

**Artificial Intelligence, Drone Warfare, and U.S. National Security Strategy:
Strategic Outcomes and Counterinsurgency Implications**

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Introduction

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into military activities has become a significant paradigm shift in the conduct of modern warfare, altering the way states achieve their national security objectives in a more complex international system. The development of machine learning, data processing, and automated decision support systems has enabled military forces to gather, process, and respond to large amounts of information faster than ever before. The most visible manifestation of these technological advances in the United States has been in the growth of drone warfare, specifically in counterterrorism as well as counterinsurgency operations in weak and conflict-ridden areas.¹ Among them, the case of Afghanistan is one of the acute cases with the help of which the strategic implications of the AI-empowered military power can be analyzed.

After the events of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the national security policy of the U.S. became more and more concerned with the necessity to counter non-state actors, forces that act in the environment of asymmetric and transnational conflicts.² Conventional military methods, based on the massive use of troops and control of territory, were expensive and highly controversial politically. The United States responded to this by shifting toward technologically mediated modes of warfare, which were said to be more precise, efficient and less risky to the military personnel. One of the key tools of this strategic change was the unmanned aerial vehicles backed by the AI-assisted intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems. The Afghan country, with its chronic insurgency, mountainous terrain, and its civilian and combatant populations that are closely knit, became a main testing ground on which these capabilities could be put to use.

¹ Okpaleke, Francis N. "The Implications of Drone Proliferation for US Grand Strategy." In *Drones and US Grand Strategy in the Contemporary World*, pp. 211-239. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023.

² Aydinli, Ersel. "9/11 Was an instance of transnational balancing: An intervention in statist IR theory." *Alternatives* 47, no. 4 (2022): 175-193.

The advocates of drone warfare assisted by AI have claimed that algorithmic targeting, pattern-of-life reasoning, and real-time information integration can help optimize operations by enhancing discrimination of the targets and quickening decision-making.³ In this light, AI is a force multiplier, which would enhance the power of national security by breaking insurgent networks without causing excessive casualties and exposure to troops.

Nevertheless, critics argue that the strategic implications of these technologies go much further than victory on the tactical level. Even in counterinsurgency states, like Afghanistan, where political legitimacy, civilian trust and local intelligence collaboration is the key to long-term stability, remote and algorithm-based violence can produce results that will disperse the bigger strategic objectives.

This paper will discuss the impact of the development of artificial intelligence in the U.S to apply it to drone missions, and Afghanistan is the key example in this context. Although comparing the insights of American drone campaigns in Pakistan and other counterterrorism settings, the analysis of the Afghanistan case emphasizes the evidence, results, and implications of the counterinsurgency warfare that uses AI. The main thesis of the argument is the fact that despite the AI-assisted deployment of drones increasing the U.S. tactical efficiency and operational range, it also led to the erosion of counterinsurgency effectiveness by undermining civilian trust, warping the intelligence dynamics, and focusing on the short-term kinetic success rather than political stability in the long term. Through the deep studies of the Afghan case, this paper aims to shed light on the strategic boundaries of artificial intelligence as a means of national security policy in an insurgency with more intricate settings.⁴

³ Roy, Kaushik, ed. *Artificial intelligence, ethics and the future of warfare: Global perspectives*. Taylor & Francis, 2024.

⁴ Iqbal, Shahid, Syed Wajeeh Abbas Rizvi, Muhammad Hasnain Haider, and Saqib Raza. "Artificial Intelligence in Security and Defense: Explore the integration of AI in military strategies, security policies, and its implications for global power dynamics." *International Journal of Human and Society* 3, no. 4 (2023): 341-353.

Artificial Intelligence, Drone Warfare, and U.S. National Security Strategy

AI has gradually entered the philosophy of the U.S. military as a technological ability and as a means of strategy. Instead of serving as an independent decision-maker, the use of AI in modern warfare is more of a system of algorithmic support tools that facilitate the improvement of human judgment and speed up information processing, as well as combine a variety of intelligence sources.⁵ When applied to drone warfare, AI has been used in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), target identification, pattern-of-life, and predictive estimates of insurgent behavior. These changes are very compatible with the wider U.S. national security interests in the speed, precision, and reduction of risks in operations against non-state actors.

The tactical value of AI-controlled drone warfare came out of the shortcomings of traditional military strength in asymmetric warfare.⁶ Combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at the scale of massive troop presence revealed the political, financial, and human costs of the long-term counterinsurgency operations. Since the American policy no longer enjoyed the public's patience for engaging in lengthy ground wars, policymakers needed to find alternative options that would put these hostile networks under pressure without necessitating occupation or excessive losses. The solution that was proposed by drone warfare, enhanced by data analysis AI, seemed to balance both military performance and domestic politics.⁷ With the ability to continuously monitor and strike faster, AI-controlled drones supported the United States in projecting power over large and challenging landscapes without presenting a human face to enemy fire.

⁵ Bovet Emanuel, Peter. "Exploring Decision Advantages: Improving Speed, Precision and Efficiency in Military Targeting by Applying Artificial Intelligence." PhD diss., Försvarshögskolan (FHS), 2025.

⁶ Meyer, Kjell. "AI-Driven Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in Modern Warfare."

⁷ Rickli, Jean-Marc, and Federico Mantellassi. "Artificial intelligence in warfare: military uses of AI and their international security implications." In *The AI wave in defence innovation*, pp. 12-36. Routledge, 2023.

In the U.S. national security strategy, this technological development was associated with an incremental redefinition of counterinsurgency that was people-centered towards counterterrorism-centered counterinsurgency. The communal principles of classical counterinsurgency include protecting the populace, establishing local legitimacy, and obtaining intelligence by maintaining prolonged collaboration with the locals.⁸ Conversely, drone operations enhanced by AI give precedence to precision targeting and decapitation of leaders and depend on technical intelligence more than human sources. Models that learned large data sets, e.g., movement patterns, communications metadata, and behavioral clues, and enabled analysts to designate possible insurgents with growing accuracy, frequently in areas where conventional intelligence collection was restricted or hazardous. This dependence on data-driven evaluations supported a strategic favoritism to kinetic answers that might be performed remotely and recurrently.

The introduction of AI into the drone kill chain shortened the engagement time greatly. Machine-learning systems where live video feeds, satellite shots, and intercepted communications could be processed enabled military operators to track targets and take action with very little delay. In the national security perspective, this acceleration was considered to be a breakthrough against insurgent networks that were based on mobility, concealment, and decentralization.⁹ Intelligence based on AI made it less likely that the accused would escape and enhanced the speed of U.S. attacks. These efficiencies reinforced the perception that technological perfection has a chance to compensate structural difficulties of insurgent warfare.

⁸ Gray, Colin. "Counterterrorism Strategies in the Age of Global Insurgency." *International Journal for Conventional and Non-Conventional Warfare* 1, no. 1 (2024): 56-64.

⁹ Agbiboa, Daniel E. *Mobility, mobilization, and counter/insurgency: The routes of terror in an African context*. University of Michigan Press, 2022.

Nevertheless, such strategic dependency on AI and drones also has brought new types of risks. The data used to train the algorithmic systems is influenced by the information on which it is trained, and in a war-torn country like Afghanistan, the information available is incomplete, biased, or ambiguous with respect to the context.¹⁰ Trends of the behavior observed by AI systems can be cultural trends, financial need, or habitual routines of civilians and not insurgent action. In cases where these forms of assessment are over-emphasized in the decision-making sphere, the risk is that probabilistic judgments are considered to be certainties. Although the final decision-making power still lies in the hands of human operators, who are formally in charge of granting the strikes, the perceived objectivity of algorithmic outputs and their perceived authority can have a major impact on the ultimate decision-making, moving some of the responsibility out of the context of human judgment.

On the strategy level, AI-induced drone warfare has transformed the meaning of success in the U.S. national security policy.¹¹ Tactical measures, including the in number of high-value targets killed, the rate of attacks, and the decrease of American casualties, became a noticeable indicator of improvement. These acts were quite consistent with a counterterrorism framework but made a poor fit with the overall objectives of the counterinsurgency, which focus on political reconciliation, institutional development, and civilian cooperation. The growing focus on the use of data-driven targeting in Afghanistan was a strategic trade-off: destabilizing insurgent networks immediately was valued more highly than the more gradual and less predictable effort to build sustainable political legitimacy.

¹⁰ Hafetz, Jonathan. "Digital Information Technologies and International Humanitarian Law: New Opportunities and Challenges." *Denv. J. Int'l L. & Pol'y* 53 (2024): 249.

¹¹ Eslami, Mohammad, Alena Vieira, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Lauro Borges, Maria Papageorgiou, Fabio Cristiano, Ibrahim Al-Marashi, Tom Sauer, and Christian Kaunert. "The geopolitics of AI-driven arms races." *Geopolitics* (2025): 1-43.

Another significant impact of the normalization of AI-assisted drone warfare on the political level was on strategic decision-making.¹² Since the number of people required to run the drone operations was less and the domestic cost was less visible, compared to the conventional deployments, the drone operations reduced the line at which the continued use of force would be acceptable. This relationship helped to sustain military involvement as the political resolution became less likely. By offering greater accuracy and lessening civilian casualties, AI systems contributed to the further development of an illusion that military action could be effective, as well as controlled. Practically, though, the overall impact of frequent strikes tended to influence civic attitudes in a manner that could not be adequately measured using technical evaluations alone.

From the perspective of national security, AI-powered drone warfare was, therefore, a national security innovation and a strategic limitation. Although it extended the capacity of the United States to observe, target and destabilize insurgent players, it also minimized the set of policy instruments used in multifaceted conflict settings. There was a danger of focusing too much on technological solutions and neglecting the political and social aspects of security, especially in the society that was torn apart by war over decades.¹³ The distance of remote and algorithm-assisted operations in Afghanistan, which had weak legitimacy and trust already, complicated the process of matching military action, as well as long-term strategic objectives.

The role of artificial intelligence in the U.S. drone warfare thus necessitates going beyond the evaluation of the technical performance to the overall impact of the technology on the

¹² Nair, Prasanth Balakrishnan. "Artificial Intelligence and War: Understanding Their Convergence and the Resulting Complexities in the Military Decision-Making Process." In *AI, Consciousness and The New Humanism: Fundamental Reflections on Minds and Machines*, pp. 259-272. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024.

¹³ Dunn Caveltty, Myriam, Christine Eriksen, and Benjamin Scharte. "Making cyber security more resilient: adding social considerations to technological fixes." *Journal of Risk Research* 26, no. 7 (2023): 801-814.

broader strategy.¹⁴ The concept of AI did not simply augment the capabilities of the military, but it redefined priorities, incentives, and notions of success in the U.S. national security strategy. As the case studies below demonstrate, these changes yielded tactically impressive and strategically ambiguous results, especially when measured according to the principles of counterinsurgency efficiency and long-term stability.

Case Studies and Strategic Outcomes

The strategic implications of AI-assisted drone warfare can be best understood by examining how these technologies are applied in various operational contexts.¹⁵ Of all U.S. drone operations, Afghanistan is the most elaborate and consequential one, not only due to the nature and size of the operation but also due to its precise definition as a counterinsurgency operation rather than a pure counterterrorism operation. The introduction of artificial intelligence in drone activities in Afghanistan was supposed to solve long-standing problems related to the mobility of insurgents and the lack of intelligence and protection of forces. The results of such integration, however, demonstrate a rather complex interdependence between tactical success and strategic constraint.

Drone attacks, with AI involvement, became the core of U.S. military action in Afghanistan against the Taliban and allied insurgency groups. Machine-learning systems were used to process large volumes of data acquired through full-motion video, satellite images, intercepted communications, and ground sensors.¹⁶ These systems allowed pattern-of-life analysis to be performed by the analysts and individuals whose movement, associations or behaviors corresponded to algorithmically defined indicators of insurgent

¹⁴ Raska, Michael, and Richard A. Bitzinger, eds. *The AI wave in defence innovation: Assessing military artificial intelligence strategies, capabilities, and trajectories*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

¹⁵ Monzon Baeza, Victor, Raúl Parada, Laura Concha Salor, and Carlos Monzo. "AI Integration in Tactical Communication Systems and Networks: A Survey and Future Research Directions." *Systems* 13, no. 9 (2025).

¹⁶ Aburass, Sanad, Ibrahim Aljarah, Zaid Rababaa, and Maha Abu Rumman. "Artificial intelligence in the global military and weapon industry: applications, methodologies, and implications." *Jordan Scientific Journal* 2, no. 1 (2025).

activity were identified. Automation of aspects of data sorting and correlation also led to AI to cut the amount of time that could have been spent on surveillance to strike by an unprecedented margin, enabling the U.S. forces to respond to the target with renewed vigor and persistence.

Operationally, it generated quantifiable short-term benefits of these capabilities. High-value targets were also identified and eliminated more effectively, insurgent leaders were placed under constant pressure, and the United States troops' exposure to face-to-face combat was minimized.¹⁷ Insurgent freedom of movement is restricted, and insurgent cycles of planning were disrupted, since the capacity to have continuous aerial surveillance of remote and contentious areas. These consequences were often mentioned in the context of strategies as proof that drone warfare augmented with AI provided a highly accurate and efficient method of fighting insurgency without the expenses of broad-scale ground warfare.¹⁸

But these strategic victories had more underlying strategic implications, which were all too clear as time progressed. The insurgency in Afghanistan was internal to civilian communities and influenced by the social, tribal, and economic dynamics of a specific area, which could hardly be captured using technical intelligence on its own. Although AI systems were more successful in recognizing the behavioral patterns, they could not perceive the meaning of the patterns in a more convincing context. Travels on familiar routes, visiting communal events or being in contact with various people might be algorithmically seen as suspicious even when they are based on normal civilian lives. Consequently, the error margin on identifying the target was still very high, even after they said that it had improved precision.

¹⁷ Siddiqui, Saira, and Shahzeb Danish. "Chaos and Collapse."

¹⁸ Latiff, Robert H. *Future peace: technology, aggression, and the rush to war*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2022.

Inaccurately reported or perceived civilian casualties had deep consequences on the counterinsurgency activities. The concept of COIN doctrine places great importance on the legitimacy and civilian confidence as sources of strategic advantage, since it determines the desire of the local population to pass intelligence and help the government authority.¹⁹ Recurring drone attacks in Afghanistan, especially those that are done with less transparency, led to fear, resentment and mistrust among the civilians. Even when strikes aimed to achieve the insurgent targets successfully, the overall population tended to view such actions as random and unmanageable violence, encouraged by an impersonal and remote source. This image sabotaged the attempts to establish a lasting political standing and diluted the intelligence apparatus on which successful counterinsurgency relies.

The dependence on AI-powered technical intelligence also shifted the human-technological sources of information balance.²⁰ With the increasing role of drone surveillance and algorithm analysis in making decisions about the targets, the comparative value of human intelligence obtained via local interaction has fallen. This perception brought an intelligence paradox: the amount of data was growing, and the quality of contextual understanding tended to decrease. In Afghanistan, with good intelligence necessitating a profound understanding of the local power formations and social bondings, the replacement of data-based inference with human judgment restricted the strategic worth of intelligence harvests. The cycle of the process of creating insecurity and alienation due to the kinetic action strengthened over time and led to a decline in civilian collaboration and a further reliance on remote surveillance.²¹

¹⁹ Davies, Glynn. "Exploring the Success and Failure of Counterinsurgency Operations: A Comparative Analysis of COIN Operations in Sri Lanka and the Philippines." PhD diss., Murdoch University, 2024.

²⁰ Zybailov, B. L., G. Yu Kosovsky, G. V. Glazko, V. I. Glazko, and Olga I. Skobel. "Evolutionary Perspectives on HumanArtificial Intelligence Convergence." *Acta Naturae (англоязычная версия)* 16, no. 3 (2024): 4-17.

²¹ Skiba, Richard. *Urban Warfare: Emergence, Evolution, Strategies and Mastery of the Modern Conflict Landscape*. After Midnight Publishing, 2024.

The strategic results of the operations in Afghanistan can be explained further compared to the practices of U.S. drone operations in the country of Pakistan, as well as in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In Pakistan, the use of drone attacks was mostly presented as a counterterrorism measure that did not fall within a counterinsurgency campaign. AI-assisted targeting had a comparable role in the detection and monitoring of suspected militants, and operationally, the program helped disrupt militant leadership. The political backlash was, however, instant and strong. Intrusions into sovereignty, civilian casualties and the lack of transparency in targeting procedures contributed to a large-scale outcry of the population and a poor U.S.-Pakistan relationship.²² Although Pakistan was not a complete COIN environment like Afghanistan, the backlash underscored the greater strategic expenses of remote, algorithm-driven warfare in sensitive political situations.

The same trend was observed in the U.S. drone operations in other theaters of counterterrorism, including Yemen. There, AI-assisted targeting helped to legitimize a state of constant drone surveillance and assassinations outside of battlefields. Even though these activities diminished the short-term risks to the U.S. interests, they also added to the instability by feeding domestic dissatisfaction and supporting militant discourses. In these situations, strategic performance remained the same: AI-based drone warfare provided tactical effectiveness but produced political and social implications that undermined the prospects of security in the long term.

These case studies taken together provide a key conflict in the U.S. national security strategy. Artificial intelligence enhanced the efficiency of drone missions, allowing them to shorten the response time and increase the scope of surveillance, yet also created a competitive advantage of strategic solutions based on kinetics over politics. This was a

²² Parveen, Tahira, Muhammad Iqbal, and Brigadier Dr Muhammad Naeem Akbar Qazi. "Post Us Withdrawal Threat Scenario for Pakistan." *GUMAN* 6, no. 4 (2023): 281-296.

particularly significant preference in Afghanistan. Though there have been years of constant drone attacks and constant destabilization of the insurgent leadership, the political conflict could not be solved.²³ The subsequent failure of the Afghanistan government and the resurgence of the Taliban government highlighted the shortcomings of a policy that focused on technological superiority at the expense of legitimacy, rule, and local confidence.

The strategic consequences of the AI-powered drone warfare cannot be measured by operational metrics or operational gains only, however. In Afghanistan, the adoption of artificial intelligence into drone operations changed the definition of success and its pursuits as the strategic scope was reduced to those that could be quantified, targeted, and killed. Although this strategy was consistent with counterterrorism goals, it was inadequate and, in certain aspects, counterproductive to a counterinsurgency strategy. The case of Afghanistan shows that even the use of sophisticated technology, which is sophisticated and is reinforced by artificial intelligence, cannot be used in place of the political and social underpinnings of sustainable security.²⁴

Implications for Counterinsurgency and National Security Policy

The benefit of AI-based drone warfare in Afghanistan has great consequences on the counterinsurgency theory and the wider U.S. national security policy.²⁵ The essence of these implications is inherently a conflict of logic between the logic of technological efficiency and the political essence of insurgent conflict. Counterinsurgency theory puts more stress on the fact that success is not measured by the capacity to tear the opposing forces but rather the

²³ Davies, Shawn, Therése Pettersson, and Magnus Öberg. "Organized violence 1989–2021 and drone warfare." *Journal of Peace Research* 59, no. 4 (2022): 593-610.

²⁴ Iqbal, Shahid, Syed Wajeeh Abbas Rizvi, Muhammad Hasnain Haider, and Saqib Raza. "Artificial Intelligence in Security and Defense: Explore the integration of AI in military strategies, security policies, and its implications for global power dynamics." *International Journal of Human and Society* 3, no. 4 (2023): 341-353.

²⁵ Mallick, P. K. "Artificial intelligence, national security and the future of warfare." In *Artificial Intelligence, Ethics and the Future of Warfare*, pp. 30-70. Routledge India, 2024.

creation of legitimacy in the minds of the people. However, in Afghanistan, the growing use of AI-enhanced drone operations reshaped the strategy, switching the focus from population-oriented engagement to remote and data-driven types of control with long-term implications on legitimacy and stability.

Legitimacy serves as a strategic center of gravity, based on a counterinsurgency viewpoint. Intelligence partnership, weakened insurgent control, and empowered governance are all the results of civil trust.²⁶ This dynamic was complicated by AI-powered drone warfare, which brought with it a form of war violence that was both ubiquitous and impersonal. Continuous air control and precision bombing induced a sense of insecurity in the civilian population, which, in many cases, did not know the reasons why certain people or places were being targeted. The lack of transparency and accountability, even in the case when the strikes were precise, contributed to the feeling of arbitrariness and injustice. These perceptions undermined the weak legitimacy of the U.S. forces and the native Afghan government that the U.S. forces were protecting in an already fractured social environment.

The adoption of artificial intelligence also increased this challenge of legitimacy because it changed the mode of generating and validating intelligence.²⁷ The classical counterinsurgency attaches great importance to human intelligence, which is achieved through continuous contact with the locals. AI-based systems, on the contrary, favor technical signatures and behavior patterns, which can be combined, measured, and scaled. Though it increased the range of surveillance, it decreased the chances of human judgment based upon cultural and contextual knowledge. The resultant intelligence imbalance in Afghanistan undermined the motivation to cooperate with civilians as communities were no longer at the

²⁶ Gray, Colin. "Counterterrorism Strategies in the Age of Global Insurgency." *International Journal for Conventional and Non-Conventional Warfare* 1, no. 1 (2024): 56-64.

²⁷ Rane, Nitin, Saurabh P. Choudhary, and Jayesh Rane. "Acceptance of artificial intelligence: key factors, challenges, and implementation strategies." *Journal of Applied Artificial Intelligence* 5, no. 2 (2024): 50-70.

center of the intelligence process and were more likely to suffer its effects in the form of kinetic action.

These strategic impacts cannot be separated with ethical considerations. Even though in the strict sense, AI systems in drone operations in the USA were not autonomous, but human authorization was still formally necessary, the role of algorithmic evaluations brought up matters of moral distance and responsibility. The most significant aspect of the situation is that decision-makers came to depend more on the results provided by systems that appear to be objective and technologically superior.²⁸ This dependency threatened to obscure the inherent vagueness of data-driven targeting, especially in a situation where there was ambiguity and the presence of civilians and combatants. The civilian casualties made responsibility diffuse, and thus, accountability was problematic, as well as the ethical legitimacy, both at the domestic and international levels.

These policy implications were on these ethical challenges. The international humanitarian law is based on the principle of distinction, proportionality and accountability. Although the idea of AI-enhanced drone warfare was frequently justified by the need to enhance adherence to these principles by being more precise, the experience in Afghanistan does not indicate that precision in itself is enough. The long-term consequences of recurrent strikes, unrelenting surveillance and non-transparent decision-making processes were the experiences of the civilians that could not be addressed through legal frameworks. The national security policy, which focuses on technological adherence rather than experienced civilian effect, threatens to undermine normative bases that support long-term strategic credibility.

²⁸ Berman, Alexander, Karl de Fine Licht, and Vanja Carlsson. "Trustworthy AI in the public sector: An empirical analysis of a Swedish labor market decision-support system." *Technology in Society* 76 (2024): 102471.

As a case study, Afghans reveal how drone warfare through AI enabled the United States to remake its national security priorities.²⁹ The capability of making prolonged operations with minimal U.S. losses minimized domestic politics that aimed to resolve the conflict either by negotiation or political expediency. Drone warfare turned into a way to contain instability without eliminating it, so that military involvement would continue without investing in governance and reconciliation. This was reinforced by artificial intelligence that maximized the efficiency and scalability of remote operations to make them an attractive alternative to more complex and uncertain political strategies.

It does not just mean implications in Afghanistan. With AI penetrating more and more into the military planning and implementation processes, policy on national security risks technological dependence on a path where having access to sophisticated tools limits strategic imagination. This risk is acute in an insurgent environment. AI-based systems are quite effective in detecting targets; however, they are a poor fit to solve grievances, establish institutions, and cultivate legitimacy. The Afghan case shows that excessive dependence on these systems may lead to the manipulation of strategic goals and focus on what may be targeted instead of what should be governed.

The problem that will face policymakers in future conflicts will be to incorporate AI into the framework of the broader strategy of legitimacy, accountability, and political solutions, among technological innovations.³⁰ In the absence of such integration, the search for efficiency will tend to recreate the same instability that national security policy is aimed at avoiding.

²⁹ Frantzman, Seth J. *The drone wars: Pioneers, killing machines, artificial intelligence, and the battle for the future*. Bombardier Books, 2021.

³⁰ Ulinicane, Inga, William Knight, Tonii Leach, Bernd Carsten Stahl, and Winter-Gladys Wanjiku. "Framing governance for a contested emerging technology: insights from AI policy." *Policy and Society* 40, no. 2 (2021): 158-177.

Conclusion

The development of artificial intelligence as a component of the U.S. drone warfare has been a landmark shift in the strategy of national security, as it puts in the vanguard speed, accuracy, and force protection in asymmetric warfare. As seen in the Afghan case, AI-enabled drone operations promoted a higher level of tactical success by improving surveillance, increasing the speed of targeting, as well as minimizing the U.S. military losses. All these benefits made AI-driven warfare a favorable tool to control security threats in the complex and distant settings.

Yet, Afghanistan also demonstrates the strategic constraints of such a strategy in a counterinsurgency setup. Artificial intelligence was beneficial because it enhanced the effectiveness of kinetic operations, but at the same time, it compromised traditional counterinsurgency missions that were based on legitimacy, civilian trust, and political stability. The continued use of drone surveillance and targeting based on algorithms led to the development of fear and resentment among civilian communities, erosion of incentives to collaborate with the local community, and the replacement of human intelligence with machine-based inferences. Consequently, strategic success did not last as tactical gains were accrued.

The experiences in Pakistan and other counterterrorism theaters make this conclusion more reliable.³¹ Throughout the cases, AI-assisted drone warfare provided a temporary destabilization of militant groups, alongside causing political and ethical fallouts and strategic stalemates. A low cost of remote warfare within the country reduced inhibitions to further military action, enabling warfare to continue without any substantial impact on political solutions.

³¹ Rahman, Habibur, Ahmad Sadiq, and Sayed Attaullah Shah. "Resurgence and Response: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategies amidst Rising Terrorism Threats." *Pakistan Journal of Social Research* 5, no. 04 (2023): 24-37.

Conclusively, it is concluded that artificial intelligence is an instrument and not a plan based on the Afghan experience. The lack of legitimacy, governance and local trust in insurgent environments cannot be offset with technological superiority.³² The overall point of the experience that can be brought into the future of the U.S. national security policy is obvious: AI needs to be incorporated into the larger political and ethical system in which long-term stability is more important than efficiency in the short term. In the absence of this alignment, artificial intelligence in warfare will have the opposite effect of creating more instability, instead of the solution.

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³² Uribe, Andres, and Sebastian van Baalen. "Governing the Shadows: Territorial Control and State Making in Civil War." *Comparative Political Studies* 58, no. 10 (2025): 2095-2129.

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