



The military is normally only too pleased to herald its successes, and to praise the courage of the men and women who put their lives on the line for their country. Perhaps it is the link (or lack of it) between these two that encourages them to talk-up certain missions, and come over all sheepish when it comes to drones.

Piloted by remote control from thousands of miles away, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) have been the one unqualified military triumph of the war in Afghanistan. That is, if "success" comes in an equation where lots of people get killed, at next to no risk, at an affordable price.

According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which compiles figures on drone strikes, the US has killed up to 3,378 people in 350 drone strikes in the past eight years. And that's just in Pakistan. The US also orchestrates drone strikes in Yemen and Somalia from a base in the tiny African state of Djibouti (which nobody is supposed to know about). But does the White House want to talk about this? Not unless it really has to. And not even then.

In April, President Obama's counter-terrorism advisor, John Brennan, gave a speech in which he defended the use of drones and said great care was taken to ensure attacks were legal and ethical. "We are at war," he said. "We are at war against a terrorist organisation called al-Qaida."

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