow and the strikes continued in large numbers.

While the use of armed UAVs started under President George W. Bush, it really hit its stride under President Barack Obama. However, this program expanded independently from the Presidents and at first it was driven by the Secretary of Defense at the time, but eventually became embedded into military culture that the negligence or lack of hands-on maintenance by Leon Panetta could harm the program and it continued to flourish. This hands-on maintenance by the Secretary of Defense led to the program continuing to grow regardless of whether President Bush or President Obama was in office at the time.

Thirdly, this study hypothesized that the reason behind the increasing drone strikes was due to the strain on presidential approval in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through the analysis of both the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama it was indeterminable as to whether or not presidential public opinion was a substantial cause in the decreasing or increasing of UCAV procurement or strikes. While movement in the public approval rating may have occurred due to the public viewing the strikes as unfavorable, too many other events took

place which may have affected the results and the fact that the dates when drone strikes occurred and when they were reported further complicate the matter.

Lastly, this study hypothesized that the reason behind the increasing number of drone strikes under the Obama administration was because it was Obama's way of war and his way of handling the War on Terror without breaking many of the promises he made while getting elected. Through the analysis of the Obama administration it is notable to point out that President Obama's use of drones in the War on Terror was explicitly stated in the 2008 Democratic Party platform which means that he was following through on a campaign promise by continuing the use of UCAVs to kill. In addition, following the analysis of large events during President Obama's first term, while there was an outcry against President Obama for his large use of drones, none of the slips in his public approval rating can be solely attributed to the disapproval. In addition, the factors such as Obama becoming President as the new MQ-9 Reapers and the push by Secretary of Defense Gates to fund the UCAV program further makes it difficult to say whether Obama was the mastermind of the increase in drone strikes during his first term or if he was focusing on other issues, such as the economy while all of this occurred in the background.

### **The Future of Drones: War has changed, but will drone use continue**

The United States drone program started off as a secret experiment by the United States government as a way to try kill a most wanted terrorist with a missile equipped reconnaissance UAV. The mission's success was an important indicator that war could be conducted with UCAV strikes. The UCAV program by the Air Force was driven by technological innovation and the guiding hands of former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld but truly shaped and honed by former Secretary of Defense Gates to the point where the program did not need direct attention to

survive and even under the less than watchful eye of former Secretary of Defense Panetta it continued to thrive. Despite the success and evolution of the United States Air Force's UCAV program there have been many criticisms both domestically and on the international level.

The American public were not the only ones who were critical of the United States use of drones, the international community also spoke out against the use of UCAVs by the United States. During a United Nations hearing in October 2013 many nations expressed concern over the proliferation of UCAVs. The use of UCAVs are not illegal but the problem is how they are currently being used by the United States in counterterrorism operations. UN experts fear that the ease and secrecy of drone deployment make it difficult to determine accountability of drone strikes. Followed by the lack of transparency shown by the United States when it comes to drone strikes makes it very difficult for the United Nations to determine the impact that these strikes are having on civilians in the countries where the strikes are occurring. Independent organizations, such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have come out against the United States use of drones, primarily in the Federally Administrated Tribal Area of Pakistan, stating that the conditions of those living under patrolled air space are changing the way people live and interact with each other. This view of the international community conflicts with officials in the United States as many, including President Barack Obama who claim UCAVs are a godsend in the United States counterterrorism campaigns being waged across Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia. There have been various reports by the government which have justified the use of UCAVs.

Even with all these criticisms facing the United States, the drone program in its current capacity of conducting strikes in secret will continue to expand until a change occurs from inside the United States government. The use of UCAVs from 2002-2014 have been used against opposition that have no reliable way to retaliate against the airframes. This must be accounted for

when analyzing the success of drone strikes during that time period. When former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was reorganizing the military after taking office in 2006, he was building it up to handle a world filled with unconventional conflicts like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, conflicts which UCAVs excel at. If the leaders in charge of the United States military continue to predict a world filled with unconventional conflicts then the use of UCAVs will continue to grow. However, a decline in the drone program could end up being a reality if military leaders see the Russia, Ukraine incident as a conventional threat to the United States and another reorganization of the military occurs. While expansion of UCAVs in the United States military is dependent on how military leaders view the future of conflicts, the era of the drone has arrived. Now that the drone program has been in use for over ten years it is to the point where it is ready to expand further. Other branches of the military are seeking to develop their own UCAVs after witnessing the success of the Air Force further embedding the use of drones into military culture. One factor that may influence the amount of drone strikes in the near future is the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the future of the drone program will be up in the air until the 2016 presidential election has come and gone and a replacement has been selected for President Obama.

President Obama is the leader for using UCAVs in a counterterrorism role ever since he has taken office in 2009 and have used them constantly throughout his whole presidency. The idea that drone strikes are going to decrease or disappear due to the election of a new President is one that is improbable. Due to the heavy use of drones, the mindset surrounding drone based counterterrorism operations has become a body count mindset which plagued the United States leadership during the Vietnam War. Since the use of drones does not require soldiers to put themselves in harm's way in order to have success it gives the President of the United States the

opportunity to sell victory to the American public without being forced to have the deaths of American servicemen hanging over each individual's head. This is important to acknowledge considering the outcry President George W. Bush experienced after only suffering a few thousand deaths in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The President of the United States who comes after President Obama will continue to use drones and rely on them to be a counterterrorism presence in the Middle East. Drones have so few drawbacks that it makes keeping them around and using them an easy decision for the next president and future military leaders.

### **Unanswered Questions**

This study follows the evolution of the United States drone program by looking at technological evolution,UCAV acquisition and the Secretary of Defense who was currently involved at the time. This was all done with respect to the United States Air Force, however despite what this study discovered about the evolution of the program with respect to the Air Force it is only one piece of the puzzle. The primary user ofUCAVs in the War on Terror aside from the United States Air Force is the Central Intelligence Agency and there are not any public records regarding how their program is organized, what drones they use or who is in charge of it. This information would prove valuable not only for cataloging the evolution of the United States drone program as a whole, but also seeing if the conclusions found by this study would also be the same for the CIA. In addition if ever an official number of drone strikes conducted by the United States is released, it could prove useful in conducting possible statistical analysis and take the study of the drone program to the next level.

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