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# Key bishop questions US drone warfare, says indiscriminate

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 13, 2013 NCR Today

A key U.S. Catholic bishop has questioned the United States' continued use of unmanned drones, saying the U.S. may be killing people indiscriminately in Pakistan in violation of Catholic teaching.

Des Moines, Iowa, Bishop Richard Pates, who heads the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, made the remarks Tuesday in a column for the *Des Moines Register*.

"With a quick missile strike from a drone here and there, we imagine our country made safer," writes Pates [1] in the column. "But the reality is that this policy perpetuates violence, radicalizing people who otherwise wouldn?t be hostile toward the United States."

Mentioning a study by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism that found that drone strikes killed as many as 3,337 people in Pakistan from June 2004 to September 2012, Pates asks: "Are civilian casualties on this scale proportional or discriminate? Would we tolerate such drone casualties in our own nation?"

"Of the people killed by U.S. drones in Pakistan (we have also used them in Yemen and Somalia), as many as 883 were civilians, including 176 children," he continues.

"This makes it difficult to justify targeted killings under Catholic ?just war? theory. But ?just war? theory applies only to action in war zones, and the United States isn?t at war with Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, making the moral justification for drones even more remote."

In his role at the U.S. bishops' conference, Pates leads eight other bishops in addressing a wide-range of international justice issues, including global poverty and human rights.

He was elected to the post in 2011 in a 122-114 vote by the bishops over Venice, Fla., Bishop Frank Joseph Dewane.

Among consultants to the bishops' committee are representatives of Catholic Relief Services and of the three major societies of consecrated men and women, who frequently focus on justice issues in their ministry: the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious.

Pates had previously questioned the drone program in separate letters in May to National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon and members of Congress.

"The Administration's policy appears to extend the use of deadly force to alleged 'signature' attacks and reportedly classifies all males of a certain age as combatants," Pates said in those letters.

"Are these policies morally defensible?" he asked. "They seem to violate the law of war, international human rights law, and moral norms."

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