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Democracy's Place in Current Warfare

In his article “Do Drones Undermine Democracy?” Peter Singer calls into question the marginal involvement by Congress and the public in determining how the United States conducts war. With evolving technologies, risk to human life in military operations has been greatly reduced. The executive branch has used drones to carry out military operations to deny assertions the United States is at war, bypassing involvement from Congress. Singer writes that he supports many of these drone strikes, but how they are conducted is a problem. Singer writes how this goes against the intentions of the Constitution. To prevent the abuse of power, the Executive branch's responsibility is to wage war, and the Legislative's to declare wars. Despite significant military operations overseas, the United States has not declared formal war since 1942. Singer cites the events in Libya as an example of extensive use of drones for air strikes against Col. Muammar el- Qaddafi's government in conjunction with NATO as an example of actions of war. The executive branch argued they did not overstep their bounds because US ground troops were not involved or at risk. Congress is still notified of operations of ground troops but Singer argues this new definition of warfare is harmful, and goes against the spirit of the Constitution. Singer concludes his article emphasizing the idea that Congress and the United States public need to be involved in determining what acts of war are.

A more interesting point Singer makes is how the Central Intelligence Agency, instead of the Air Force, is conducting the majority of military operations involving drones. The shows how

the priorities of a large government may be more at fault than the actions of the President alone. If the CIA is conducting drone strikes in other countries as acts of war, they may have taken their mission of protecting United States interests abroad too far. Singer's issue that the executive branch needs to communicate with Congress and the public more is valid, yet it may be missing the central issue of what the responsibilities of these agencies actually are. There has also been a change of how threats to the United States are not coming from a recognized country with borders on a map, but rather by extremist groups operating within countries. When the aggressors are non-state actors, this can further confuse the idea of what constitutes war. Everyone wants to feel safe, but the United States does not have supreme power or authority to subject the rest of the world to its agenda. If the United States has serious concerns and needs to declare war, then that should be announced or else these operations need to be scaled back.

The evolution of technology has always has a profound affect on how people conduct war. Singer cites how drones have changed the practice of war now, but advancements in technology such machine guns, aircraft, and ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) have also greatly changed the conduct of warfare since the writing of the Constitution. Singer places the blame of changing the idea warfare on the Executive branch but this has been a slow evolution of a new "normal" for the public. The United States public has been, for the most part, compliant in the new way war is fought. What does need to change is for the Executive Branch to acknowledge the fact that the country is at war, and they need to communicate this with Congress and the public. The idea is that if we as a nation are not suffering casualties it is not war is ignorant of the fact these actions are killing people and destroying the resources of the opposition. The decision to engage in acts of war in a democracy should include input and debate by Congress and the public.

The views of Peter Singer, that the Executive branch should not be engaging in acts of war unilaterally, is valid. However, it also highlights broader changes of how warfare is conducted as well as how U.S. citizens view armed conflict. The culmination of these ideas is that as a country, the United States needs to make decisions of war together.

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Works Cited

Singer, Peter W. "Do Drones Undermine Democracy?" *New York Times* 21 Jan. 2012: Print.