United States

War from a distance Droning on

The president is weighing how extensively to use drones. More civilian casualties abroad seem the likeliest outcome

DRONES HAVE BEEN a common sight in the skies above Afghanistan, but rarely had one trained its gaze on the capital, Kabul.

On August 29th, as America was hastily withdrawing its remaining soldiers and Afghan refugees through the city's airport, a drone struck a white Toyota Corolla.

After the strike, General Mark Milley, America's top military official, called it a "righteous" strike, and the Pentagon claimed it had thwarted an imminent attack on American forces.

In fact no terrorists had been killed and seven of the ten victims were children.

President Joe Biden broke with his former boss, Barack Obama, in withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

Like Mr Obama, he now faces a choice on how extensively to use drones to replace soldiers and pilots.

Mr Biden has pledged to conduct "over-the-horizon" counterterrorism operations, chiefly using armed drones, in Afghanistan, to pursue terrorists while reducing the toll of the war on terror on Americans.

Yet as the experience of Mr Obama and his successor, Donald Trump, suggests, drone strikes have hardly proved a strategic success.

As Samuel Moyn of Yale University argues in his recently published book "Humane," such attempts to make the war less lethal may have made it harder to end.

Mr Biden's strategy appears to be just the formula for a more sustainable, but no less brutal, war on terror.

As troop casualties mounted and the public opinion turned under President George W. Bush, drones emerged as a means of long-distance fighting.

First deployed just weeks after September 11th, it was Mr Obama who greatly expanded their use.

The rationale was clear. America would no longer rely on vulnerable ground forces.

Drones could strike as far afield as Pakistan, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia—places where America was not, officially, at war.

Killing terrorists, rather than seizing them in battle, could also solve the Guantánamo problem. "If no one was captured, no one could be mistreated," writes Mr Moyn.

Keen to withdraw troops from Iraq and, eventually, Afghanistan, Mr Obama directed more drone strikes in his first year than Mr Bush had in his entire presidency.

A brief prepared in March of 2009 by the Department of Justice laid out the administration's contorted legal justification.

It declared that the war on terror operated on a global battlefields. Nor would it be limited to al-Qaeda and "associated forces": even those with tenuous ties like al-Shabab in Somalia, were fair game.

Mr Moyn argues this gave permission to strike targets that did not pose an "imminent" threat, as international law demands.

At the height of Mr Obama's drone campaign in 2010, America's armed forces launched 128 strikes in Pakistan alone.

美国版块

战争就在不远处嗡嗡作响

美国总统正在权衡使用无人机的强度。在国外，最终结果就是造成更多的平民伤亡

一直以来无人机在阿富汗上空很常见，但很少将目标对准首都喀布尔。

8 月 29 日，美国匆忙从机场撤出剩余士兵和阿富汗难民时，一架无人机撞上了一辆白色的丰田卡罗拉。

空袭结束后，美国最高军事官员马克·米利将军称这是一次"正义"的袭击，五角大楼（美国国防部）称其打击了对美军的迫切进攻。

事实上，并没有恐怖分子被击毙，十名受害者中有七名是儿童。

美国总统拜登在是否从阿富汗撤军问题上与前上司巴拉克·奥巴马决裂。

和奥巴马一样，他现在面临着一个选择，需要考虑多大程度地使用无人机来取代士兵和飞行员。

拜登承诺将在阿富汗开展以武装无人机为主的"超视距"反恐行动，以追捕恐怖分子，同时减少美国在反恐战争中的伤亡。

然而，奥巴马和他的继任者唐纳德·特朗普的经历已经表明，无人机袭击并不是一种战略上的成功。

正如耶鲁大学的塞缪尔·莫恩（Samuel Moyn）在他最近出版的书"人道"（Humane）中指出的那样，这种试图降低战争杀伤力的尝试可能会让战争更难结束。

拜登的战略似乎是一场更可持续、但同样残酷的反恐战争的方式。

在乔治·布什总统执政期间，由于部队伤亡人数的增加和公众舆论的转变，无人机成为了一种远程战斗手段。

9·11 事件发生后几周内，奥巴马首次部署了无人机并极大地扩大了使用范围。

原因很简单，美国将不再依赖脆弱的地面部队。

无人机可以攻击远至巴基斯坦、利比亚、也门和索马里地区，而在这些地方美国还并没有官方开战。

杀死恐怖分子，而不是在战争中抓获他们，也可以解决古巴的关塔那摩问题。莫恩写道："如果没有人被捕，就不会有人受到虐待。"

奥巴马坚持从伊拉克撤军，最终也成功从阿富汗撤军，他在上任第一年指挥的无人机袭击比布什在整个总统任期内指挥的还要多。

2009 年 3 月，美国司法部准备了一份简报，阐述了政府歪曲的辩解。

简报宣称，全球战场上都在进行反恐战争。这并不局限于基地组织和"相关势力"：即使对于那些与索马里青年党有着微妙联系的人也都是公平的。

莫恩辩称，这让他们得以打击那些不构成"立即"威胁的目标，正如国际法所要求的那样。

在奥巴马 2010 年无人机行动的巅峰时期，美国武装部队仅在巴基斯坦就发动了 128 次空袭。