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## **DRONES SPARE TROOPS, HAVE POWERFUL IMPACT**

**Americans and Californians, whether liberal or conservative, should champion drone programs that save American troops from having a larger footprint and having to put their lives in danger in foreign territories.**

By Robert Weiner & Tom Sherman

A note from Osama bin Laden discovered at his Abbottabad residence by U.S. Seal Team Six during the U.S. raid on May 2, 2011, revealed, "Brothers said they were frankly exhausted from the enemy's air bombardments." Osama bin Laden hated drones, because they work. Drones save American troops from risk of death, kill far fewer civilians than ground troops operations, and make our military more effective against enemy combatants. Regardless, drones are often decried by many liberals as too invasive, too impersonal and too deadly to innocent civilians.

Southern California has been a national leader of the drone industry, ever since the San Diego-based General Atomics pioneered the first Predator drone development more than two decades ago. Currently, 13 California drone manufacturers operate across the state, including 3D Robotics of San Diego and Datron Communication Systems of Vista. Pentagon officials initially purchased 10 drones from General Atomics — that number has now swelled to over 10,000 drones currently under Pentagon control, according to The Washington Post, and unknown numbers in CIA hands; a Defense News report estimates at least 80.

"The defense industry has been a huge incubator of jobs in California, especially Southern California," said Assemblyman Steven Bradford, D-Gardena, last year. "We want these well-paying, high-tech manufacturing jobs to continue to grow here in California."

**Americans and Californians, whether liberal or conservative, should champion drone programs that save American troops from having a larger footprint and having to put their lives in danger in foreign territories. Drones reduce ground troops, yet they have as powerful an impact.**

Hillary Clinton points out, in her recent memoir "Hard Choices," that during her tenure as secretary of state, drone programs were "one of the most effective and controversial elements of the Obama administration's strategy against Al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists ... bin Laden himself worried about the heavy losses that drones were inflicting."

It is a key plus for drones that U.S. troops are three times safer from friendly fire attacks when deployed in war zones covered by drones compared with traditional warfare.

During the Gulf War, American casualties totaled 382 in-theater deaths, of which nearly 62 percent were due to either friendly fire or other accidents, according to Navy research.

However, during the current age of drones, only 21.5 percent of casualties are classified as “non-hostile,” according to Pentagon stats. America and our allies are sometimes literally our own worst enemy on the battlefield. Drones protect our troops from their own traditional battlefield errors.

In a letter to President Obama in 2012, 25 congressmen stated, “We are concerned that the use of such “signature” strikes could raise the risk of killing innocent civilians or individuals who may have no relationship to attacks on the United States.”

They are just wrong. In fact, it is a myth that drones disproportionately kill civilians. After a review of the deaths inflicted by American drones since 2004, the Pakistani Defense Ministry concluded that citizen fatalities occurred at a rate of 3 percent of total kills — a total of 67 innocent civilians.

During the Gulf War, without drones, U.S. Air Force fighter jets demolished the Amiriyah bomb shelter, and killed more than 400 Iraqi women and children, in one incident alone.

We owe it to the innocent civilians of foreign territories to inflict as little destruction as possible.

Beyond offensive firepower, drones offer unprecedented surveillance opportunities. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Cal., chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, admitted that the hideout where Osama bin Laden was killed had been under 24-hour drone surveillance gathering intelligence before the final Navy SEAL team stormed the compound.

“[Using drones has] been a positive program,” concluded Feinstein.

Drones deserve a place in liberal advocacy. Drones spare the United States from sending troops into warfare, when they could return broken, scarred, or in a coffin; prevent needless deaths of innocent civilians abroad; and save American lives. Are these not liberal tenets?

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