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Local, national activists speak against Obama administration's drone wars

BY **CHASTITY DILLARD** | FEBRUARY 23, 2012 **6:30 AM**

Foreign-policy experts and peace activists here and around the country say the technological advancement of warfare is very disturbing.

"This war on terror is really an imperialist war, and it's really destroying us from the inside," said Brian Terrell, an international peace activist.

Terrell spoke to a group of more than 40 locals Wednesday night at a forum on drone policy in Iowa City. Terrell was recently deported from Bahrain, where he participated as an international observer for the anniversary of the Arab Spring.

The U.S. military and the CIA have launched more than 380 drone strikes since 2009, according to the libertarian think tank Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. Drones are unmanned, remote controlled planes used to assassinate alleged terrorist.

Foreign-policy experts say the President Obama's use of the drones violates his Constitutional power.

Nat Hentoff, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, said there is nothing in the Constitution giving the president the power to approve the killings — which, he believes amounts to President Obama becoming an American dictator.

"Most of these assassinations take place far away from battlefield," Hentoff said. "Because so much of this goes outside of the battlefield, how does this administration justify this? This is really one of the worst breaking of American laws in history."

But Terry Dahms, the head of the Johnson County Democrats, said he thinks the drones are much more economical than fighter jets.

"Anytime unarmed civilians are harmed or killed is very unfortunate, and no one would condone military actions that do harm unarmed civilians, but this is all very complicated," he said. "We don't often know the full story and probably the answer is, if we don't want civilians to be killed, then we shouldn't have the war. There are no simple solutions."

Dahms defended Obama's drone policy.

"To lay this on President Obama's doorstep is a bit of a stretch," he said. "Yes, he is commander in chief, but he's not the one calling all the shots. He's not the one ordering these drones to attack."

On Wednesday, Terrell said the use of the drones is separating the soldier from the battlefield.

"[But] when there is no human interaction, we are moving very quickly toward where there will be no human heart, and it makes my blood run cold to see that a lot of Americans see that as an advantage," he said.

According to the New York Times, the Pentagon has roughly 7,000 aerial drones, compared with fewer than 50 a decade ago.

David Cortright, a director of Policy Studies at the Kroc Institute for International peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, said the growth in use of the new tool is inevitable.

"It has a seductive quality," he said. "This new tool is now available. If you have someone you don't like, you can blow them up. It all seems too easy, and that's something that we ought to be contemplating."

Terrell said the drones require human control, but technological advances are headed toward independent warfare.

"Even though this is all very high-tech, I think because of the human cheapness of it, it makes it OK to kill non-Americans."