Inside the Echo Chamber: Television News Coverage of the CIA Drone Program

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INSIDE THE ECHO CHAMBER: TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF THE CIA DRONE PROGRAM

By

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ABSTRACT

Broadcast and cable television news coverage of the CIA’s drone program from 2002 through 2013 is reviewed critically. Corporate ownership is examined to determine whether the need to generate profits has an influence on news coverage of the issue. This thesis looked specifically at the quality of the coverage of the legal and ethical issues of the CIA drone program and whether the coverage looked at all facets of the controversial aspects of the program. To carry out this analysis, the database LexisNexis was utilized to search news transcripts for this time frame using both the search terms “unmanned military aircraft” and “cia AND drones.” These transcripts were then examined to determine which qualified as a discussion of the issues. Broadcast and cable news were then compared in light of the political economic framework of the propaganda model to determine whether corporate ownership has an influence over news coverage, particularly when it comes to news stories on national security issues that bring together powerful defense and government interests. This thesis finds that coverage of the drone program only becomes a serious issue when the policymakers in Washington begin to become divided on the issue, suggesting that rather than facilitating a truly democratic debate with a variety of perspectives, television news follows a discourse set by the political and economic elite. This was the same even for publicly-owned PBS, who, in the midst of the most drone program coverage, produced a drone documentary funded by drone manufacturer Lockheed Martin and did not present a significantly different range of views or more critical coverage of the program than cable news outlets.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The decision to go to war and how that war will be fought are some of the most important decisions a country can make. Public opinion and support, however, can only be developed on the basis of accurate, available and accessible information. When citizens are lacking the full scope of knowledge on an issue, they cannot give full consent to the military interventions their government is undertaking on their behalf. The media have a responsibility to provide that necessary information to the public, and the press has recognized this role. As media scholar James Carey put it, the “press justifies itself in the name of the public: it exists to inform the public, to serve as the extended eyes and ears of the public. The press protects the public’s interest and justifies itself in its name” (Carey, 1997, p. 236). Journalists, newspapers and broadcasters have “incorporated public interest language into professional codes of ethics and corporates standards and practices,” further supporting the role of the press as serving the public interest (Champlin & Knoedler, 2006, p.136).

The role of journalism in a democracy is to perform three specific functions: “to act as a rigorous watchdog of the powerful and those who wish to be powerful; to ferret out the truth from lies; and to present a wide range of informed positions on key issues” (McChesney, 2004, p.57). Providing critical and independent analyses of government actions, particularly military interventions, is one of the most critical duties of journalists operating within a democracy. The media have the ability to contribute immensely to facilitating public discourse and providing the resources necessary for citizens to engage in meaningful participation (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, pp. 22-23). However, when the media operate within a structure that privileges corporate and
conservative interests, the ability of the media to provide those critical and independent analyses comes into question.

If news content is being produced as a product of a capitalist entity, it raises the question of whether news content is serving democratic interests or the bottom-line. Media conglomerates began to grow when media ownership regulations were relaxed in the 1980s, leading to the buying up of news media. This was seen as a business investment undertaken with the intent of generating “significant returns to pay down debt and satisfy investors” (McChesney, 2004, p. 78). This transformation of news into a market commodity raises the question of whether news media are fulfilling their role of serving the public interest by providing the information necessary to the public to participate in the democratic process.

This thesis looks to answer that question by focusing on the coverage afforded to an issue that may be the most important for a society to consider: the coverage of war. The decision to go to war is a decision to put people to death, and as such is not a decision a society should make lightly. Having informed citizenry is vital when these decisions are being made – as McChesney quotes Justice Potter Stewart from his opinion on the Pentagon Papers case, “the only effective restraint upon executive policy and power in the areas of national defense may lie in an enlightened citizenry – in an informed and critical public opinion which alone can here protect the values of democratic government” (McChesney, 2004, p. 75).

The war coverage this thesis looks at in particular is the CIA’s use of drones in a targeted killing program as part of the broader U.S. War on Terror. The program, though legally and ethically controversial both at home and abroad, has become a central component of U.S. antiterrorism strategy. As a joint operation undertaken by the CIA and U.S. military as well as by being situated within the U.S. War on Terror, coverage of the CIA drone program fits within the
umbrella of war coverage. Through a comparison of cable and broadcast news coverage of the CIA drone program, this thesis seeks to answer whether the news media are providing the necessary comprehensive coverage for citizens to have the knowledge required to participate in the discourse of such an important national security issue, and whether there is a difference between the coverage from cable news versus broadcast news, which has a particular obligation to serve the public interest (Smith, 2009, p. 389).

1.1 The Structural and Historical Factors Behind News Coverage

The coverage we receive today from media outlets is shaped by both historic and structural factors. An understanding of how the present media structure came to be along with an understanding of how media coverage of war has changed over time is crucial to giving a historic context to the arguments in this paper. A review of the news coverage of recent U.S. military conflicts gives insight into how the relationship between the media and the U.S. government and military has changed over time, while a review of the evolution of the media system provides insight into the structural influences at play. Taken together, both parts show how historic and structural factors intertwine to contribute to a military-industrial-media complex that facilitates a propaganda system.

1.1.1 A Brief History of U.S. War Coverage

The ability of the press to carry out its democratic responsibilities to inform and serve the public during war is complicated by historical factors. The relationship between the press and the government has changed over time as the government has developed new forms of information management during times of war. From the perspective of the military, the press can wreak havoc on a mission: undermine support for the government officials leading the military action, compromise battle security, and turn public opinion against war efforts (Sweeney, 2006, p.5).
This perspective of the press was developed largely during the Vietnam War and led to the development of an information management system of embedded reporters and press pools by the U.S. military to control journalists’ access to conflict zones and information. This information management system is the product of the previous forty years of U.S. involvement in conflicts around the world and will likely be evident when analyzing the coverage of drones.

The Vietnam War marked the beginning of the military taking an adversarial view of the press and its ability to influence public opinion. At the start of the war, the military and the press shared a good relationship: the military even went so far as to pay for correspondents to fly to Vietnam to cover the war, hoping that they would be able to give the “true” story to the American people. However, as the war went on, the relationship soured, and journalists found themselves facing increasing restrictions as the military blamed journalists for turning the American public against the war. A news embargo in 1971 kept U.S. correspondents away from the operational area of the Dewey Cannon II operation, and correspondents were excluded from the helicopters that raided the Son Tay POW camp and from the ships that rescued the crew of the Mayaguez. A cable from the State Department warned against providing transport to journalists who might report unfavorable stories (Cassell, 1985).

The military and political elites would attribute the role of the media as playing a huge part in turning public support away from the war and ultimately causing the withdrawal of U.S. troops. However, critical reporting only came about when Washington became divided over involvement in Vietnam. Opposing views became headlines when the political elite began to separate into “hawks” and “doves” (Allen & Zelizer, 2004, p. 97). Divisions in Washington aside, the view of the political and military elite was that the media had twisted the war and turned away the public through their coverage of the war, in particular by showing graphic
images of casualties. In reality, only 3 percent of the evening news stories on Vietnam between 1965 and 1970 showed heavy fighting with the dead or wounded. TV war stories featuring casualties were brief and made up only a small number of the reports filed (Kumar, 2006, p. 50). Despite this, the perception of the media as a driving force behind the U.S. loss in Vietnam meant that the next U.S. conflict would see a shift in how journalists and the media were treated by the government.

In 1983, the United States invaded Grenada. Unlike at the start of the Vietnam War, when correspondents were brought along with the military, correspondents were not allowed to join the invasion forces. On the day following the invasion, the Department of Defense stated that “reporters would not be allowed until conditions were safe and that DOD photographers had accompanied the invasion force” (Cassell, 1985, p. 943). The first group of reporters allowed in found themselves escorted by military officials. When one *Newsweek* reporter strayed from the escorted group, he quickly found himself booted from the group of reporters allowed into the conflict zone (Cassell, 1985, p. 944). The military had learned from the perceived failure in Vietnam, and this time the military had clamped down on the story the media would be allowed to provide to the American public.

Following Grenada, the Department of Defense faced criticism from the news media of the handling of press access. This led to the Department of Defense putting together a panel to create recommendations as to how to handle free press access while also maintaining mission security and troop safety (Cassell, 1985, p. 946). The recommendations from this panel led to the creation of a press pool who could be called upon whenever there was a restriction on the number of reporters able to come along on military missions.
In 1989, the United States invaded Panama. The press pool that had been established following Grenada was flown into Panama, but the journalists were held on a military base for several hours until the most intense fighting had ended (Mermin, 1999 p. 36). Journalists complained about the military’s restriction of information. The *Boston Globe* reported that “armed guards had prevented reporters from leaving the U.S. military installations where they had been confined” (Solomon, 2005, p. 117). While conflict raged outside, journalists were kept inside the military compound for four days. Access was only granted to sectors once they had been secured, ensuring that journalists were kept away from essentially all conflict. As a result, coverage showed what appeared to be a quick and bloodless operation rather than the realities of the conflict, which resulted in civilian casualties in the thousands according to some Latin American sources (Sweeney, 2006, pp. 157-158).

The next significant military conflict for the United States was the Gulf War in 1991. This war marked the success of the U.S. government in developing a media strategy to control the story. Photos, video footage and battlefield dispatches had to be cleared by the Department of Defense. Journalists were limited in their ability to travel and what American military activities they could report on (Solomon, 2005, p. 117). The military laid out rules about what journalists could report, restricting them from reporting troop names or numbers, or identifying weapons or specific locations. These restrictions on the press meant that they had to rely on diplomatic and military briefings from Washington for information and that news accounts were vague and repetitive (Sweeney, 2006, pp. 161-162). The Pentagon also required a security review of all news reports, meaning that only U.S. military-approved press reports would make their way back to Americans at home (Smith, 1993, p. 301).
The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 as part of the War on Terror. Numerous studies have been done on the news coverage surrounding the early years of the war in Iraq, determining that the media failed to critically question the decisions surrounding the war (Bagdikian, 2004, pp. 74-86; Kumar, 2006; McChesney, 2004, pp. 120-123). The failure of the media in this respect meant that Americans believed incorrect information supplied by the U.S. government regarding the relationship between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks and the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, despite the availability of significant evidence to disprove those claims (Kumar, 2006, p. 59). The media downplayed or outright omitted facts that ran counter to the Bush administration’s justification for war. Phil Donahue found his show canceled by NBC after “presenting guests who are antiwar, anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration’s motives” (Kumar, 2006, p. 60).

Journalists were allowed to show off the superior military technology used by U.S. forces, however, and were permitted to join the troops in the same type of “embedding” that had occurred during the first Gulf War. The military allowed for firsthand photographic and video evidence of the invasion, but journalists were not granted access to the commanders who fully understand the invasion (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 80). Journalists, stuck with troops, were unable to move freely on their own and so were unable to convey the images of the consequences of the attacks. When such images were available of the Iraqi and U.S. casualties, the destruction of homes and other human elements, networks declined to air them (Kumar, 2006, p. 62).

The United States did not just invade Iraq following the 9/11 attacks but Afghanistan as well. Similar tactics prevailed in attempting to control new coverage. The Pentagon went to great lengths to prevent the American public from access to satellite images of the effects of bombings in Afghanistan. The Pentagon purchased the rights to all Ikonos satellite images of Afghanistan
from Space Imaging, the company that owns the Ikonos satellite (Solomon, 2005, p. 129). The military provided video to the press of its bombings in Afghanistan. Later, the Pentagon would provide daily briefings to journalists as part of maintaining control over the story (Solomon, 2005, p. 129).

1.1.2 A Brief History of Structural Factors

These historical factors have come along with changes in the structure of the media system. News media have become a product of international conglomerates, and, as such, the democratic responsibilities of the press also compete against the profit-maximizing interests of their corporate holders. The shift of the news media to a corporate structure that lends itself to propaganda has facilitated the development of this system.

News first began to be treated as a mass-produced commodity in the early nineteenth century. During this time of the partisan press, newspapers were run by political parties and the contents were related to the political goals of the publishing party (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 51). Newspapers began to shift towards profit-making with the rise of the penny press in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Penny papers sold by newsboys in the streets replaced the subscription papers of the partisan press. This had the effect of broadening the range and scope of news content to attract more readers, with “human interest stories and dramatic descriptions of sordid events” replacing political analysis (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 160). The goal for newspapers owners was no longer to print political information for party members, but to sell papers to the largest possible audience.

The Associated Press came into being during this time (1848), serving as a source of news for many different papers to draw upon for content. However, in order to do so, the Associated Press had to adopt a standard of “objectivity” so that its reports would be picked up
by newspapers across the political spectrum. This journalistic norm was created so that wire services could be widely sold and to “keep reporters in check so as to ease owners’ fears of alienating audiences, and, increasingly, advertisers” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 160).

The reliance of newspapers on advertising began to change dramatically during the 1880s and 1890s. As the development of brand names and trademarks by national manufacturers grew, so did the demand for advertising. According to Bettig and Hall, the ratio of editorial matter to advertising changed from about 70:30 to 50:50 during this time (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 161). The portion of total revenues for a newspaper due to advertising also increased significantly: advertising revenues increased from 44 percent of the total newspaper income in 1880 to 55 percent in 1900 (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 161).

As other news media emerged, the reliance on advertising remained. Radio listening began to become a popular activity in the early 1920s, and in 1922 telephone company AT&T began to sell “toll airtime” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 54). Radio manufacturers and department stores saw the benefit in supporting new radio programs to increase sale of radio sets, and turning to advertisers allows the corporate broadcasters to generate revenue not tied to manufacturing (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 55). The advertising supported, for-profit model established in the radio industry would then transition to the television industry.

The television industry got its start in the late 1940s and was dominated by the same firms who had already become major players in the radio industry (ABC, NBC and CBS). They followed the same strategy as they had for radio of producing programs for a mass audience and then selling the audience to advertisers (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 56). Although the Communications Act of 1934 called for broadcast stations to “serve the public interest,
convenience, and necessity,” news was seen as something that could bring prestige to the networks but was not very profitable (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p.57).

Over time, the structure of the industries producing news media content have changed, from the partisan press all the way to profit-driven outlets owned by massive corporations. The question now becomes how does that structure impact the news coverage we receive, and, for this particular thesis, the news coverage of particularly important issues such as war?

1.1.3 The Media-Military-Industrial Complex

In 1961, President Eisenhower warned the American people of the dangers of falling prey to the military-industrial complex. He warned of “an immense military and a large arms industry,” stating that “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex” (Eisenhower, 1961, paras. 16-17). The warning remains relevant.

The 2014 defense budget for the United States is approximately $572 billion (Kime, 2014). For companies supplying defense products and services, the defense industry is incredibly profitable. Furthermore, politicians may find themselves influenced by “the economic clout of the military business [and] the political power of its allies,” as lobbying and political contributions from these industries can be a powerful motivator for politicians (Solomon, 2005, p. 113). The military-industrial complex suggests that when continual conflict and defense spending align the interests of those in power in the government and those in the multi-billion dollar defense industry, defense and security interests dominate Congress (Dunlap, 2011, para. 3).

While Eisenhower’s warning was intended to be directed at those politicians and companies who benefit from conflict and defense spending, the media can be included in that
warning today. Media conglomerates may share connections with the defense industry and the political elite. In *War Made Easy*, Norman Solomon describes how the military-industrial complex, a relationship between the U.S. military and its manufacturers who mutually benefit from a large defense budget, has extended into the media: “firms with military ties routinely advertise in news outlets. Often, media magnates and people on the boards of large media-related corporations enjoy close links – financial and social – with the military industry and Washington’s foreign-policy establishment” (Solomon, 2005, p. 113). Media companies may even, as was the case when NBC was owned by General Electric, have very direct ties to weapons manufacturing (Solomon, 2005, p. 113). In terms of government relations, large transnational media corporations rely on the government to protect their interests and allow them to expand abroad, further growing their profits. Government policies that make advertising costs tax-deductible is a huge part of what makes a reliance-on-advertising model profitable, and copyright law protects the content produced or owned by these corporations (Croteau & Hoynes, YEAR, p. 66). The focus on profits has also introduced structural factors that allow for the government’s information management strategies to be successful: it is far less expensive to rely on government produced material than to hire investigative journalists (Kumar, 2006, p. 52).

The coverage of war and the structure of the media system have both changed over time, but the responsibilities of the news media when it comes to covering war, or any issue of public interest, have not. Citizens in a democracy are not supposed to play a complacent role in their government: they are supposed to have a voice in what their government undertakes on their behalf. The transition to a profit-driven media model has serious implications attempts by the press to fulfill their duties in a democracy. As McChesney put in in his 2010 article in *The
“popular rule doesn’t work without an informed citizenry, and an informed citizenry cannot exist without credible journalism” (McChesney, 2010, p. 13).

1.2 Media Coverage of the CIA Drone Program

The War on Terror remains ongoing conflict for the United States. There continues to be a need for a national conversation on the programs, actions and policies the United States has undertaken in its efforts to win this war. The CIA drone targeted killing program deserves a place in this conversation due to the legal and ethical implications of its use and its role within the context of a current U.S. war.

This thesis examines how the underlying issues of the U.S. media system structure affect news coverage surrounding issues of war, looking in particular at the CIA drone program. A political economic approach, the propaganda model, will be applied to analyze U.S. media coverage of the CIA drone program. The use of the propaganda model will focus specifically on whether ownership impacts coverage by comparing cable news sources and broadcast news sources, examining how much coverage is present, whether there is a diversity of opinions present, what sources are used and what ideologies are perpetuated. The news outlets that will be looked at are CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS.

Chapter two provides brief background information on the use of drones. This section includes an explanation of drone technology and why the military would want to use drones. Additionally, this section provides information on the laws of armed conflict. This information is necessary to understand the legal and ethical controversies stirred up by drones and the implications of their use. This chapter also reviews other research that has been done regarding media coverage of earlier U.S. military conflicts, starting with Vietnam.
Chapter three explains the political economic approach used to analyze the coverage, the propaganda model. The propaganda model “attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 1). The political economic approach and this model in particular were chosen because they deal with how the relationships between those in power, the political systems and the economic systems of a society influence media content and production. War brings together significant political and economic interests, and an understanding of the influences of the political and economic systems on media content such as the one the propaganda model supplies is necessary to contextualize the implications of the type and amount of coverage it receives. This chapter also describes the methodology for collecting the news transcripts.

Chapter four looks at ownership. This chapter will review the ownership of the news outlets chosen for analysis, looking directly at who owns what as well as considering the implications of interlocking boards of directors that may influence interests across industries.

Chapters five and six analyze the coverage in terms of sources and ideologies perpetuated, looking in particular for differences in coverage between cable and broadcast news that may be attributable to influences of ownership.

Chapter seven is a case study of the visuals for one month of coverage (April 2013) for both cable and broadcast news networks. This chapter examines video clips to determine if there is a difference in coverage between cable and broadcast news on the visual level and what additional meaning the visuals may provide to the coverage.
Chapter eight draws conclusions from the coverage. This chapter reviews the coverage in light of the democratic functions of the press. It concludes with a discussion of the implications and consequences of the findings for news coverage in a democracy.
CHAPTER TWO

WAR REPORTING AND DRONES

To understand the importance of the media coverage of the CIA drone program, it is necessary to examine what drone technology is, how drones are used by the CIA and the legal and ethical controversies surrounding their use. This chapter seeks to visit each of those areas, starting first with a brief description of what drones are and how they are used before delving into the controversies associated with their use by the CIA. Next, this chapter will explain other studies that have been done on war coverage since the Cold War, addressing reoccurring patterns that have emerged.

2.1 Drones: What They Are, Their Uses and Their Controversies

The other names that drones are known by, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or remotely piloted aerial systems (RPAS), are perhaps a bit more descriptive terms for the technology that makes up a drone. Drones are aircraft controlled by “pilots” on the ground or through a pre-programmed mission (Cole & Wright, 2010, para. 1). Drones present several advantages over manned air flights or other military technologies: for instance, they can hover in place for hours, gathering surveillance and determining the best time to make a hit; they can strike quickly and “the missile can be diverted from its original target in an intentional miss” (Hazelton, 2013, p. 30). Additionally, drones are claimed to cause less collateral damage than missiles or manned aerial bombings and are less expensive than manned air flights (Hazelton, 2013, p. 30). Drones can be sent into areas of conflict when actually sending soldiers in would not be politically feasible or would be too risky (The Economist, 2011).

The use of drones falls into two categories: reconnaissance and surveillance, or hunter-killer missions. Initial use of drones in the War on Terror was carried out through the military
and at first only for surveillance purposes. Drone use by the military and the CIA soon shifted to identifying, locating and eliminating targets: the military carried out its first armed mission using the Predator drone in Afghanistan in 2001, and in 2002, the CIA undertook a kill operation in Afghanistan without military support (Matthews, 2013; Sifton, 2010).

The relationship between the CIA and the military regarding the use of drones is complicated. Kill operations are undertaken as a project between the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), which falls within the Department of Defense, and the CIA. The division is intended to give the United States plausible deniability about the strikes: JSOC operations follow publicly available military doctrine, and JSOC operations can be, and are, publicly acknowledged by the government. However, CIA “covert operations” cannot be legally acknowledged by the U.S. government – and that includes drone strikes labeled as “covert operations” (Zenko & Fellow, 2013, para. 2).

The process of oversight regarding the use of drones is also made complicated due to differences in reporting requirements for JSOC and the CIA. Congressional oversight is made difficult by the division of the drone program between military and intelligence. CIA information makes its way to the Senate intelligence committee: JSOC counterterrorism efforts are reported to the House armed services committee (Zenko & Fellow, 2013, para. 3).

Since their introduction, drones have become an integral part of U.S. military and counterterrorism strategy: as of 2012, drones made up approximately one-third of all U.S. military aircraft; the military has spent $26 billion on drones since 2001, and the frequency of drone strikes has increased to one every four days (Ackerman & Schactman, 2012; The Economist, 2011).
2.1.1 The Controversies Around Drones

On the surface, drones seem like the ideal military technology. They present the ability to save money and the lives of soldiers. There is even evidence that their use may deter would-be terrorists and “sow paranoid and distrust among terrorists groups” (Callam, 2010, para. 18). Drones seem to represent a way to wage costless war. Yet, there are a number of controversies surrounding the use of drones that show that their use by the government merits further discourse by the American public. With this mind, coverage of the targeted killing program and use of drones represents an opportunity for the media to serve the public interest by providing the information needed for citizens to understand the war their government is undertaking on their behalf. Areas of particular concern for coverage include the legality of targeted killings, the impact it has on our image abroad, and the lack of transparency and accountability surrounding how targets are chosen.

2.1.1.1 Legality of Targeted Killings

The United States has sought to defend its targeted killing program under both domestic and international law. Domestically, the Authorization for the Use of Military Force passed by Congress immediately following 9/11 gives the president tremendous leeway in going after those directly responsible for the 9/11 attacks as well as those countries that aided or harbored those responsible. It allows the president to use “all necessary and appropriate force” to prevent future acts of terrorism from those responsible for 9/11 (AUMF, 2001).

The United States contends that its actions remain legal by asserting that the United States remains in armed conflict with al-Qaeda and is engaging in legitimate acts of self-defense. This legal argument was detailed in a 2010 speech from then-Secretary of State legal advisor Harold Koh. Koh stated that because the United States remained in armed conflict with al-Qaeda,
the United States has “the authority under international law, and the responsibility to its citizens, to use force, including lethal force, to defend itself, including by targeting persons such as high-level al-Qaeda leaders who are planning attacks” (Koh, 2010, para. 52). Koh goes on to lay out two criteria for targeted killings that he claims keep targeted killings within international law: (1) distinction, or that targets are limited to military objectives and not civilians; (2) proportionality, or that the military actions taken do not cause incidental damage or loss of civilian life that would be excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated (Koh, 2010, paras. 53-54). According to Koh, the United States is within domestic law regarding assassinations as target killings carried out while in armed conflict are not considered assassinations (Koh, 2010, para. 58).

However, the United States has been criticized for taking its interpretation of self-defense against terrorist attacks too broadly. The U.S. government’s broadly defined use of force for self-defense gives the United States tremendous latitude to act using drones without regard to sovereignty, a notion that does not sit well with other nations (Masters, 2013). UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings Christof Heyns expressed concern that not only could the actions of the United States set a precedent for other states to follow, but that these actions could even constitute human rights crimes under international law (Bowcot, 2012). Additionally, as the United States moves farther away from the events of 9/11 and directly targeting al-Qaeda, the more difficult it becomes to frame the actions of the United States as related to 9/11 and the actions of the president as within the auspices of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (Masters, 2013, para. 13).
2.1.1.2 U.S. Image Abroad

The U.S image abroad has been affected both by the international community’s view of U.S. legal arguments used to defend its program and by the impact the drone program has had in the countries where the strikes take place. The use of drones by the military has been limited to within combat zones. The CIA, on the other hand, has not limited its use of drones to combat zones and has included areas with civilians within its target zones (Callam, 2010, para. 11). While exact numbers on civilian casualties are a matter of some debate due to a lack of an official count from the U.S. government, Pakistan claimed in 2012 that more than thousand civilians had been killed in Pakistan by U.S. drone strikes and that U.S. claims about the accuracy of drone strikes were inaccurate (Bowcott, 2012; Shah, 2012).

A 2012 study that looked at media reports of casualties of drone use in Pakistan found that “drone strikes killed 2,562-3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom 474-881 were civilians, including 176 children… these strikes also injured an additional 1,228-1,362 individuals” (“Living under Drones,” 2012, p. 6). This same study found that drone strikes are also responsible for severe trauma experienced by those in the areas where drone strikes occur. The ability of the United States to strike at any given time contributed to severe fear, anxiety and stress felt by those on the ground (“Living under Drones,” 2012b, para. 2). Given the number of civilian casualties and injuries, the psychological trauma drone strikes inflict on the civilian population and the property damage that drones strikes can cause, it is unsurprising that the use of drones has had serious consequences for the U.S. image abroad: General Stanley McChrystal, who ran the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, said of drones that “the resentment created by American use of unmanned strikes… is much greater than the average American appreciates. They are hated on a visceral level, even by people who’ve never seen one
or seen the effects of one” (Alexander, 2013, para. 3.). In Yemen, another country heavily targeted for drone strikes, drone strikes have also resulted in anger and increased hostility toward the United States (Raghaven, 2012). As of 2014, drone strikes have killed an estimated 293-430 people in Yemen (“Drone Strikes,” 2014).

2.1.1.3 The Kill List

The decisions about the targets selected for drone strikes come down to lists created by different national security agencies. The National Security Council creates a list of potential targets and reviews the list at weekly meetings with the president and vice president. The Department of Defense creates another list, with JSOC within the Department of Defense having a list separate from the general DOD list. Then, the CIA creates its own list without input from the NSC or the DOD (Arkin & Priest, 2011). The secrecy surrounding the creation of “kill lists,” and the release of a Justice Department memo that outlines the legality of the extrajudicial killing of U.S. citizens suspected of terrorism, create worries regarding an executive branch with unchecked power (Isikoff, 2013).

Permission to kill varies depending on the agency and the location of the person involved. Some individuals can be killed with only approval from tactical commanders, others only with senior military or cabinet-level approval, and still others only with presidential approval. The military’s lethal drone strikes have been limited to individuals in Iraq and Afghanistan – where the United States was clearly involved in military operations. The CIA drone strikes, on the other hand, have been conducted in countries where the United States is not presently engaged in military operations: Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. Presidential approval is required to approve targets in those countries (Arkan & Priest, 2011).
John Brennan, then assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism, addressed the “rigorous standards” applied to the selection of targets in a speech given in April 2012. According to Brennan, if counterterrorism professionals believe that a suspected member of al-Qaeda presents “such a threat to the United States as to warrant lethal action, they may raise that individual’s name for consideration. The proposal will go through a careful review, and, as appropriate, will be evaluated by the very most senior officials in our government for decision” (Brennan, 2012, para. 52). This explanation is followed by a recap of the same legal arguments put forth by Harold Koh in 2010 to justify the use of targeted killings by the United States with no further discussion of what exactly the criteria is to warrant lethal action, what the careful review entails, or what happens when the senior officials evaluate the name submitted for consideration. In sum, the entire process is carried out through the executive branch without transparency or accountability. The executive branch decides who meets the criteria of a terrorist and of an “imminent threat” to the United States, with the President ultimately giving the go-ahead for a targeted killing. The guilt of these targets is decided in secret by the President of the United States and not through any legal process. And, as a Department of Justice memo leaked in 2013 revealed, the president is not limited to approving targets of other nationalities but can also approve the targeting of U.S. citizens without due process or any charges by claiming self-defense so long as they meet the previously established criteria for a targeted killing (Greenwald, 2013). Furthermore, the memo leaves open the possibility that a targeted killing may be authorized by the President even if the target does not meet the criteria initially laid out in the memo of being a senior level al-Qaeda leader and posing an imminent threat with capture not a feasible option (Greenwald, 2013).
2.1.2 On the Importance of News Coverage

As clearly laid out above, the use of drones by the United States in a targeted killing program has very serious implications for the country. The executive branch has undertaken an extensive military program with questionable legal basis, one that has shown that will target U.S. citizens if necessary. The ease of using drones and the fact that their use occurs far away from the eyes of Americans makes the issue one that lends itself to apathy from the public: it saves American lives, and without images of the fallout, why care about the people the program affects? Without an understanding of the other issues surrounding the use of drones, the portrayal of the drone targeted killing program is easy to accept as the most efficient and effective way to guarantee national security, and it is easy to neglect a more critical analysis. If the media are to fulfill their role within a democratic society, they must bring the controversial issues surrounding the use of drones to light to the American public so that they may weigh in on the future of the program.

2.2 Media Coverage of War: Reoccurring Patterns

Media coverage has changed along with the types of conflicts the United States has become involved in over the years. Numerous studies have been undertaken to consider the role the media have played in addressing these conflicts and producing critical coverage. There are three conflicts in particular that merit consideration in terms of the research generated about coverage of a U.S. military conflict and in terms of how they build off each other to explain the present day media coverage that Americans receive. These conflicts are the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War and the Iraq War. After reviewing the research regarding the media coverage for each of these conflicts, other research that has been done on media coverage of the CIA drone
program will be reviewed and discussed as well as how this paper will address the issue
differently than has been done previously.

2.2.1 Media Coverage During Prior U.S. Military Interventions

While the Korean War was the first war of the Cold War, most research on how the Cold
War began to shape media coverage of U.S. conflicts starts with the Vietnam War (Hallin 1984;
was the coverage of the Vietnam War that ultimately caused the United States to lose the war.
However, a study of the actual television coverage reveals that the media relied heavily on
official information and avoided “passing explicit judgment on official policy and statements”
(Hallin, 1984, p. 6). An analysis of the sources used for news coverage revealed heavily reliance
on official sources: “72 percent of the sources used in stories with Washington datelines were
U.S. government officials, as were 54 percent of the sources used in Saigon” (Hallin, 1984, p.
14). Critical news coverage increased as the war went on, but so did divisions between those in
power in Washington – and thus, according to the study on Vietnam War news coverage by
Daniel Hallin, the change in coverage was a reflection of the collapse of elite consensus on
foreign policy (Hallin, 1984, p. 20).

A content analysis of the television coverage of the Vietnam War found that the images
portrayed on television were rarely gruesome depictions of heavy fighting or casualties
(Patterson, 1984). This study took a stratified random sample of television news programs from
ABC, CBS and NBC and looked at regular evening television news programs between 1968 and
1973. Vietnam-related stories dominated the programs analyzed, but the majority of the time
“none of the networks carried stories which included film or photographs of combat” (Peterson,
1984 p. 401). This study further supports the dispelling of the myth that the media lost Vietnam,
as it disproves the idea that graphic battlefield images were displayed on a nightly basis to the
American people.

Research regarding the media coverage of the next major U.S. military conflict, the 1991
Gulf War, highlights tightening government control of the media and shows that the mainstream
media followed the government’s narrative for the conflict rather than providing critical
coverage (Bawden & Sheppard, 1997; Denton, 1993; Gottschalk, 1992; Halliday, 2007; Kellner,
2004, pp. 136-153). An analysis of the coverage by David Kellner found that mainstream media
coverage leading up to the war contained “few dissenting voices…and discussion strongly
privileged a military solution to the crisis” (Kellner, 2004, p. 137). Additionally, a study done by
FAIR, a media watchdog group, found that “ABC devoted only 0.7 percent of its Gulf coverage
to opposition to the military buildup. CBS allowed 0.8 percent, while NBC devoted 1.5 percent,
or 13.3 minutes for all stories about protests, anti-war organizations, conscientious objectors, and
religious dissenters” (Kellner, 2004, p. 143). While the sources were limited in part due to the
government’s pool system for journalists that restricted media access to the conflict zone and
government censorship over images and reports filed from the conflict zone, the sources were
also limited by the news outlets themselves: “of the 878 news sources used by the three major
commercial networks, only 1.5 percent were identified as anti-war protestors” (Kellner, 2004, p.
145).

The Gulf War was even more of a “television war” than Vietnam, with viewers for the
first time able to see real time images of the conflict as events unfolded (Denton, 1993, p. 29).
CNN in particular was able to provide continuous live coverage of the conflict as the first 24
hours news network. A 1993 study looked at the coverage between CNN and ABC News to
compare the differences between the coverage from a continuous, cable news channel and from a
consolidated news hour on a broadcast network (Dobkin, 1993, pp. 107-121). The study found that ABC and CNN both “emphasized Bush’s leadership and his allies, described Hussein – and often by extension, the Iraqi people – as villainous, depicted protestors as rebels, and reported on the moods, beliefs, and reactions of ‘average’ Americans” (Dobkin, 1993, p. 116). News coverage described U.S. military actions in defensive rather than offensive terms. “Average” Americans were depicted as war supporters, and as the war progressed, “protesters were depicted as marginal and deviant” (Dobkin, 1993, p. 119). Ultimately, the study concluded that both ABC and CNN followed similar structures in their construct of the narrative of the Gulf War, a narrative which privileged military intervention and “fit the emerging needs of the Pentagon and White House” (Dobkin, 1993, p. 120).

More recently, a significant amount of research has been dedicated to the media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War (Hayes & Guardino, 2010; Kellner, 2004b; Kumar, 2006). The findings of research on the media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War show similar failings as were found in the media coverage of the Gulf War over ten years prior.

According to Kumar, the overall tone of media coverage in the months leading up to the war and during the early days of the war was “weighted decisively in favor of the war” (Kumar, 2006, p. 58). Information that could have hurt the case for the war was downplayed in the media: Kumar cites as an example the failure of the media to fully cover the news story that in the weeks leading up to the official UN Security Council vote on the war, US officials had listened in on phone calls and read emails of UN Security Council representatives from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria, Guinea and Pakistan who were stationed in New York. While UK news sources broke the story, the LA Times and Washington Post “did their best to play down the significance,” and other media did not even bother to cover the story (Kumar, 2006, p. 58).
Kumar goes on further to describe how the media perpetuated the Bush administration’s stance that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), despite evidence disproving the claim. According to Kumar, “the media chose to bury questions about WMDs deep inside a story or to ignore it altogether,” and “some media outlets would even take a hostile tone towards those who disagreed with the U.S. position on WMDs” (Kumar, 2006, p. 59). Kumar also describes the ramifications for disagreeing with the war: Peter Arnett was fired from MSNBC for saying that things were not going as planned for the United States, and the Iraqi news station in Baghdad that had contradicted claims made by U.S. and U.K. officials was bombed. To underscore how much content was weighted towards the conflict, Kumar goes on to cite that Fox News, CNN, MSNBC and other media outlets supported the bombing (Kumar, 2006, p. 63).

Another study, this one from 2004, compared American broadcast coverage of the Iraq War to coverage from the BBC, Canadian and other international news sources (Kellner, 2004b). The study found that U.S. networks “tended to ignore Iraqi casualties, Arab outrage about the war, global anti-war and anti-U.S. protests, and the negative features of the war, whereas the BBC and Canadian outlets often featured these more critical themes” (Kellner, 2004b, p. 334). The study also found that “U.S. television coverage tended toward promilitary patriotism, propaganda and technological fetishism, celebrating the weapons of war and military humanism, highlighting the achievements and heroism of the U.S. troops” (Kellner, 2004b, p. 334). Global broadcasting networks on the other hand were much more critical of the U.S. military (Kellner, 2004b, p. 334).

More recently there has been some research dedicated to the media coverage of the CIA drone program. A study carried out by Tara McKelvey, a Newsweek and Daily Beast correspondent, looked specifically at newspaper coverage of the legality of drone strikes. The
study describes the type of coverage provided by different newspapers and found that news coverage gradually increased and became more critical over time, but still fell short of the coverage the issue deserved. According to McKelvey, one of the biggest obstacles for coverage is the covert operation status of the drone program and the necessary reliance on official sources (McKelvey, 2013, p. 12-13).

A master’s thesis by Cassady Sharp (2013) analyzes the coverage of the drone program with a focus on the discussion regarding the technology of drones. The study looked at mainstream media coverage of the drone program, analyzing content from top online newspapers and three television news channels – CNN, Fox News and MSNBC (Sharp, 2013, p. 25). Sharp found that there was a lack of government transparency on the issue – sources were frequently unnamed military officials, even when referring to unclassified missions (Sharp, 2013, pp. 30-32). Sharp also found that coverage relied on recycled information, which meant that once unnamed Pakistani officials released information about drone strikes, U.S. media would recycle the same information from each other as they had no way to independently verify the information as U.S. journalists are not allowed into the areas of Pakistan where the drone strikes occur (Sharp, 2013, p. 35). Once again, the research here points toward a tight control on information and access from the U.S. military.

2.2.2 Addressing the Failures of the Media in War Reporting

The research surrounding the coverage of recent U.S. military conflicts highlights several areas of concern in news coverage: an overwhelming reliance on official sources, an often uncritical assumption of the government’s narrative, and little coverage of dissenting views. Rather than critical coverage, news coverage for U.S. military conflicts starting from Vietnam has tended toward reflecting the view of Washington. The research also shows the development
of an information management strategy by the government that has contributed to the lack of critical coverage by limiting the access of journalists and forcing a reliance on official sources. The same shortcomings appearing repeatedly in the coverage of U.S. military conflicts brings up the question of why these same shortcomings appear again and again. The literature behind why the same failures are perpetuated by the media with each conflict suggests that the shortcomings are not due to journalists failing as individuals to provide critical coverage, but rather the development of a media structure that favors saving political goodwill and preserving economic considerations. A brief review of some of the literature on the structure of the system and its influence on news content in particular will serve to contextualize the next chapter of this thesis, which will look at the theoretical framework used to analyze the news transcripts.

2.2.3 Summary of Literature on the Structure of the Media System

According to McChesney in *The Problem of the Media* (2004), corporate ownership has had significant influence over the work of journalists and their ability to provide democratic journalism (McChesney, 2004, p. 57). The development of “professional journalism” arose due to the need to have journalists appear as neutral as possible in order to maximize audience size. As part of appearing objective and neutral, anything from official sources serves as legitimate news (McChesney, 2004, p. 68). McChesney also argues that the influence of corporate ownership can be found the choices of stories covered: stories that are cheap to cover and unlikely to offend those in power become legitimate news rather than stories that scrutinize big business or the activities of the government that serve the interests of the wealthy (McChesney, 2004, pp.72-73).

Further literature on the subject of the structure of the media system can be found in *Big Money, Big Media* by Ronald Bettig and Jeanne Lynn Hall (2012). The commercialization of
news has, according to Bettig and Hall, led to the development of publications with “unusually explicit agendas, audiences, and appeals to advertisers” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 163). A significant amount of the revenue for news media comes from advertisers: “around 50-60 percent for magazines, 80 percent for newspapers, and 100 percent for radio and television broadcasters,” with cable getting a double dip by earning both subscription fees and advertising revenue (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 164). Bettig and Hall discuss how those in power can use the media as a tool to determine what is not news and will not be covered, avoiding issues of corporate power. They cite specifically the lack of coverage to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund or foreign trade in 1999, despite massive protests at the World Trade Organization meeting that year (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 174). Bettig and Hall also cover how the relationship between media conglomerates and the government can lead to the press as more of a lapdog than a watchdog for the people: government officials have an important role for media conglomerates, putting into place regulations and laws that affect how those media conglomerates do business (Bettig & Hall, 2012, pp. 176-177).

Yet another work in this field that describes the structure of the system and its implications for new coverage is The Business of the Media by David Croteau and William Hoynes (2006). Croteau and Hoynes cover how the media industry has changed over time to a multi-billion dollar industry with only a few dominant players and the implications of that for the public sphere. With regard to news content, Croteau and Hoynes cover how the emphasis on bottom line profits can influence programming decisions: shock value draws in viewers and therefore advertisers, meaning content heavy on sex, violence and spectacle is served at the expensive of substantive content (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 164). Croteau and Hoynes contend that the structure of today’s media system with its emphasis on profits has inserted
“commercial considerations into many different forms of news and information media” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 169). Additionally, the pursuit of profits has the result of self-censorship. Editors and journalists know what the company’s interests are and the risk to their job if they don’t self-censor. Corporate censorship also appears, with the media organization itself choosing to drop stories. Conflicts of interest between the media conglomerate’s other holdings or the interests of advertisers also come into play. The end result, as summarized by Croteau and Hoynes, is that “the quest for profits often leads to media that are homogenized and trivial… and making profits the first priority also has political implications for what is and is not routinely included in the media” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 189).

All of the literature briefly discussed here falls into political economy of media, which is the focus of chapter three. Chapter three will describe the theoretical background for political economy of media as well as the more specific analytic framework within political economy of media used for this thesis, the propaganda model. Finally, chapter three will describe the methodology used to collect the data.
CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL ECONOMY

The vast majority of media content produced today is the product of massive media conglomerates. News media are not exempt. To understand why we get the news coverage we do, we must look at the political and economic institutions that facilitate the type of environment that allows for these massive media conglomerates to exist. Political economy provides the context for an analysis of news coverage. To understand what is meant by a political economic approach, though, it is necessary to first visit the theoretical foundations of political economy. Following that, the framework of the propaganda model will be explained.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

Political economy is defined by Vincent Mosco in *The Political Economy of Communication* as “the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources” (Mosco, 1996, p. 25). To consider political economy is to consider how power and wealth come into play as influencing factors on a society’s communications, or its production and distribution of knowledge. Political economy provides a theoretical framework that allows us to analyze mass media communications through a lens that explains them in the context of the institutional and power structures within which they operate.

Political economy originated in the eighteenth century as an attempt to explain and justify capitalism. Political economy evolved as capitalism evolved, with the nineteenth century seeing the addition of Karl Marx and Frederick Engel’s class analysis and a radical critique of the capitalist system (Wasko, 2005, p. 26). Through its development by theorists during the capitalist revolution, political economy as a theory became influenced by the dynamic forces that
transformed societies. The “economic” portion of political economy looks at “the systems and organizations that are concerned with the allocation of resources and the distribution of output” (Norris, 1990, p. 2). Political economy looks beyond just the structure of the system but is also concerned with normative questions about how not only wealth is distributed within a society, but how it ought to be (Norris, 1990, p. 7). The “political” aspect of political economy revolves around the “system of institutions and organizations concerned with the governance of a society” (Norris, 1990, p. 1). This can be understood as power: who gets to make the decisions in a society that will determine the behavior of others in the society?

In the eighteenth century, economists such as Adam Smith focused on the production, distribution and consumption of resources in light of social theory, looking at how these resources were allocated towards satisfying certain needs and not others (Wasko, 2005, p. 26). Political economy continues to include a moral aspect to it, concerning itself with advancing the social good – a component which distinguishes political economy from economics (Mosco, 1996, pp. 34-35). The moral dimension also provides a “strong defense of democracy, equality, and the public sphere in the face of powerful private interests” (Mosco, 1996, p. 36).

The idea of the public sphere is associated with German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1964), who described the necessity of a public sphere within a democracy. The “public sphere” is the space between the government and society, in which control of the state is exercised formally through voting and informally through public opinion (Curran, 1993, p. 29). Public opinion should be developed through discussion of societal issues in a forum freely accessible to all (Habermas, 1964). The role of the media within that public sphere is to “cultivate the social spaces for ongoing public dialogue” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 22)
In order to serve the public sphere, there should be a variety of information available from different sources. Information should be free from government restriction or censorship, and media outlets should have many owners rather than only a few. The public sphere views people as citizens, rather than consumers, and that “the media should ‘serve’ these citizens, rather than ‘target’ potential consumers” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 22). The role of the media in a democracy should be to facilitate the participation of those citizens in the public domain by allowing “to contribute to public debate and have an input in the framing of public policy” (Curran, 1993, p. 30). Croteau and Hoynes (2006, p. 156-157) lay out four specific characteristics for media that contributes to the public interest of a democratic society, which are worth noting here:

1. **Diversity** – that there should be a range of views and experiences present that reflect the diversity within the society;

2. **Innovation** – the content produced by the media industry should be fresh and original, not imitative and formulaic;

3. **Substance** – media must include “substantive news and entertainment addressing significant issues facing society” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 157);

4. **Independence** – media should “provide citizens with information and views independent of concentrated power – either governmental or corporate” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 157)

Public interest standards such as the ones laid out by Croteau and Hoynes can be applied to all media. However, the United States has historically associated the press with the need to fulfill this role within the public sphere of a democracy: the First Amendment was created to protect a free press in recognition of this important social function (McChesney, 2004, pp. 27-
Both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison wrote on the significance of the press in a democracy, seeing it as necessary to creating an informed citizenry and protection against elite rule (McChesney, 2004, pp. 29-30). This foundation for the role of the press in the United States puts in place the expectation of American news media to fulfill their role in the public sphere of educating the citizenry and facilitating discussion of important societal and public policy issues.

The transformation of the media industry from family-owned enterprises into the conglomerates present today brings political economy into the realm of communication. These conglomerates are capitalist entities interested in producing commodities to make a profit. In order to understand the media content produced, the institutional structure within which it is produced and where that structure falls within a political economic context must be considered. To do this, we look to the propaganda model to provide a framework within political economy to examine the transcripts used in this thesis.

### 3.2 The Propaganda Model

The propaganda model “attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 1). According to this view, the media serve the interests of those who control and finance them.

The structure of the media is set up in a way that contributes to serving the interests of the power elite: concentration of ownership gives media companies monopoly power, the reliance on advertising influence content choices to keep profits up, and the definition of what is newsworthy is determined by the company. The influence of powerful interests in news means that the slant of news tends to protect those interests. “Experts” are used to confirm the preferred slant, oppositional views are downplayed, and preferred conservative ideologies are perpetuated.
As the interests of media conglomerates, other corporate businesses, and the government often intersect, solidarity among these groups develops (Herman, 1996). The mainstream media become a propaganda tool to further the interests of those in power and are used to manufacture the appearance of public consent.

The propaganda model is further divided into five components: ownership; reliance on official sources; reliance on advertising; flak; and anti-communism, now anti-terrorism. Each component must be broken down and discussed in order to provide an understanding of the propaganda model and will be looked at particularly in the context of how each element affects news content.

3.2.1 Ownership

The number of dominant media corporations has shrunk from fifty in 1983 to only five today (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 16). This means that the majority of today’s news comes from outlets owned by corporate conglomerates, whose interest lies in maximizing profits. Ownership is an important consideration for media content – “control over ideas, news, and culture rates as unique power even among powerful corporations” (McChesney, 2004, p. 225). When ownership rests in the hands of a few private entities whose interests are the bottom line and retaining advertisers, the “market” can serve as an effective censor for content (McChesney, 2004, p.225). Concerns about ownership include both their direct owners as well as their boards of directors. Direct owners form an obvious connection between content produced and corporate interests, but interlocking boards of directors can lead to some less obvious interests being present. For instance, AOL’s board of directors during its merger with Time Warner in 2000 included “General Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Ronald Reagan’s former secretary of state; General Colin Powell, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President George H.W. Bush; Franklin
Raines, chair and CEO of Fannie Mae; and Marjorie M. Scardino, CEO of Pearson PLC, one of the world’s largest publishing companies” (Betti & Hall, 2012, p. 42). When executive boards look like AOL’s, with a range of powerful political and economic interests present, media executives may think twice about running stories that may offend the interests of those on their board (Betti & Hall, 2012, p. 43).

As media conglomerates grow in size, they look to the government to promote their interests at home and abroad. This results in an overlap of economic and political interests between big media companies and government (McChesney, 2004, p. 73). Government regulations can create significant obstacles for media conglomerates, making lobbying efforts and establishing relationships with relevant government officials worthwhile endeavors. For instance, News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch was able to get around regulatory issues and expanded his business by maintaining close relationships with British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, late U.S. president Ronald Reagan, and (at the time) House Speaker Newt Gingrich. The passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which reduced ownership rules and allowed for massive media mergers, was due in part to heavy lobbying by the media industry (Wexler, 2000). It was likely also helped by the fact that President Bill Clinton’s supporters included important figures in the television and motion picture industry. Clinton’s dependence on the support of the television and motion picture industry reportedly influenced his decisions on communications polices (Picard, 1999, p. 206). Currying favor with the government has the potential for big-pay offs for the industry in terms of both favorable regulation policies and assistance in their efforts for expansion into overseas markets.

Concentration as these conglomerates grow in size has the effect of creating less diversity in the content produced by these media companies. Options become reduced as media companies
buy up outlets and merge into larger conglomerates. This has the effect of producing an increasingly narrow set of viewpoints being presented, with the dominant ideologies as the ones being perpetuated. Diversity is also impacted by the choice of media conglomerates to cut back on the number of journalists they employ and rely more on cheap or free sources of information as a way to reduce budgets (Kumar, 2006, para. 11). The use of news syndication firms that collect and distribute news content and provide their content to any news media willing to buy it results in the bulk of materials coming from the same firms. With fewer journalists involved in the production of news and with news coming from the same firms and their staff, there are fewer people examining events and the coverage becomes similar (Picard, 1999, p. 209). The type of investigative journalism that would question the structure of the system is not encouraged, or even budgeted for –those types of journalists cost more to hire, and answering to corporate ownership does not provide much incentive to fuel investigations into stories that might anger business or government institutions (McChesney, 2004, p. 81).

3.2.2 Reliance on Advertising

Media outlets have little incentive to produce content that will upset advertisers or anger government institutions, and journalists have largely adjusted to their corporate situation. McChesney in *The Problem of the Media* quotes a statistic from *Electronic Media* in 2001 that found that the majority of TV station executives found their news departments “cooperative” in shaping news in a way that benefited “nontraditional revenue development” (McChesney, 2004, p. 83).

In *The Political Economy of Culture* (1989), Sut Jhally poses three scenarios that illustrate how the desire by journalists to please superiors: their direct bosses, the corporate entity that owns them and then going even further up the hierarchy to the advertisers upon whose
support the corporate entity relies. The first is the debate concerning the arms race: if media companies have connections to the defense industry, such as in the case of General Electric and its ownership of NBC until very recently, then their relationship will surely affect the quality and type of debate on the arms race found on network television. Next, Jhally brings up discussion on energy policy. Once again, media companies share close ties with the industry with oil representatives on the boards of “all the powerful news media” (Jhally, 1989, p. 69). Finally, Jhally brings up the issue of foreign affairs, connecting the reporting of those issues to the other interests that media companies have in preserving their investments they themselves have around the world along with the investments of the other companies with which they work closely (Jhally, 1989, pp. 68-69). These three scenarios illustrate very clearly considerations for the other interests media outlets have when deciding how to cover news and what news to cover: as capitalist entities, these media outlets have an obligation to their bottom line.

News stories are often chosen based on whether they serve commercial and political interests of big business, subjecting the government to more scrutiny than big business – that is, unless it’s those government activities that serve the interests of the wealthy, including “the role of the CIA and other institutions of national security” (McChesney, 2004, p.73). Taking a partisan position can alienate readers or advertisers: media outlets utilize a loose understanding of the political “left” and “right.” This means that media outlets feature dominant, acceptable frameworks of society and politics and focus on the debates among “easily accessible political figures and dominant organizations while generally ignoring political concerns outside of those familiar parameters” (Picard, 1999, pp. 210-211). News that sells is a much larger consideration for companies, particularly news that can be conveyed in a way that supports the financial goals of companies (Picard, 1999, p. 211).
Another way in which advertisers exert influence is through being given advance notice by the media company of any content that might portray the advertiser negatively. For instance, an oil company may be given the opportunity by a news channel to reschedule ads if the evening news features an oil spill (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 187). However, advertisers are increasingly demanding advance warning of any content that might be controversial, regardless of whether or not it pertains to their industry. As one example, Chrysler Corporation demanded advance warning for “any and all editorial content that encompasses sexual, political, social issues or any editorial that might be construed as provocative or offensive” by the magazines in which its advertisements appeared, as well as demanding a written summary of the major themes and articles for that issue (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 187).

3.2.3 Reliance on Official Sources

Another component of the propaganda model is the reliance on official sources. Relying on official sources does not provide a diversity of viewpoints or information on issues. Using corporate press releases or information from a carefully organized government press conference does not encourage investigative journalism or questioning those in power. Rather, the preference for official sources means that journalists must cultivate relationships with those sources, making criticism a risky career choice if they wish to continue to have access to that source (McChesney, 2004, p. 69). Officials can use the power they have as a source of information to influence news stories and ensure that information is conveyed from their preferred slant. This reliance on official sources also serves to create a system in which official sources are viewed as more credible and preferable to alternative sources. Those who fall outside the range of acceptable sources are dismissed by the mainstream media (Kumar, 2006, para. 13).
Relying on official sources is also a cost-saving measure. For the corporate media outlets, an emphasis on maximizing profits has resulted in a reduction of journalist staff (Kumar, 2006, p. 52). Following up on a press release or official announcement is cheaper and faster than seeking out other stories. By relying on a “golden Rolodex” to reach set sources at the courthouse, police station, city hall or Wall Street, stories can be produced “on a predictable timetable and at low cost” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 174). This method of gathering stories – simply sending reporters to where the official sources gather and then reporting back what those official sources say – explains why reporters are assigned to the White House and “file stories regularly, regardless of what is taking place” (McChesney, 2004, p. 69). This means that the agenda for the media is dictated by what the official sources choose to speak about, and journalists who raise issues that are not being discussed by official sources are accused of acting unprofessionally (McChesney, 2004, p. 69). The outcome of this obvious reliance on official information is that those delivering the information, whether government or corporate, acquire the power to manipulate the news (Kumar, 2006, p. 52).

3.2.4 Flak

Flak serves as another filter for the propaganda model. Flak is the negative responses to media content. Flak is costly to media corporations: not only do they have to defend themselves to the complaining public or organization (and possibly in front of a regulating body or a court), they run the risk of losing advertisers (Herman & Chomsky 2002, p.26). Flak relates to the propaganda model because those in power have weight when it comes to creating flak. With consequences like advertisers pulling their dollars away from media companies or government revoking access to top officials, flak increases the cost of producing media content that may upset the interests of the elite.
Advertisers choose to support media outlets that reach the right demographics and pull the right size audiences. When it comes to news content, outlets must also provide the right kind of coverage lest they lose significant revenue. For instance, in 1990, GM refused to place commercials on television programs that feature documentary filmmaker Michael Moore following Moore’s film *Roger & Me*, which covered GM’s closure of a truck plant in Flint, Michigan that devastated the city (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 183). In 1991, national advertisers expressed that they were “extremely reluctant” to purchase ad time on programming specials about the Persian Gulf War (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 183). This resulted in programming being scaled back, as it was not economically feasible to continue to produce the specials. The ad industry’s rationale for not running ads during war news programs, according to an executive at Deutsch Advertising, was “‘...it’s wasted money. Commercials need to be seen in the right environment. A war is just not an upbeat environment’” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 183). As the two cases illustrate, advertisers’ threats to pull their accounts presents very real and effective pressure to keep the reporting of news outlets in line with the desires of the advertising companies.

In terms of flak from government sources, the reliance on official sources means that producing critical coverage could result in being cut off from those sources. Furthermore, the reliance of the media industry on favorable government policies provides little incentive to risk angering governmental officials or agencies. For instance, consider the networks falling in line with a request from the Bush administration to limit their coverage following 9/11. A conference call between Condoleezza Rice and network executives from ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and CNN in October 2001 resulted in the networks agreeing to limit their prospective news coverage of tapes of al Qaeda leaders (Solomon, 2005, p. 127). At the time, the Federal Communications
Commission was chaired by Michael Powell, the son of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell. For these network executives seeking further deregulation for future mergers and to increase market share, there were clear incentives to acquiesce to the Bush administration’s requests about war coverage (Solomon, 2005, p. 128).

3.2.5 Anti-Communism

The fifth part of the propaganda model is “anti-communism,” which today may be more relevant as using the “‘free market’ as a principal ideological underpinning along with ‘anti-terrorism’ and the ‘war on terror’ that have provided the needed enemy or face of evil” (Mullen, 2009, p.15). During the Cold War, the threat of communism allowed for an ideological bond between policy-makers and journalists, providing them with a framework with which to understand global events as well as with “a powerful rhetorical tool with which to criticize as unpatriotic anyone who questioned U.S. foreign policy” (Robinson, 2004, p. 97). Today, post-Cold War and post-9/11, terrorism has replaced communism as a unifying ideology. As with communism, it too provides journalists and policymakers with a framework for understanding global events as well as a tool to justify a more aggressive U.S. foreign policy (Robinson, 2004, p. 107). The Bush administration delineated the war clearly: according to President George W. Bush, “‘you’re either with us, or you’re with the terrorists’” (Solomon, 2005, p. 174).

In terms of perpetuating the ideology of capitalism, it makes sense that that for the elite who benefit from our capitalist society in its current iteration, anything that questions how the market works is suspect. Perpetuating a dominant ideology of capitalism is beneficial to those at the top of the system, and Americans by and large buy into it: 68 percent of Americans believe that the most important factor in getting ahead is hard work, with 70 percent of Americans believing that the United States is the land of opportunity where “everyone who works hard gets
ahead” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p.166). For Americans, freedom is equated with free enterprise, free markets and free trade, an association that corporations benefit from and are unlikely to ever want truly questioned (Bettig and Hall, 2012, p.166). Anti-communism, or the belief in capitalism and the free market, will not directly be looked at in this thesis but its influence on other parts of the structure cannot be ignored.

3.3 The Propaganda Model and War Coverage

The propaganda model suggests that since the interests of major investors are present in the defense budget, media coverage will limit the debate and marginalize voices that suggest reducing the defense budget. For those players for whom advancing corporate interests is a priority, including media conglomerates, military involvement is advisable and justifiable and that is shown by instances such as the media denying Ralph Nader, third-party presidential candidate in the 2000 election and a proponent of defense budget cuts, coverage on the issues and defending his exclusion from the presidential debates on the grounds that the dominant two parties sufficiently covered the range of viewpoints (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 36). This has the result of creating the assumption that the decision by the United States to go to war is based on just and good reasons. This affects coverage of war as journalists, accepting this viewpoint, are unwilling to question if the United States is causing more harm than good in its military involvements.

The propaganda model offers a useful framework to analyzing the media coverage of drones by cable news and broadcast networks, as the usage of drones, part of national security and defense interests, is of significant interest to those members of the elite who form the military-industrial complex – and, by extension, the media corporations with ties to the military-industrial complex. While corporately owned news outlets have an obligation to their
shareholders, as providers of news they also have an obligation to the American public to provide full coverage on topics of national interest such as the drone program. The comparison between cable and broadcast news coverage will shed light on whether ownership makes a difference in coverage. Analyzing the sources, particularly in terms of reliance on official sources and the amount of coverage accorded to dissenting views, will provide further insight as to the quality of the coverage and whether the full spectrum of debate is presented. Furthermore, considering the ideologies perpetuated in the coverage will demonstrate whether coverage follows a government-prescribed anti-terrorist filter or whether coverage presents a more critical take on the government’s actions.

Additionally, the propaganda model as a political economic approach offers a different perspective to an analysis of drone coverage than what has previously been offered. This thesis looks specifically at cable and broadcast news coverage throughout the entire War on Terror, from 2002 through 2013, with a focus on coverage regarding the legal and ethical implications of the CIA’s drone program. Previous studies have focused on print coverage rather than cable news, looked only at specific years of the program or only focused on the technology of the drone program (McKelvey, 2013; Sharp, 2012). This thesis will look at the predominant cable news channels of Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, and broadcast news on networks ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS.

3.4 Methodology

Television is of particular interest for analyzing news coverage as television remains the most widely used source for national and international news. In 2011, 66% of Americans cited television news as their main source of news: in the earlier years of the War on Terror, this number was even higher, with 82% citing television news as their main source of news in 2002.
(Pew Research Center, 2011). Looking at television news coverage, therefore, remains an important way of measuring what coverage most Americans are receiving. For this study, the cable news sources that are examined are CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC and the broadcast sources are ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS.

This study uses the academic database LexisNexis to find news transcripts from October 2002 through October 2013. The search terms that were used are “unmanned military aircraft,” and then “CIA and drones” to capture all relevant stories. Of the thousands of results returned, the only news stories that were used for this analysis are those that focus specifically on discussing the U.S. military use of unmanned aerial surveillance vehicles – e.g., results in which the use of drones in Afghanistan or Pakistan was mentioned in passing as the method by which a photograph or video footage was obtained were not included in the analysis. Only results that talk about the U.S. military use of drones as part of the War on Terror were used: references to domestic use for border patrol and to the use of drones in Libya were not included. As the focus of this thesis is on the legal and ethical uses of drones, only news stories that focus on those aspects of drone use were included. To qualify as discussing the legal and/or ethical use of drones, stories must include:

- Explicit discussion of legality (e.g. flat out asking a guest whether the program is legal)

- Explicit discussion of ethics (e.g. flat out asking a guest whether the program is ethical)

- Questions or discussion related to the legal issues previously outlined, including:
  - The chain of command for decisions related to targeted killings
  - The distinction between the CIA program and the military program
  - The justification for the program (e.g. Authorization for the Use of Military Force)
Questions or discussion related to the ethical issues previously outlined, including:

- Number of civilian casualties and/or proportional use of force in war
- Desensitization of soldiers
- Campaign contributions from defense companies involved in the production of drone technology

Only stories that actually discuss the legal or ethical issues were considered. That is, any segment in which there was only a single line referring to “ethical concerns” or “questions about legality” and did not develop the idea further than merely mentioning that such concerns exist were not kept in for analysis, as such a small amount of content is not sufficient to qualify as a “discussion” of the issue. In particular, this analysis is focused on coverage that looks at varying points of view and suggests implications for the future, as well as coverage that attempts to explain the drone program and what the exact legal and ethical considerations may be. Though the story selection had some subjective judgment applied, such criteria helped to achieve consistency regarding the story selection across networks and years.

Both news shows and talk shows (shows that are based on opinion and discussion) on the cable news channels were examined to form a more complete picture of the amount and extent of coverage of this topic by the selected news outlets. Stories that appear twice (e.g., ran in the evening news and then again in the morning news) were counted as two separate stories in the totals, but their content was only discussed once.

The content was considered in the context of the propaganda model, looking in particular at the components of ownership, reliance on official sources, and the ideologies perpetuated. As this thesis relied on transcripts, an analysis of advertisers would be difficult and as such the component of advertising was not included.
Though transcripts can provide plenty of information on the verbal messages conveyed by news outlets, they lack the visual representations that also have a persuasive effect on viewers. Information processing research suggests that visuals can have considerable influence on viewers, with images being more readily recalled by viewers than what was said – especially when the images are particularly negative (Bucy & Grabe, 2007, p. 655-666). Television news images in particular can elicit a strong emotional response, increasing the likelihood of the audience caring about the issue and paying attention (Pfau et al, 2008, p. 304). Images of war are widely thought to impact public support and opinion of war policy and are of particular concern for this thesis (Griffin, 2010, p. 35). Thus, in order to provide some additional insight into the strength of the coverage, video clips of the news networks from April 2013 were used to provide a single month case study of the coverage.

April 2013 represents a month in which coverage should be fairly significant, following the CIA confirmation hearings for John Brennan in February and Senator Rand Paul’s filibuster on the program, but ideally focused less on discussing the events themselves and more so on the actual program. The news clips for analysis come from the website Internet Archive, found at Archive.org. The Internet Archive provides a diverse video library that includes TV news clips since 2009 and allows users to search closed captions to find content. The search terms that were used are “CIA and drones.” Clips were gathered from both cable and broadcast networks and then compared. The focus for this chapter is the visuals: what depictions of drones are shown? Of the battlefield? Of the victims? Does the host cut the guest off or allow the guest to speak, even if the host disagrees with the guest’s opinion? Are graphs or charts shown – and, if so, do they appear to be skewed? Do they include the sources for the graphs or charts? Does the tone of voice indicate sarcasm, irony, anger?
Though I examine only one month’s worth of news clips, the analysis of the visuals strengthen the evidence regarding how the various networks handled the coverage and provide better insight into what the coverage looked like for each network.

To provide an understanding of what interests may come into play for news media coverage, the next chapter, chapter four, focuses on the ownership and boards of directors of the cable and broadcast news outlets that are examined in this thesis.

Once ownership has been covered in depth, chapters five and six examine the coverage itself, looking at sources and message perpetuated. This analysis looks at how critically news outlets covered the issue and to what degree viewpoints other than those espoused by the government were present.

Chapter seven focuses on the case study, providing a full description of the video clips analyzed and how the visual depiction may reveal more insight into the coverage provided.

Chapter eight presents the conclusions of this study and their implications.
CHAPTER FOUR

OWNERSHIP

The news outlets analyzed in this thesis are ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS, Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN. Other than publically-owned PBS, these outlets are all owned by the five largest media conglomerates: Disney, News Corp, Comcast/General Electric, Time Warner, and Viacom/CBS. Comcast purchased NBCUniversal (containing both NBC and MSNBC) from General Electric in a 2011 deal; Disney owns ABC, News Corp. owns Fox News, Time Warner owns CNN, and Viacom, though now a separate business from CBS since 2005, maintains a close relationship with the network and both remain under parent company National Amusements.

Ownership is a critical component of this analysis, as corporate ownership brings news networks into a profit-driven apparatus. This extends certain pressures to the news media, with the need to yield ever-growing revenue numbers. Additionally, corporate owners share personal and business ties to many other corporations. In some cases, the corporation itself may own other entities that compromise its news outlets: for example, General Electric’s involvement in weapons production calls into question the neutrality of its news coverage on those issues. Furthermore, as these media corporations grow in size, they are “drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest” (Chomsky & Herman, 1988, p.14). This means that because of the need to cut costs and increase profits, media corporations rely on the use of official sources for cheap information and to serve as easy and consistent sources for news stories – creating a relationship in which the media are dependent on access to official sources. As these corporations continue to grow, they require government permission for mergers and to ensure their interests are protected at home.
and abroad. Corporate ownership is therefore a necessary filter to understand how the news media may be influenced by the economic and political interests of news outlets’ owners.

Each company is briefly profiled here in order to demonstrate how the size and wealth of these media conglomerates brings them into close contact with the power elite who influence policy decisions within the government. In particular, these profiles look at how these corporations have used lobbying dollars and political influence to achieve business goals, and how their well-connected boards of directors show overlapping circles of media companies, lobbyists, banks, politicians, and other corporate executives. Finally, this chapter ends by noting how those close relationships are reflected in the sources used on news outlets.

4.1 The Companies

4.1.1 Comcast/General Electric.

Though known for manufacturing consumer appliances, GE is also a large player in the banking, insurance and defense industries. GE’s media entities make up only a small part of the overall GE conglomerate. GE’s involvement in the media industry came about in the early 1900s when it founded RCA to monopolize wireless and then created NBC to monopolize network radio. GE lost control of RCA in 1931, but regained it in 1986 only to sell off most of RCA’s holdings apart from NBC (Meehan, 2005, p. 60).

By 2002, GE was “involved in television production, distribution, broadcast networks, and cable channels” (Meehan, 2005, p. 61). Besides owning the major network NBC, GE also owned Spanish language network Telemundo and part of PAX, a network aimed at Christians. GE would use NBC and Telemundo to expand its cable operations, creating such cables ventures as Telemundo Internacional and MSNBC, a joint venture with Microsoft (Meehan, 2005, p. 61-61). GE entered into other joint ventures, such as sharing ownership in The History Channel and
History International with Disney and Viacom and leasing hours on NBC’s Saturday morning schedule to Discovery (Meehan, 2005, p. 62).

However, GE still didn’t own a film production company. That changed in 2003 when Universal Studio’s owner, a water utilities business called Vivendi, decided to sell off Universal to ease a cash crunch Vivendi was experiencing (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 94). The deal went through in 2004, with General Electric spending $5.4 billion to acquire Universal Entertainment’s movie studio, cable channels and theme parks (Ahrens, 2004). The merger combined Universal’s extensive film and television library and production studios with NBC’s range of media outlets, and NBC became NBCUniversal.

By 2009, however, GE was looking to unload NBCUniversal in favor of focusing on its core industrial businesses of aviation, power generation, rail, and medical-imaging equipment (“GE’s NBC Sale,” 2009). GE quickly found a buyer for NBCUniversal in cable company Comcast. By the end of 2009, GE and Comcast had announced a joint venture worth a combined $37.25 billion that would eventually give Comcast full ownership of NBCUniversal. 2009 was the same year that Comcast posted revenue of $35.8 billion, and Comcast’s video, high-speed internet, and voice customers numbered 47.1 million (“Comcast Reports,” 2010, pp. 2-3).

By 2011, Comcast had acquired a 51 percent stake in NBCUniversal, with GE keeping the remaining 49 percent (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 96). This was also the last year in which NBC was included for the year’s revenues for GE: General Electric reported $142 billion in consolidated revenues exclusively from GE and $5 billion in consolidated revenue from NBCUniversal for a total of $147 billion (“GE Works,” 2011, p.1). With Comcast’s power in the cable provider market now joined with a massive content creation company, the deal stirred up
concerns that Comcast owning both the content and the pipeline would lead to monopoly conditions (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 96; Gustin, 2013, para. 13).

The deal was approved anyway, which is unsurprising when considering the money Comcast put into lobbying efforts leading up to the deal’s approval. For 2012, Comcast’s lobbying expenditures show that it spent a total of $12,937,000 on lobbying efforts (“Comcast Lobbying Totals,” 2014). Comcast made a number of political contributions that year as well, donating $2,533,777 to Democrat politicians and $1,584,188 to Republican politicians (“Comcast Total Contributions,” 2014). In 2010, GE spent $480,000 of its lobbying expenditures on the TV/Movies/Music industry (“Lobbying Spending,” 2014). GE’s political contributions for 2010 totaled $2,672,000 (“General Electric: Recipients,” 2014).

Following 2010’s lobbying efforts and political donations, in January 2011, Congressmen Charles W. Dent and Michael Doyle sent a letter to the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Julius Genachowski, asking him to approve the Comcast-NBC deal as the joint venture would “promote competition, investment, localism, diversity and innovation, and is in the public interest” (Dent & Doyle, 2011, p. 1). This letter contained a list of 97 signatures of members of Congress. 84 of the 97 signatories received campaign contributions from Comcast, ranging from around $1,000 to $25,100 (“Lawmakers Backing,” 2011). Later in 2011, in another example of how close relationships between corporations and government officials can be beneficial, Federal Communications commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker resigned from the FCC to join Comcast as its senior vice president of governmental affairs, just four months after she had voted to approve the merger (Tsukayama, 2011). The Comcast acquisition of NBCUniversal shows how for large corporations seeking to expand past what federal regulations allow, close relationships with the government are vital for ensuring growth.
These close relationships are aided by interlocking boards of directors. For General Electric, these connections include the Council on Foreign Relations\textsuperscript{1}, the Center for Strategic and International Studies\textsuperscript{2}, the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, Boeing and Northrup Grumman\textsuperscript{3} ("General Electric Interlocks," 2014). For Comcast, these connections include the Council on Foreign Relations, Obama for America and the U.S. Department of Defense ("Comcast Interlocks," 2014). While these are not complete lists of the board interlocks for either company, both serve to show how corporations such as General Electric and Comcast are connected to politicians, defense interests, and foreign policy. In particular, for the purposes of this thesis, the defense industry’s relationship with GE is of particular note: GE was ranked eight on the Pentagon’s list of the top military contractors for 2004 with more than $2 billion in revenue (Solomon, 2005, p. 114).

4.1.2 Disney

The Walt Disney Company has come a long way from its start as an animation studio in 1923. Disney today is a media conglomerate with “operations in publishing, radio, broadcast television, cable television, home video, DVDs, Internet, film, music, sports, theme parks, live theater, licensing, merchandising, and retailing” (Meehan, 2005, p. 57). Disney’s annual income matches up with its sizable endeavors: at the end of 2013, Disney’s revenue was $45 billion ("Walt Disney Co," 2014).

Though Disney has expanded far beyond its early animation days, film and television still remain a vital part of the Disney machine. Disney’s film and television holdings include eight

\textsuperscript{1} The Council on Foreign Relations is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank specializing in U.S. foreign policy and international affairs.
\textsuperscript{2} The Center for Strategic and International Studies is a think tank focused on defense and security, regional stability and transnational challenges.
\textsuperscript{3} Northrop Grumman is a global security company focused on aerospace and defense technology.
television stations and the ABC television network, ESPN, Disney Channels Worldwide, SOAPnet Networks, Touchstone, Miramax, The Walt Disney Company Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures, and Pixar. Other holdings for Disney include the Disney theme parks and water parks, music and book publishing companies such as Marvel Publishing and Hollywood Records, and 227 radio stations (“Who Owns the Media,” 2014).

With such a variety of business interests to protect, Disney makes good use of lobbying dollars and campaign contributions to ensure Disney’s interests are represented in Washington. In 2012, Disney spent $1,799,643 on campaign contributions and $3,890,000 on lobbying efforts (“Walt Disney Co,” 2014). Disney’s political influence has been used primarily to open global markets and to protect its intellectual property. In particular, Disney has lobbied for legislation for stronger copyright protection. When Disney characters were nearly up to become part of public domain in the late 1990s, Disney used its political clout to get Congress to pass what was known as “the Mickey Mouse Extension Act,” which extended the length of copyright (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 70). Disney has also extended its political influence in other ways. After Chinese officials showed disapproval of Disney-distributed film Kundun in 1997, Disney sent Henry Kissinger to China to smooth things over and ensure that Disney could continue to operate in China uninhibited (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 69).

The mutually beneficial relationship between Disney and politicians ensures that both sides have an incentive to work together. Besides campaign contributions, connections with corporations can lead to further careers after politics: for instance, former senator George Mitchell worked at a number of multinational corporations after the Senate, ending up at Disney as the chairman of the board from 2006-2007. Even while Mitchell was chairing at Disney, he
remained director at FedEx, Staples, and Starwood Hotels and Restaurants, as well as a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (Bettig & Hall, 2006).

As exemplified by Mitchell’s other relationships while chairman at Disney, Disney’s wealth and power brings those at the executive level at Disney into contact with other political and corporate elite. The corporate connections at Disney are spread across a variety of industries through interlocking boards of directors. Disney’s board of directors boasting interlocks to such organizations as the Council on Foreign Relations, Boeing, the U.S. Senate, the CIA and the Brookings Institution4 show how Disney connects to not just other corporations but to the political world and foreign policy establishment in Washington.

As a final example of how political relationships factor in at Disney, Disney refused to fund the release of Michael Moore’s documentary Fahrenheit 9/11, a film that was critical of the Bush administration. Disney’s CEO Michael Eisner explained that the company “did not want a film in the middle of our political process where we’re such a nonpartisan company and our guests that participate in all our attractions do not look for us to take sides” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 73). For Disney, its political and economic interests far outweighed Michael Moore’s film.

4.1.3 News Corporation

News Corporation as the multinational conglomerate it is today is a far cry from its start as an Australian newspaper Rupert Murdoch inherited from his father (Meehan, 2005, p. 64). In 2011, News Corp.’s revenue was $33.4 billion (“Who Owns the Media,” 2014). News Corp. encompasses a range of significant media holdings. These holdings include: filmed entertainment through Twentieth Century Fox; thirty-five television stations and the Fox Television Network,

4 The Brookings Institution is a D.C.-based think tank focused primarily on economic, governance, foreign policy, and global economy and development issues.
with its cable network programming including the Fox Business Network and Fox News; direct broadcast satellite television services; four national newspapers in the UK, nearly 150 local newspapers in Australia, and the *New York Post* and *Wall Street Journal* in the United States; a 32% minority share in Hulu.com; and publishing entities such as HarperCollins (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 74).

Being a transnational corporation with so many different holdings, News Corp. is understandably concerned with government decisions that may impact its businesses. Bagdikian described Rupert Murdoch as being driven by “the accumulation of as much media power as possible and the use of that power to promote his deep-seated conservative politics” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 38). While all conglomerates will use lobbying and campaign contributions to secure political support to achieve business goals, Murdoch has shown he will go even further. When Murdoch’s desired acquisition of two large national newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and the (daily) *Times*, was forbidden by England’s Monopoly Commission, he used his media to help Conservative candidate Margaret Thatcher win election to prime minister – after which Murdoch was able to break the Minority Commission rules with Thatcher’s cooperation (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 39). Thatcher’s close relationship with President Ronald Reagan would later help Murdoch immigrate to the United States, expediting Murdoch’s citizenship status so that Murdoch could own broadcast stations in the United States. In 1985, Reagan’s FCC would create a new category of network so that Murdoch could create Fox, operate it at the most profitable times and not have to provide any public service or news programming as typically required by laws and regulations (Meehan, 2005, p. 64).

The Fox network lead to the creation of Fox News in 1996. Fox News was intended as a competitor to Time Warner’s CNN, which meant that Time Warner was unwilling to offer Fox
News to its subscribers in New York City. Murdoch responded by running articles in *The New York Post* and ads in *The New York Times*. Republican Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Republican Governor George Pataki spoke out against Time Warner’s actions, and with the pressure on, Time Warner added Fox News. Not incidentally, Murdoch had contributed financially to the Republican Party, supported both Giuliani and Pataki in his *New York Post*, and the head of Fox News had previously been a Republican strategist and served as a consultant to the mayor (Meehan, 2005, p. 66).

The control that Murdoch has maintained over News Corp. is such that at Fox News, “media owners can shape the content, form, and delivery of news, public opinion, and popular culture” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 80). Fox News has a clear neoconservative political view and has been criticized for being biased. For instance, leading up the Iraq War, Fox News’ support of the Bush administration extended to “sometimes disregarding the facts in favor of official interpretations” (Meehan, 2005, p. 67). In another case, News Corp.’s interests lead to outright censorship of news: investigative reporters in Fox’s Tampa Bay affiliate found that supermarkets were selling milk that, despite claims to the contrary, actually contained a synthetic growth hormone developed by Monsanto. When Monsanto found out about the story, it reached out to Fox’s Roger Ailes who shut the story down. After months of dragging out “revisions” on the story and even offering to pay the reporters to go away and keep quiet, the reporters were fired (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 182).

All the evidence has demonstrated that through Rupert Murdoch, News Corp. has a distinct position in the realm of conservative politics. News Corp. spends a significant amount on lobbying expenditures, with $2,915,000 going to lobbying efforts in 2013 (“Lobbying Spending Database,” 2014). Outside of its political connections, though, News Corp. has a number of
corporate connections through its board of directors interlocks, which for 2008 included groups like Goldman Sachs, Brookings Institution, American Express, Council on Foreign Relations, and many others (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 82-83). Of particular note for the purpose of this thesis, though, are the Brookings Institute, The Council on Foreign Relations, the Atlantic Council\(^5\), the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board, and the U.S. Department of Justice ("Twenty-First Century Fox Interlocks,” 2014). These connections, though only a few of many, serve to further underscore how the media industry maintains close relationships with the policy makers in Washington, including in the realm of foreign policy.

News Corp.’s structure may be similar to the other media conglomerates, by both producing and distributing its content, with similar interlocking boards and how it coordinates products across its ventures, but the obvious political bent to News Corp. makes it unique. It also makes Fox News a particularly interesting outlet for this thesis, as the coverage will certainly be influenced by Fox News’ unabashed conservatism and partisanship.

4.1.4 Time Warner

Time Warner’s acquisition of AOL in 2001 merged two of the largest telecommunication companies at the time into a single entity, AOL Time Warner, in a deal worth $106 billion (Meehan, 2005, p. 69). Though consumer advocates, media access advocates and competing firms had lobbied the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission not to approve the deal, the merger was approved a year and one day after AOL and Time Warner had announced it (Bettig & Hall, 2012, pp. 45-46).

\(^5\) The Atlantic Council is a nonprofit think tank focusing on international affairs. It is independent of the U.S. government and NATO.
The combination of AOL and Time Warner appeared to be the definition of synergy. Time Warner possessed media content accumulated from its earlier merger between Time, Inc., magazine publisher whose library contained titles such as *Time, Sports Illustrated,* and *People,* and Warner Brothers, whose holdings encompassed film, music, and television. AOL would provide the method by which the content got to consumers (Bagdikian, 2004, pp. 30-31).

However, the merger soon turned out not to be the deal that Time Warner had planned. Not only did the merger itself involve an accumulation of debt, but as the Securities and Exchange Commission would reveal, AOL had misrepresented its revenues and profits going into the deal (Meehan, 2005, p. 70). The value of AOL-Time Warner dropped down to $61 billion – far from the $106 billion purchase price of the deal that had brought the two together (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 46).

At the time of the deal, Time Warner’s holdings included AOL, cable, film entertainment, television networks, music, publishing, telecommunications, theme parks, licensing, and retail outlets (Meehan, 2005, pp. 71-72). When Time Warner’s value began to decline after merging with AOL, though, Time Warner began to sell off assets to deal with its debt. Time Warner sold Comedy Central to Viacom, divested its stake in DIRECTV, sold the Warner Music Group, and finally spun off its Time Warner Cable in 2009 (Bettig & Hall, 2012, pp. 47-48). Today, Time Warner is one of the world’s largest entertainment conglomerates, with its 2011 revenue at $29 billion. Time Warner’s current holdings include one television station, the Warner Brothers film and television entities, 22 magazines, DC Comics, and television networks such as HBO, Cinemax, and CNN (“Who Owns the Media,” 2014).

Though ultimately a disastrous business decision for Time Warner, the AOL-Time Warner merger shows how for big business, positive government relations can pay off in a big
way. Both Time Warner and AOL made huge investments in their lobbying team leading up to the merger, anticipating anti-trust concerns. This included recruiting people like Ivan Schlager, who had served as the minority counsel for the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, and Louis Dupart, who had previously been the staff director of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s antitrust subcommittee (Mintz & Schwartz, 2000). In 2000, AOL and Time Warner spent a combined $3.8 million lobbying Congress and the executive branch about the merger. That number excludes whatever amount AOL and Time Warner spent lobbying the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, as those agencies do not require financial reporting in their lobbying disclosure rules (“AOL and Time Warner,” 2000). However much additional those efforts were, it clearly paid off as the deal ultimately went through. As further testimony to how much value is placed on lobbying, Time Warner continued to involve itself heavily in the lobbying process even while struggling to come back from its AOL merger. Between 1989 and 2012, Time Warner was one of the largest political donors, donating $20 million to candidates with 72 percent going to Democrats (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 51).

Besides its efforts with lobbying and campaign contributions, Time Warner is connected to other power elite through its board of directors, through which Time Warner shares close ties with a number of other industries. Organizations of particular note among the many connections include the Council on Foreign Relations, the Atlantic Council, the Boeing Company, RAND Corporation\(^6\), the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the United States Department of Justice, and the United States Department of Commerce (“Time Warner Inc. Interlocks,” 2014).

\(^6\) The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit global policy think tank that offers research and analysis to the U.S. armed forces.
These highlighted interlocks show how Time Warner’s relationships extend into government, defense and security, and foreign policy.

4.1.5 Viacom/CBS


Nearly thirty years later after having been sold off from CBS, Viacom acquired CBS in a $37.3 billion merger in 1999 (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 17). This brought CBS into Viacom’s already substantial holdings: cable networks; television networks; program production and syndication; Infinity radio networks; outdoor advertising; Blockbuster video; and other entertainment products such as films, books, movie theaters, music, five theme parks and one themed attraction (Meehan, 2005, p. 75). By 2005, though, Viacom’s CEO Sumner Redstone was ready to spin off CBS in an attempt to improve Viacom’s lagging stock value. Viacom would retain the cable networks and Paramount films, while CBS would keep the broadcast networks and stations, Paramount television, theme parks, outdoor advertising, and Simon & Schuster publishing (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 24).

The Viacom-CBS merger again illustrates how lobbying and campaign contributions allow corporations to seek special treatment from government agencies. In 1998, CBS spent $1,940,000 in lobbying expenditures, while Viacom spent $1,000,000 (“TV, Movies, and Music,” 2014). The merger itself would not have been possible without the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which lifted ownership limits and also showed that heavy industry lobbying could pay off in big ways for media conglomerates (Wexler, 2000). As a
further example of the close relationships between corporations and government, at one point CBS employed as a lobbyist Anthony Podesta, a major Democratic Party fundraiser, campaign strategist, and brother to Bill Clinton’s chief of staff (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 209).

Despite their separation, both companies remained closely connected and under the larger National Amusements Holdings umbrella. Just as with the other conglomerates, the board of directors for Viacom and CBS shows a number of connections with other corporations, law firms, financial firms, government, education, and charities. Of particular note, however, are the connections to such entities as Northrup Grumman, the Council on Foreign Relations, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (“CBS Corporation Interlocks,” 2014). There are many more interlocks for CBS, but those highlighted show how CBS has multiple connections to the worlds of politics, defense, and foreign policy.

### 4.1.6 PBS

PBS has its roots in the National Educational Television (NET) network founded in 1952. NET relied mostly on funding from the Ford Foundation and served as a distributer for educational programs produced by local television stations. NET would begin to produce its own programs in the mid-1950s and, by the 1960s, to import content from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). When the Ford Foundation began to withdraw funding from NET in 1966, the U.S. government stepped in to save public television by creating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) (Blackwell, 2010, p.10).

The rationale for creating the CPB was that public broadcasting served as “a great national, ‘public’ resource and democratic instrument that affirms diversity and revives civic life” (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 302). The CPB was created to provide federal funds for
public television and radio stations. Public Broadcast Service, or PBS, was formed in 1972 and connected public television stations across the country so that they could share programs and services (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 302). Public television is decentralized, consisting of local stations owned and operated by licensees. The stations operations are funded by the CPB. PBS, funded by fees paid by member licensees and CPB grants, “operates a satellite-system to distribute programs to local stations” (U.S Government Accountability Office, 2007, para. 2). Under the umbrella of PBS, local television stations can air the same branded programs such as Sesame Street and Nova. These programs are funded and produced by PBS member stations and then offered to PBS for distribution to other member stations (Blackwell, 2010, p. 10).

Publicly funded television has traditionally been the destination for educational, cultural and public affairs programming. The federally funded aspect of PBS was intended to let it provide such programming in a commercial-free environment. However, when creating the legislation for a new system of public broadcasting, Congress chose to have public broadcasting be subjected to the annual budgeting and appropriation process (Avery, 2007). This means that without guaranteed financial support, public broadcasting has had to rely on other sources of funding including viewer donations, licensees memberships, state and local governments, and businesses (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). Because PBS generates funding from multiple sources, whether or not PBS should receive federal funds is an issue that has come up occasionally.

In the early 1990s, Republicans targeted PBS as an example of wasteful government spending. Newt Gingrich would launch a “zero fund” campaign in 1995 to completely pull federal funding from the CPB (Sherman, 2005). Nearly twenty years later, in 2012, presidential hopeful Mitt Romney would make a comment about cutting funding for Big Bird during a
debate, fueling a flurry of attention to how much federal funding CPB receives (Lee, 2012). The vulnerability of government funding to political will is a pressing issue for public television. When public television becomes reliant on relationships with corporations to support an increasing number of its programs and operations because government funding is not enough, the possibility of commercial influences creeping into programming becomes much more likely.

Following the 1995 campaign that nearly cut all the federal funding for public broadcasting, PBS began to focus on commercial efforts to drive up revenue. Some of the alliances PBS formed in the wake of the “zero fund” campaign included Warner Home Video marketing PBS programming under its PBS Home Video label; a deal with Warner Bros. for companion recordings to PBS programs; co-producing a program with Disney/ABC Television international; and striking a deal with Microsoft to allow it to use PBS materials on Microsoft’s WebTV Internet service (McGraw, 1998). PBS’s corporate sponsors have included such companies as ExxonMobil, who paid more than $300 million to fund the Masterpiece Theatre over the course of 33 years, Johnson & Johnson, Wal-Mart, Dannon Yogurt and Lipton Tea (“PBS Gets Corporate Sponsors,” 2004).

Despite the standards that PBS has for funding practice, which state that “public television must protect its journalist integrity and it must reinforce the accurate that it is a free and independent institution” and that “its noncommercial character must be preserved,” the creeping corporate influence has come at a cost to some of the programming on PBS (“Editorial and Funding Standards,” 2014). The political aspect of PBS funding is also worth noting again here: the CPB board is a fifteen-member board of presidential appointees, subjecting it to political instability as administrations change (Avery, 2007). A conservative stocked CPB board
in the early 2000s caused PBS to “quietly let major producers know it wanted proposals for programs that would add conservative balance to the schedule” (Sherman, 2005, para. 4).

An example of special interests making their way into PBS programming was discovered by journalists at Pando in 2014. They found that in 2011, a video series called “Teaching Channel Presents” began on PBS. This series is designed to provide information and professional development around the Common Core State Standards. The programming never mentioned that the primary backer for the series is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has spent between $200 million and $2.3 billion to push the Common Core State Standards in schools and in politics. Microsoft has commercial interests in promoting the Common Core State Standards: it has joined with education publisher and technology firm Pearson to create digital education technologies and applications. The Gates Foundation has donated $300,000 in grants to the PBS affiliate station responsible for the videos in the series as well as contributed grants to other PBS television productions relating to education, and a $499,997 grant directly to PBS to “create digital learning objects that enhance middle school mathematics achievement” (Mott & Sirota, 2014).

Two more instances of special interests influencing public television content came at the hands of the Koch brothers. David Koch is a billionaire industrialist who co-owns Koch Industries, an energy and chemical conglomerate, with his brother Charles Koch. The Koch brothers are known for their conservative politics and willingness to extend significant financial support to organizations that share their political views and will help move the country to the right (Meyer, 2013, para. 2). David Koch has contributed $23 million to public broadcasting over the years, becoming a trustee of Boston’s public broadcasting operation WGJB in 1997 and joining the board of New York’s public television outlet WNET in 2006 (Meyer, 2013, para. 2).
In 2012, Academy award winning filmmaker Alex Gibney completed a documentary that looked at economic inequality and the “one-percent” in America. The documentary took a look at the Koch brothers, subjecting their politics and business to scrutiny. PBS had agreed to air the documentary, but began to grow concerned over the portrayal of the Koch brothers in the film. This led to WNET president Neal Shapiro calling David Koch, offering him the opportunity to view the film ahead of time and prepare a written statement that would be aired immediately following the program. At that time, right before the film was set to air, it was rumored that Koch had been planning on giving a seven-figure donation. Shapiro denied the potential gift as motivation for his call (Meyer, 2013, para.13). The film was ultimately allowed to air unedited, but aired a statement from Koch Industries, unedited, immediately after the film. Furthermore, Charles Schumer, the Democratic senator from New York, had also taken issue with his portrayal in the film. WNET also allowed Schumer to have a rebuttal aired following the program (Meyer, 2013, para.15-16). Even with the attempt to mollify Koch Industries, David Koch did not follow through with any donation. With this incident freshly in mind, another planned film called Citizen Koch that looked at the Citizens United ruling and mentioned the Koch brothers multiple times as huge conservative donors was ultimately pulled by PBS (Meyer, 2013).

Finally, yet another example of interests influencing programming came in 2014, when PBS accepting funding from billionaire natural gas trader John D. Arnold. The funding was for a NewsHour program on pensions in California and mentioned a ballot initiative to roll back public employee pensions. Arnold was partially funding the initiative campaign. Once the conflict of interest was exposed, PBS ended up returning the $3.5 million grant (Hiltzek, 2014). That PBS even accepted the funding to begin with, though, is problematic.
What sets public television apart from commercial offerings is its separation from special interests. When public television leans more on corporate funding – according to the CPB, most revenue to both public and radio television (about 59 percent) comes from donations from individuals, corporate underwriters and private grants – public television becomes increasingly vulnerable to the same corporate and political influences as commercial offerings (Lee, 2012, para. 9). This is especially troublesome considering that the rationale for providing public television is to have an alternative media whose entire purpose is to serve the U.S. public – to educate, to inform, to provide a space for debate that allows for diverse voices and ideas to be expressed.

4.2 Think Tanks, Sources, and the Media-Military-Industrial Complex

In 1999, just prior to the first missiles striking Yugoslavia, a Fox News anchor covering the story misspoke: “Let’s bring in our Pentagon spokesman – excuse me, our Pentagon correspondent” (Solomon, 2005, p. 125). Though unintentional, the slipup illustrates how close military analysts are to the defense background they often come from.

A number of military analysts on television news outlets are retired military. While these military analysts certainly have valuable insight from their experiences, having retired military officers become network military analysts illustrates how official sources continue to be seen as the appropriate authorities by news outlets. It also adds a new level to the relationship between the military and the media conglomerates when former NATO supreme commander Wesley Clark and Major General Don Shepperd are employed by Time Warner to explain military strategy (Solomon, 2005, p. 126).

Some of these military analysts are also employed as defense consultants even while regularly appearing and commenting on television news channels. While these military analysts
might be off the direct Department of Defense payroll, they still profit from continued conflict and defense spending. For example, Fox News analyst Timur J. Eads worked in a lobbying capacity for the military contractor Blackbird Technologies (Farestta, 2008); CBS analyst Jeffrey McCausland served as the director of national security affairs for the D.C. lobby firm Buchanan Ingersoll and Rooney (Farestta, 2008); and CNN national security analyst Frances Townsend is a senior vice president at MacAndrews & Forbes, an investment company that owns military vehicle manufacturer AM General (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013).

A 2008 report from The New York Times found that Pentagon strategy called for military analysts to be “wooed in hundreds of private briefings with senior military leaders, including officials with significant influence over contracting and budget matters” (Barstow, 2008). As a result, The New York Times stated that “members of this group have echoed administration talking points, sometimes even when they suspected the information was false or inflated. Some analysts acknowledge they suppressed doubts because they feared jeopardizing their access” (Barstow, 2008). Though the 2008 report explained that military analysts with industry ties were part of a “Pentagon information apparatus” to generate favorable war coverage during the Bush administration, the concerns about industry ties continues to hold true (Barstow, 2008).

A more recent study on coverage of the conflict in Syria found that a number of defense experts with backgrounds in the military and intelligence appeared on news shows and weighed in on the debate without disclosing their industry ties (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013). The study found that these commentators were largely supportive of military action, with many framing the debate as part of national security (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013). Experts from think tanks with industry ties also weighed in on the debate. Their industry ties were not disclosed, and included the Brookings Institution, which receives millions in funding from the
defense industry, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which has “individual connections to the defense industry through its advisors and trustees, including CSIS Senior Advisor Margaret Sidney Ashworth, Corporate Vice President for Government Relations at Northrop Grumman, and CSIS Advisor Thomas Culligan, Senior Vice President at Raytheon” (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013).

As noted previously, think tanks are among the connections these media conglomerates have through their interlocking boards of directors. These think tanks are supported by a number of other industries, and for the think tanks focusing on national security issues, a large part of their funding will come from the defense industry. This means that both media and defense industries can be interlocked through the think tanks producing the experts that appear on television news. For instance, the Atlantic Council has received funding from Raytheon, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop (Armstrong, Conner & Yax, 2013). The Atlantic Council also receives funding from News Corp, and Frederick Kempe of the News Corp-owned Wall Street Journal sits on its board (Carp, 2013). Comcast and General Electric joined the likes of Boeing and Lockheed in funding the Center for American Progress in 2011 (Silverstein, 2013). The Brookings Institution interlocks with the Walt Disney Company, Viacom, Time Warner (through CNN) and News Corp (“Brookings Institution,” 2013). Both the Atlantic Council and the Brookings Institution were think tanks whose experts appeared on television news shows to discuss the Syria conflict, supporting military action and not disclosing their industry ties (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013).

While the source of funding does not mean that the think tanks experts are necessarily biased, choosing to fund particular types of think tanks allows the donating corporations to encourage and reward particular types of findings. In terms of the think tanks that handle defense
issues, these types of connections underscore the interlocks that exist between the media industry, defense industry and national security community.

The inclusion of the defense industry into the news-making process gives it significant influence over the content, especially when the relationships between the analysts and their industry ties are not transparent. The conflict of interest has a direct impact on the quality of public discourse. If those who are informing the viewers about war-related technology are profiting from it, where is the incentive to be truly critical? The relationship that sources have to the defense industry is a connection that will be scrutinized in next two chapters on the coverage.

These connections that draw the defense industry and media companies together lead to the media companies themselves becoming interconnected. The same types of political and economic pressures extend to all of the media conglomerates. The similarities in outside influences means that the coverage itself can be quite similar – if media companies share connections to the same types of think tanks, industries, and political institutions, then it would not be unexpected for the coverage to reflect the same types of stories. News outlets might tailor their perspective to their audience (e.g., Fox News to its conservative views and MSNBC to its liberal viewers), but what becomes a story is likely to be the same across outlets, and the types of sources used across outlets should likely fall within similar ranges of acceptable. For instance, it is expected that none of the cable news outlets will address the financial, defense-spending aspect of the drone program – or if they do, they will not bring it up in a negative light. To do so could damage the relationships their parent companies have established with the defense industry.

Though broadcast news channels may be subject to some of the same types of pressures due to their relationships with the same media conglomerates that own the cable news networks,
they at least have an obligation to the public to serve as a source of news and will hopefully, at
least some of the time, overcome those influences to provide stories that cable news will not.
PBS, by being a public service, should always provide those types of stories without pressure
from commercial or political interests. However, as outlined earlier in this chapter, the increased
reliance on corporate funding shows that PBS is not immune to the pressures of outside
influences that provide financial backing. Thus, when it comes to coverage of the drone program,
there may not be nearly as significant of a difference as expected.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE COVERAGE: 2002-2008

This chapter will look at transcripts of news programs from 2002-2008 on cable news networks CNN, MSNBC and Fox News as well as the broadcast news networks ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS. Using the database LexisNexis and the search terms “CIA” and “drones,” the coverage returned will be analyzed for discussion of the legal or ethical implications of the drone program. The coverage is divided into two time frames, 2002-2008 and 2009-2013, in order to differentiate between coverage during different presidential administrations as the changing political atmosphere may have played a role in coverage.

News stories that discussed the legal or ethical implications of the drone program during this time period were few and far between. When drones were discussed by news outlets, the discussion usually revolved around explaining drones as a new military technology or mentioning drones only in passing as part of a grander military strategy. However, there were some stories during this time on both broadcast and cable news sources that discussed the CIA drone program more critically.

The coverage during this time will be broken down by cable news and broadcast news, and discussed thematically in terms of discussion of legality and discussion of ethics and trace chronologically to best illustrate the year by year variations. Some stories covered both legal and ethical issues: for those stories, the part discussing legality will be covered in the legal section, and the part containing ethics will be covered in the ethical section. After the coverage has been discussed thematically, sources will be covered for that particular type (cable or broadcast). The specific breakdown for the number of stories per network and year can be found in Appendix A. The list of sources, broken down by type and by year, can be found in Appendix C.
5.1 Cable News Coverage from 2002-2008

5.1.1 Cable News Coverage: Legal Issues

In February 2002, the CIA launched its first airstrike in Afghanistan, resulting in the deaths of three civilians. This was both the first time that a Hellfire missile had been launched from a drone and the first time the CIA had openly expanded its authority into what had traditionally been the domain of the military. For such a momentous moment in national security, the issue received surprisingly little coverage. Only CNN ran stories immediately in the aftermath of the drone strike that dealt explicitly with questioning the relationship between the CIA and the military for this program.

This initial burst of coverage involved interviews with official sources: Retired General Wesley Clark, former NATO Supreme Commander; Representative Jane Harman (D-CA); and Robert Bauer, former CIA operative were all interviewed by CNN host Wolf Blitzer about the use of drones by the CIA. Blitzer was clearly interested in establishing the legality of the CIA’s actions and asked both guests whether the CIA had the ability to authorize drone strikes. In the February 7, 2002, interview with General Clark, Blitzer flat-out asked “whether the CIA can do certain things in this kind of the military confrontation that the regular rank-and-file can’t do” (Blitzer, McIntyre & Wallace, 2002). Clark responded in the affirmative, further adding, “they [the CIA] could have had a presidential order, called a finding, that would have enabled them to strike and use lethal force in executing a mission” (Blitzer, McIntyre & Wallace, 2002). From this initial interview, the legality question appeared to have been answered in the form of the presidential finding. Whether or not such a presidential order actually existed, however, was not explicitly stated or confirmed in the interview.
A few days later on February 11, 2002, Blitzer returned to the topic with guests Jane Harman and Robert Bauer. Blitzer, again concerned with recognizing the lines between the military and CIA, asked his guests, “isn’t it the military who’s supposed to be firing missiles, not the intelligence community?” (Blitzer, McIntrye & Savidge, 2002). Though Baer acknowledged that may traditionally be the case, he added, “this is an exceptional circumstance where the CIA has to integrate intelligence to hit a target, a risky target like this. It has to be operated very quickly and without any delay at all” (Blitzer, McIntrye & Savidge, 2002). Harman took a slightly different approach, distinguishing that she thought the CIA was not acting in a military capacity: “I wouldn't call it a military actor. It's providing intelligence necessary for the military to conduct a surgical operation, hopefully to minimize civilian casualties because these things are very well targeted” (Blitzer, McIntrye & Savidge, 2002).

These two early sets of interviews brought up the looming question in the aftermath of the first CIA drone strikes – that is, whether the CIA had the authority to use traditional military power in this way. However, the answers provided came from sources with relationships to the U.S. intelligence community. Their answers supported the actions as necessary and brushed away the questions of legality and concerns about the blurring line between military and CIA. Contextualized within the early stages of the U.S. War in Afghanistan and the lead up to the 2003 Iraq War, it becomes less surprising that once a satisfactory answer was received that our intelligence community was legally pursuing terrorists, the question was not further pursued.

In November 2002, a CIA drone strike targeting a vehicle convoy believed to be carrying a top al-Qaeda official resulted in the deaths of five other men, including an American citizen suspected to be affiliated with al-Qaeda. This drone strike occurred in Yemen, outside of the established war zone of Afghanistan. With this drone strike, the CIA established that the
definition of the war zone in the War on Terror would be a far broader concept than traditionally held. The issue was further complicated by the death of an American citizen. Though the legality of the program would seem like an angle of the story that should receive significant coverage, in reality, the legality question received very limited coverage.

CNN invited Jim Walsh, “an expert on international security and terrorist issues” at Harvard, on to discuss the CIA’s drone use. The relationship between the CIA and the military was again discussed. Walsh described that the CIA was responsible for overseeing the operation, adding that this marked a turning point in which the CIA and military were expanding into an area traditionally overseen by law enforcement. Walsh further elaborated on the implications of the transition, stating, “what we have here is an American citizen has been killed by the CIA in a friendly country and without a trial. That marks a new step for American policy. In the past, we’ve criticized other countries that have targeted individuals and some would argue that it puts us on a slippery slope down the path of assassination” (Lin, 2002). When asked whether the United States was now engaging in targeted killing, Walsh responded, “this certainly appears to be that. It’s hard to describe it in any other way. They were not in a battlefield” (Lin, 2002).

The interview with Walsh accomplished two things. First, it provided a critical view of what the CIA was now doing from the perspective of a source not involved in the national security apparatus of the U.S. government. Second, it directly suggested that the United States was operating a targeted killing program and drew a comparison to assassination. Assassination was banned decades ago in the United States, with President Gerald Ford issuing an executive order banning “political assassinations” during peacetime – an executive order that future presidents reaffirmed and that continues to apply (Friedman, 2012). Clarifying where the drone program falls regarding assassination is a key component of establishing the legality of the drone
Targeted killing is only legal so long as it can be distinguished from an assassination: that it is not politically motivated and occurs during wartime. This also ties into the troublesome broad reach of the War on Terror: if the United States has the authority to go after targets in every corner of the world, deeming them “security” threats rather than “political” (although a case could be made that threats could very well often be both), where is the line truly drawn with the distinction between targeted killings and assassinations?

CNN followed up the Walsh interview with two more stories on the subject. The first featured guest was James Woolsey, former CIA director. CNN host Blitzer presented the legal argument for the actions of the United States: “it was legal, U.S. officials said; because the president had signed an intelligence finding last fall that allowed the CIA to engage in legal, covert operations against al-Qaeda. In other words, there seemed to be loopholes in the ban on assassinations” (Blitzer & Morton, 2002). Disregarding the assassination comparison, Woolsey claimed the CIA’s actions were indeed made legal by the president authorizing covert action by signing “a presidential finding with legal action” (Blitzer & Morton, 2002). This did not answer whether the targeted killings were truly distinct from the ban on assassinations. A “presidential finding” does not clarify what does and does not constitute assassination, but instead gives the impression that current law on assassinations is irrelevant because legality for this type of killing can be achieved through permission from the president.

The second and last story that CNN aired in 2002 focusing on the legality of the drone strikes involved an interview with retired Major General Don Sheppered of the U.S. Air Force. Sheppered was also a CNN military analyst at the time. Sheppered defended the quality of the intelligence used to make the decisions for a drone strike and emphatically laid out once more the argument that these actions did not constitute assassination: “You know there is a prohibition
against assassinations. This is not an assassination. There was an intelligence finding by the president that allowed us to go after identified suspects. This is not a case of us just going out looking for anybody and shooting them wherever they are. We're going after known people in known locations. That makes it a lot different from an assassination” (Costello, 2002).

Though the interview with Walsh had provided a more critical basis for the following interviews, seeming to have led into the questions on whether the CIA’s program constituted assassination, the follow-ups on the topic with Woolsey and Sheppered strongly supported the government’s legal actions. CNN did not return to the topic again for 2002.

The 2002 drone strikes demonstrated the CIA’s willingness to expand into the realm of the military and its willingness to stretch the definition of the war zone. And yet, Fox News provided only one critical story on the legality of the CIA’s November 2002 actions in Yemen. The feature, which aired on December 5, 2002, had Fox News correspondent Catherina Herridge explaining that “there are no exceptions for Americans,” and that “this option exists only – and this is important – when others, such as military strikes or law enforcement efforts – aren’t practical” (Asman & Herridge, 2002). Fox News eliminated the need for discussion of whether an American citizen with ties to terrorist groups needs to have any special considerations (“no exceptions”) or if drone strikes were really used as a last resort. Herridge also cited National Security Officials who said “the killing of an American in this way was legal and raised no constitutional questions” (Asman & Herridge, 2002). MSNBC did not critically discuss the legal implications of the story at all.

Both instances of the CIA’s drone strikes in 2002 likely had their coverage influenced by the overall climate at the time – post 9/11, questioning the tactics of the national security officials who were going after the terrorists who had made the United States their target so
recently and to such national devastation did not fit into the nation’s narrative as set by the Bush Administration at the time. Numerous studies have been done on the lack of critical coverage by the media in the early stages of the War in Afghanistan and 2003 War in Iraq, and the same nationalist climate that influenced other war coverage during this time likely permeated the CIA drone program’s coverage as well (Kumar, 2006; Lewandowsky et al, 2005; Miller, 2004). Fox News has been heavily implicated in the propagating the administration’s messages during this time, something which may explain why Fox News only aired a single story on the topic and why that particular story shut down discussion on the issue by citing national security officials that the target killings “raised no constitution questions” (Asman & Herridge, 2002).

Furthermore, despite the lack of secrecy surrounding the program in later years, it may have been a slightly better kept secret as the CIA first began the program. This may also very well explain why there was no significant coverage discussing the legality of the program until 2005.

As for MSNBC and its lack of critical coverage throughout the early 2000s, this was also a time when parent company General Electric was profiting from a government that was upping its defense spending in anticipation of military involvement. Interestingly, rather than coverage with favorable explanations of the CIA’s targeted killings, MSNBC had no coverage at all. Considering that Fox News only had one story, though, MSNBC’s lack of coverage does not stand out as unique. There would not be any further coverage on the legal issues of the program by any network for 2003 and 2004.

CNN returned to the topic in 2005 as a segment on CNN’s Live Saturday. Pentagon Military Correspondent Kathleen Koch reaffirmed the CIA’s authority to run the drone program, stating, “the CIA asserts the right to attack top al Qaeda leaders in the world where they can find one” (Foreman et. al., 2005). Though the CIA had implied this belief through its actions in
Yemen in 2002, this was the first time on cable news that it had been so explicitly laid out. The CIA’s assertion that it has the right to attack al Qaeda leaders anywhere in the world is a bold one - it goes beyond the traditional limitation of war to the battlefield and has strong implications for future military action (Wood, 2013). If the CIA is able to claim that it may act outside the scope of international law by attacking targets regardless of location outside of the combat zone in the interests of self-defense and national security, that gives a great deal of power to what is traditionally a secretive and covert arm of the executive branch. This assertion went unchallenged on the program.

Following the *Live Saturday* program, CNN ran two more stories in 2005 on the legality of the program. Both were interviews between CNN host Wolf Blitzer and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. In the first interview in May 2005, Blitzer asked Hadley point-blank if the United States had the authority from the Pakistan government to fly drones over Pakistan and to launch missiles at targets. Hadley dodged the question, saying, “the relationships we have are very sensitive.” Then, when asked if the president had signed documents authorizing targeted killings of terrorists, Hadley responded, “we are in a wartime situation, and our military forces are taking action against the enemy. Of course” (Blitzer & McLaughlin, 2005). Finally, an explicit answer had appeared as to whether the oft-referenced presidential findings providing the legality for the CIA’s targeted killings existed. Though, this answer did not detail what exactly the presidential findings entailed, nor did it truly answer if the program was legal. However, Hadley’s answer was accepted and Blitzer did not question him further. Apparently the National Security Advisor’s vague admittance of a presidential finding was a sufficient response as to where the CIA got the authority to carry out its program.
When Hadley later returned to CNN in December 2005 to discuss the issue again with Blitzer, the amount the administration was willing to admit about the program had apparently shrunk. Once again, Blitzer asked Hadley if presidential authorization was required when using Predator drones and Hellfire missiles to assassinate terrorist targets. This time, Hadley told Blitzer, “you’re going into areas we do not talk about publicly, for obvious reasons” (Blitzer, Robinson et. al., 2005). Hadley also took the opportunity to clarify that these targeted killings did not constitute assassinations: “This is not law enforcement, this is not assassination. This is going against the leadership of an organization that has declared war on the United States” (Blitzer, Robinson et. al., 2005).

While Hadley had in his first interview admitted that there was a presidential sign-off on targeted killings, between his first and second interviews, the Bush Administration had apparently rethought publicly discussing such a detail. Blitzer did not press the issue.

The following year in 2006, a U.S. drone strike resulted in civilian deaths. Following these deaths, MSNBC began to question the workings of the chain of command that led to the decisions to fire missiles from drones. The chain of command, as explained by MSNBC, involved the CIA director giving the command, and if not available, the deputy or assistant director five levels down could approve the strike. According to comments from former CIA director James Woolsey, the rapid response time was necessary. MSNBC reporter Jim Miklaszewski was not impressed with the range of authority levels with the power to approve the strike, stating “that things could go to terribly wrong and innocent civilians are killed” (Daniels, Kosinsko et. al., 2006). While only a brief segment, this marked the start of a type of questioning about the chain of command and concerns about civilian deaths to which MSNBC would later return, though not until 2009. The chain of command brings up questions about the concentration
of executive power and transparency. If the decisions to make targeted killings are cloaked entirely in CIA secrecy and made completely in the Oval Office, then there is little accountability and no transparency at all.

These stories show that cable news coverage was sparse for the early years of the CIA’s drone program. While a few legal questions were brought up, none of the news outlets developed the legal angle further. This is not because there was a lack of knowledge about drones: drone technology was openly talked about. The drone program itself was a poorly kept secret – though coverage was sparse, networks having guests such as Stephen Hadley and the fact that there were any news stories at all that centered on the CIA drone program show that the program was known about starting from the first strike in 2002. Even so, the program went without official acknowledgement, a factor that may have impacted coverage as cable news anchors did not press officials for more answers to the questions they had tentatively brought up in their coverage. As the sources showed for this time frame, official sources were far and away the preferred sources for questions on the legality of the program, and if these sources were unwilling to comment on a national security issue, the anchors seemed to be okay with dropping the issue and moving on.

While transcripts were used for this analysis rather than video clips, the number of lines dedicated to discussing the legal issues indicate that the stories made up only a few minutes of a larger news show. The brief time frame for these stories would certainly also make it difficult for reporters to delve too deeply into issues: but only Wolf Blitzer from CNN continued lines of questioning across multiple shows, with two shows in 2002 and two in 2005 featuring a continued theme of questions about the legality of the CIA’s drone program. However, as Blitzer’s 2005 interviews with Stephen Hadley showed, despite his questions, Blitzer was willing to move on from unsatisfactory answers to specific questions.
5.1.2 Cable News Coverage: Ethical Issues

By 2005, the United States had started using drones to go after targets in Pakistan. This was controversial because the Pakistan government had not publicly supported the U.S. drone strikes, but rather had made it clear that they did not appreciate the invasion of their sovereign airspace in the border area near Afghanistan. Despite this, Pakistan had acknowledged behind the scenes that the U.S. strikes were actually beneficial to both sides, as the Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives in the region were no friend to the Pakistan government, but had yet to make this known publicly in 2005 (Miller & Woodward, 2013). The conversation around drones during this time revolved largely around their use in Pakistan, but very little coverage dealt with the impact of the image of the U.S. abroad because of its use of drones in Pakistan or the cost to civilian life and property from drone use. Outside of “collateral damage,” no other ethical considerations were discussed.

A story on CNN’s Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer in 2006 briefly mentioned the idea of “collateral damage.” Blitzer’s guests for the segment of his show dealing with drone strikes were two members of the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, Senator Trent Lott, a Republican senator from Mississippi, and Senator Evan Bayh, a Democrat senator from Indiana. When Blitzer asked about the intelligence threshold to justify approving a targeted killing, Bayh responded, “I just got back from that part of the world, Wolf. The standard of proof before an operation like that is extraordinarily high. You don’t do something like that without pretty good evidence” (Blitzer, Bergen et. al, 2006). A later guest in that same show was James Risen from The New York Times. When Blitzer asked Risen about whether he agreed with the argument that former intelligence officials had put forth that U.S. drone strike decisions were made based on good intelligence, Risen said, “I think that’s true.” Risen then went on to suggest that “a lot of
the Pakistani protests are really for internal consumption,” as a way for the Pakistani government to show their people that they are shocked by the actions of the United States while secretly working with the United States to target terrorists, dismissing the protests as political posturing (Blitzer, Bergen et. al, 2006). The segment gave the impression that the decisions to carry out targeted killings were based on very good intelligence, and the sentiment that Senator Bayh expressed regarding civilian casualties was, “it's a regrettable situation, but what else are we supposed to do? It's like the wild, wild west out there.” The only protests mentioned were the Pakistani government’s public reaction to the drone strikes, not those happening in the streets by the Pakistani people (Blitzer, Bergen et. al, 2006).

The discussion of “collateral damage” came up again later the next day on CNN, this time on The Situation Room with guests John McLaughlin, CNN National Security Advisor, and William Cohen, CNN World Affairs Analyst. McLaughlin stated that “the bar is very high for the intelligence” used by the United States before approving a targeted killing, and that collateral damage is carefully weighed in the decision. Cohen expanded on the point a bit further, saying that “when you talk about collateral damage, you are killing innocent people in the process. So, the president of the United States has to be apprised of what those consequences are and then make a decision that it's worth the risk and worth the embitterment and the bitterness that will follow that, if you kill innocent people who are not engaged in a war against you” (Blitzer, Bash et. al., 2006). Both segments, especially considering they aired within a day of each other, gave the impression that the decisions to launch drones were based on very good intelligence, and though collateral damage was regrettable, that these decisions were only made when the threat justified the risk of civilian deaths. The official sources used throughout lent credibility to the
claim of the process being a very careful one, with some unfortunate consequences occasionally occurring.

Though official sources lent credibility, they also only provided one view of the civilian casualties. The sources’ relationships with the government mean that they are already predisposed to present the argument that aligns with the official stance on the program. Even their more critical comments in which they acknowledged that innocent people do occasionally die as a result of this program were still supportive of the program’s goals and actions. There were no antiwar voices included to present a different side, or voices that weighed the civilian casualties differently. There were no voices from other areas that could perhaps better weigh in on the ethical considerations of the drone program, or at least add further insight to other aspects: no humanitarian workers, no psychologists to comment on the mental health of the drone pilots, no civil rights activists. The impact of the drone program on civilians extends beyond military considerations, and as such more voices should be included in this discussion.

5.2 Broadcast News Coverage from 2002-2008

5.2.1 Broadcast News Coverage: Legal Issues

There was very little critical coverage of the drone program during this time by broadcast news outlets. While the broadcast news outlets did report stories about the drone program and acknowledge its existence, there were very few instances of the news outlets delving deeper into the legal questions around the CIA drone program. There were only two instances, both on NBC, in which the legality of the program was brought up and questioned.

NBC featured a brief discussion of the authority given to the CIA to launch a drone strike in a segment on NBC Nightly News in 2005. The featured guest, Washington Post reporter and NBC News national security analyst Dana Priest, offered the legal argument for why the CIA can
launch drone strikes. Priest explained that the president had signed a secret presidential finding giving the CIA the authority “to write new guidelines for then they would use armed Predators to kill suspected terrorists. That was approved by the White House and the Justice Department,” and that “this is all meant to give the CIA more flexibility against al-Qaeda” (Seigenthaler, 2005). In short, as Priest summarized, the CIA “has the authority it needs.” The secret presidential finding expanding the authority of the CIA that Priest had brought up was not questioned by the segment’s host, and the claim that the CIA’s actions were legal was left at that.

The next year NBC ran another story regarding the use of drone strikes in Pakistan that touched on the legality of the issue. On January 16, 2006, NBC host Jim Miklaszewski explained that senior U.S. officials had explained that the United States had the authority to use lethal force inside Pakistan because Pakistan’s President Musharraf had “agreed the U.S. could launch air strikes against terrorist targets in Pakistan, and only needed to inform the Pakistani government, not seek its permission” (Daniels, Kosinki et. al., 2006). Miklaszewski further explained that when it came down to “exactly who gives the order to pull the trigger,” that CIA director Porter Gross would give the order, but if Gross was unavailable, the deputy or assistant CIA directors could give the order. Miklaszewski expressed some concern about the chain of command, noting that “things could go terribly wrong” and civilians could be killed (Daniels, Kosinki et. al., 2006). Jim Miklaszewski, as previously noted in the cable news legality section, had also appeared on MSNBC around this time expressing similar concerns about the chain of command. Though he again did not have the opportunity to go further with the issue, at least some critical questions had been brought to the forefront of the issue. Though a different segment, the use of the same reporter provided the same analysis and tone to the news in both instances. In this case, both times Miklaszewski came across as worried about the structure though he was not
outwardly negative about it. Nothing new was reported in his second appearance, making for nearly identical news stories in terms of content and person reporting.

Though the cable news coverage had been sparse, the broadcast news coverage shows even fewer stories. However, it is important to also keep in mind that these broadcast news outlets have far fewer news hours to fill than the 24-hour cable news channels. Even so, the broadcast news coverage that did occur during this time was largely the same quality as the cable news — that is, for the stories that did appear, they relied on official sources or failed to delve more deeply into critical questions brought up on their news shows. For broadcast news stories, each story is only a small piece of an overall news program. These broadcast news channels also have a smaller number of news programming hours overall compared to the 24-hour news channels. Thus, broadcast news stories faced time constraints that limited how in-depth they could be on the coverage that did occur. Even with these constraints though, more coverage could have occurred had there been an emphasis placed on this particular news story.

5.2.2 Broadcast News Coverage: Ethical Issues

While there had been very limited coverage of the legality of the drone program, slightly more broadcast news outlets picked up on stories that had to do with the idea of collateral damage with U.S. drone use in Pakistan. All outlets covered the fact that the United States was operating drone strikes in Pakistan, but there were a few instances in which various news outlets reported on the issue a bit more critically than simply reporting that a drone strike had occurred. A broadcast news outlet (CBS) was also the only one out of all the news outlets (both broadcast and cable) to report on campaign donations tied to drone manufacturers.

On January 16, 2006, ABC’s Nightline, World News Tonight, and Good Morning America each aired coverage of a story regarding American Predator drones firing Hellfire
missiles on a tribal village in Pakistan. The missiles apparently missed their target, Osama bin Laden’s top deputy, killing and injuring women and children instead. The segments made mention of protests in Pakistan, with Pakistanis burning U.S. flags and chanting “death to America” and featured ABC reporter David Wright on the ground in Islamabad. The Nightline segment featured Wright interviewing Pakistanis at an Islamabad market about the incident, featuring one Pakistani who opposed the drone strikes and one Pakistani who viewed the drone strikes as a necessary evil, while the World News Tonight and Good Morning America segments just featured Wright as a voiceover briefly summarizing the sentiments in Islamabad (Gibson & Roberts, 2006; Vargas & Woodruff, 2006; Wright, 2006). NBC would also pick up on the story, with a short segment on its Nightly News. Reporter Jim Maceda was shown in Islamabad with a Pakistani man, whose comments Maceda conveyed to the viewer as, “we are America’s allies against terror but they're waging a war against us” (Maceda, 2006). While all segments were on the short side, they provided a much stronger take on the Pakistani protests by featuring reporters with people on the street. This stands in contrast to the cable news coverage, where the same issue of collateral damage was discussed but the reporters were not on the ground in Pakistan and the sources interviewed were all official sources rather than the locals impacted by the drone strikes.

Although the targeted killings in Pakistan continued, coverage after 2006 remained along the lines of discussing general Pakistani government and U.S. government collusion without directly bringing up the impact the use of drones for targeted killings in Pakistan. It was not until November of 2008 that the drone strikes in Pakistan were explicitly brought up and discussed again, in a CBS segment involving an interview with Asif Ali Zardari, then-president of Pakistan. Anchor Harry Smith asked Zardari about the escalation in the number of US Predator
strikes on Pakistani soil. As had been the Pakistani government’s stance throughout the War on Terror, Zardari denied knowledge of the drone strikes, claiming, “it's undermining my sovereignty, and it's not helping win the war on the hearts or minds of people” (Smith, 2008). Though Zardari focused his complaints on the violation of sovereignty, the interview showed some support for the idea that anti-terrorism strategy that alienated the populace might not be viable long-term. This interview reflected yet another difference in sources used between broadcast and cable news for covering the ethical considerations: though cable news outlets discussed the same ethical issues, their official sources were American rather than Pakistani.

During this time frame of 2002-2008, there was one other ethical issue that came up on broadcast news. In June 2006, CBS ran a story on congressional trips being paid for by special interests. In particular, CBS discussed trips paid for by General Atomics, the makers of the Predator drone. Over the course of five and a half years, General Atomics had paid for 86 trips worth $660,000 for congressional staffers and guests. One particular trip was for Congressman Buck McKeon’s Chief of Staff Robert Cochran, who brought his wife on a $27,000 trip to Australia paid for by General Atomics. The travel form for Cochran stated the purpose of the trip was to “meet and discuss Unmanned Aerial Vehicle issues with Australian officials” (Attkisson, 2006). CBS reporter Sheryl Attkisson went on to further discuss the connection between the expensive trips and U.S. drone use: “as General Atomics hosted more travel, the Predator became a successful staple of the war in Iraq. Contracts skyrocketed from a mere $22 million to a card request for 347 million. The company wouldn't agree to an interview but tells CBS News the paid trips ‘foster debate regarding our initiatives and technologies’” (Attkisson, 2006). The story first aired on the evening news for CBS on June 5, and CBS replayed the segment for the morning news the follow day on June 6. However, the story wasn’t developed
further by CBS and no other news outlets, cable or broadcast, picked up on the news story despite the significance of the story. Defense manufacturers wooing congresspersons with expensive trips for the purpose of landing multi-million dollar contracts calls into question the true need for the defense manufacturer’s products. Reporting on these types of lobbying efforts is necessary for the public to keep an eye on the involvement of special interests in national security issues, yet only CBS stepped up to fulfill the watchdog responsibility of the press with regard to this issue.

While this is troublesome for all networks, in particular the lack of coverage is problematic coming from publically owned PBS. PBS is intended to provide trustworthy information to the American public, “treating its audience as citizens, not simply consumers” (“PBS overview, 2014). Not only does failure to cover this story run counter to PBS’ own mission statement, this is exactly the type of failure that a publicly funded television is intended to prevent: a failure to report on a news story because it might upset advertisers or sources whose support is necessary for the news outlet. However, according to the Lexis Nexis database, there was no other coverage from 2006 in which the campaign donations of General Atomics were discussed. The lack of coverage from PBS may be reflective of the increased corporate underwriting PBS accepts in order to make up for the lack of government funding, decreasing incentives to report on stories that might damage the relationship between PBS and its funders. By relying on corporations to help finance programming, the distinctions between PBS and its commercial competitors become blurred.
5.3 Sources Used from 2002-2008

5.3.1 Cable Network Sources

Official sources were used frequently during this time by CNN, the only cable news outlet to feature multiple stories during this time frame that looked at the ethical and legal implications of the CIA drone program. Retired General Wesley Clark and retired Major General Don Shepperd were both used as sources. Shepperd was also a CNN military analyst. Both were supportive of the program in their comments. Clark founded his own defense consulting firm Wesley K. Clark and Associates in 2004 – after his appearance on CNN, but still indicative of his ties to the defense industry (Armstrong, Connor & Yax, 2013). Clark also serves as a director of the Atlantic Council, whose members include drone manufacturers such as Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and General Dynamics (“Atlantic Council Board of Directors,” 2014; “Atlantic Council Supporters,” 2014).

Stephen Hadley made multiple appearances as the National Security Advisor. Hadley’s appearance as a guest was not unusual or unexpected given the program’s nature. Hadley’s interviews had him sitting in as the voice of the administration, there to defend the program and to dodge questions about how it worked. While Blitzer, who interviewed him on all of his appearances, did ask critical questions of the program to Hadley, there was limited follow up to Hadley’s responses, and there was never a counter viewpoint present during the discussions with Hadley to argue against his and the administration’s claims about the legality of the program and the distinction between targeted killings and assassinations.

Members of Congress also appeared on CNN: Senator Trent Lott and Senator Evan Bayh were both guests. CNN also supplied two of its own analysts: Jon McLaughlin, CNN security analyst, and William Cohen, world affairs analyst. The only non-official source on CNN during
this time was Jim Walsh, an expert on international security and terrorism from Harvard. Fox News, the only other outlet to feature coverage of the issue, relied on nameless “national security officials.” Anonymous sources are by their nature not accountable for what they say, and without names or position to attach to the comments viewers cannot judge for themselves whether they trust the veracity of the source. The overwhelming reliance on official sources is certainly due in part to the nature of the topic as a matter of national security. At the same time, to fail to bring in outside perspectives to the issue is to limit the discourse on an issue that impacts the entire American public, not just those in the defense industry. The legal and ethical questions brought up by the drone program matter to all Americans – if our government is allowed to run killing programs through its intelligence agency that operates in secret and under a loosely defined legal framework, what other national security programs might be deemed acceptable? What standards are the United States setting in a world where drone technology is being rapidly adopted by other countries? The answers to these questions impact all Americans and set the tone for the future direction of our national security programs and policies. More voices must be included outside of those directly involved in the defense and intelligence communities of the United States government.

5.3.2 Broadcast Network Sources

Though broadcast news coverage was limited, both official and unofficial sources were included, sometimes with overlap. NBC, for instance, invited as a guest Washington Post writer Dana Priest – however, Priest was also an NBC national security analyst. Pakistan’s President Asif al Zardari appeared on CBS. ABC featured on the ground footage from Islamabad in which the reporter discussed the use of drones with Pakistani citizens. No other outside sources were brought on to any of the broadcast news networks to discuss the drone program.
CBS was the only network during this time period to feature an interview with a president of Pakistan in its coverage of the drone program. The president of Pakistan, though not an American official source, still qualifies as an official source. While being outside of the U.S. government and in the targeted country lends a different perspective to Zardari’s interview, to truly distinguish Zardari as different from the American official sources would be to disregard the close and sometimes collusive relationship between the United States and Pakistan at this time (Miller & Woodward, 2013; “Pakistan and US,” 2013). Pakistan was benefiting from the drone strikes and had worked behind the scenes with the United States on the drone strikes. To come on an American news show and be truly critical of the program would have had serious ramifications for U.S.-Pakistan relations, and Zardari dodged the issue entirely by denying any knowledge of the drone strikes.

The use of on-the-ground reporters in Islamabad by ABC provided a source that was definitely not official and gave more insight into what the effects of the drones were in Pakistan. Though short, featuring locals gave the segment more authenticity than simply reading a quote of the sentiments of Pakistanis. Even more importantly, it provided a narrative that showed that while the U.S. government maintained its stance that these drones were doing more good than harm, for the people experiencing the drones, they were a terrifying daily occurrence.

The difference in coverage between cable and broadcast news may have been due in part to the nature of most of the cable news programs included being more talk show in nature, whereas the stories featured on the broadcast news were more about reporting the news. The on-the-ground reporting done by ABC and NBC may have been an attempt to offer a different, more engaging type of reporting: all of the cable news stories had been in-studio interviews, which are much cheaper to produce but not nearly as interesting for viewers as a reporter walking the
streets of Islamabad. Thus, some of the decisions about sources may have been related to creating a more competitive type of programming and to distinguish themselves from the competition.
CHAPTER SIX

THE COVERAGE: 2009-2013

The coverage during this time will be broken down by cable news and broadcast news, and discussed thematically in terms of discussion of legality and discussion of ethics and traced chronologically. Some stories covered both legal and ethical issues: for those stories, the part discussing legality will be covered in the legal section, and the part containing ethics will be covered in the ethical section. After the coverage has been discussed thematically, sources will be covered for that particular type (cable or broadcast). The specific breakdown for the number of stories per network and year can be found in the table in Appendix A. The list of sources, broken down by type and by year, may be found in Appendix C. The distinction between this set of years (2009-2013) and the earlier set of years (2002-2008) is the change in presidential administrations.

6.1 Cable News Coverage from 2009-2013

6.1.1 Cable News Coverage: Legal Issues

In January 2009, U.S. airstrikes against terrorists were launched, reportedly without specific approval from the White House. This news story was immediately latched onto by MSNBC, where host Rachel Maddow questioned whether the CIA was running its own war regardless of presidential approval (Maddow & Jones, 2009). Maddow brought up the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force that allows the president go after al-Qaeda operatives wherever they may be. Maddow then pointed out that for seven out of every eight drone attacks for that year, the United States was not shooting at al-Qaeda but rather “we were shooting at people the Pakistani government told us they wanted killed, Pakistani extremists that threaten
that government, not al-Qaeda,” ending her discussion by asking “under what legal authority are we now doing this?” (Maddow & Jones, 2009).

In October 2009, Maddow also invited on Jonathan Turley, professor of constitutional law at George Washington University on to her show to provide a legal opinion and some limited answers to the questions she had brought up previously. According to Turley, while authority for the strikes was easily claimed, it’s “much more difficult to find where that authority could possibly be.” Turley then went on to add that “we are destabilizing the world by violating international law. International law is built on a couple of pillars, and the most important one is the concept of sovereignty. And what we’re doing is saying that we can unilaterally violate sovereignty” (Maddow, 2009). Turley’s interview clearly indicated a less than favorable view of the administration’s claims of possessing the authority for the drone strikes, and by the end laid out that at the very least the United States was guilty of violating sovereignty.

Despite not having had much coverage on the drone program until this point, MSNBC in 2009 had three programs that discussed the legality of the drone program. This may be due in part to a shift at MSNBC towards more talk and opinion shows: a 2007 report from the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that MSNBC had begun to shift more toward making politics a brand, “with a large dose of opinion and personality” (“The State of News,” 2007, para. 24). In 2009, MSNBC transitioned to more personality-driven daytime programming. At the time, MSNBC president Phil Griffin explained the revamp as, “we’re changing dayside away from the TelePrompTer headline news to Dylan Ratigan and Dr. Nancy” (“MSNBC Prez,” 2009). MSNBC also began to make moves to establish itself as the liberal network, creating a lineup of left-leaning hosts that included Rachel Maddow, Ed Shultz and Keith Olbermann (O’Connor, 2009). The increase of talk shows with a focus on politics meant that there were more
opportunities for lengthier discussions of the drone program that had previously occurred. Rather than just relaying the news, MSNBC was now featuring many more shows that invited guests on for in-depth analysis. Furthermore, MSNBC’s serious shift to the left is important to note as that impacts its analysis and coverage. What is also important to note is the fact that the shift to the left and the move to more opinion-based programming was done out of a commercial desire to chase higher ratings. The fact that the newly-defined left lean to MSNBC came out of a desire to be more competitive against other news networks suggests that MSNBC’s new liberal programming would produce only a narrow range of “liberal” views – just those appealing to the largest number of viewers – in order to garner the audience size needed to bolster ratings.

As for the other networks in 2009, Fox News featured only one critical story and CNN featured two. Both networks would feature official sources that maintained the government’s stance that the program was both legal and appropriate for the task of taking down terrorists. Fox News briefly discussed the use of drones in June 2009, with former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld appearing on Kilmeade and Friends. Rumsfeld defended the Bush administration’s antiterrorism tactics, saying that the drone program was effective “because it saves American pilots' lives and they can be operated and done in clandestine ways,” going on to further clarify that for as for “who ought to be developing the strategy” behind the use of drones should be “unquestionably the President and the Senior Officials in the Department of Defense and the Department of State.” His statements were met with agreement with host Brian Kilmeade before moving on to the next topic (Kilmeade, 2009). The issue was not further discussed. The short length of the segment’s focus on the drone program did not lead to any great discussion of the program, but this instance is another example of a Fox News host showing general support for the program.
CNN aired two stories in 2009 that looked critically at the use of drones, both in November and both on the show *Amanpour*. The shows aired on different days with slightly different content, although they shared a fair amount of information overlap. The first *Amanpour* show played footage of the damage from a missile fired by a drone strike, a strike that Pakistanis claimed had killed children (Amanpour & Robertson, 2009). The second *Amanpour* show recycled elements from the previous show, including the same footage of the damage from a missile fired by a drone, but included a discussion with guest speakers General Talat Masood, a former Pakistani Ministry of Defense official, Peter Bergen, CNN national security analyst, and Vicki Divull, former assistant general counsel for the CIA. (Amanpour, Niell et. al., 2009).

When questioned on accountability regarding the drone strikes, Divull responded, “the rules at the Central Intelligence Agency are the United States Law. And any other directives from the President of the United States” (Amanpour, Niell et. al., 2009). The panel, filled with national security insiders, was not diverse in either guests or its guests’ opinions. The rest of the segment discussed the ethical considerations of the civilian casualties and is discussed in section 6.1.2, Cable News Coverage: Ethical Issues.

For a viewer of Fox News or CNN – if he/she was even aware of the drone program, given the coverage up to this point – it would appear that the drone program was certainly legal. Even the footage of Pakistan on *Amanpour* was mitigated by having a former Pakistani Ministry of Defense official appear on the show and not speak out about the use of drones. After all, if someone from Pakistan was unwilling to weigh on the cost to civilian lives, surely it must not be that bad. Maddow’s guest, Jonathon Turley, had been critical of the precedent the United States was setting for respecting sovereignty. Still, Turley had failed to clearly outline where he thought the line was or could be drawn with respect to the legal authority the United States claimed to
possess that allowed the drone program to exist. Between the three networks for 2009, though, MSNBC had presented the most critical questioning of the program— all on The Rachel Maddow Show. Much of that questioning, though, had come in the form of host Rachel Maddow ruminating out loud about the potential problems with the program. This is reflective of the format of the show with Maddow’s role as a political pundit. She is commenting on the news rather than simply reporting it. While the questions and points she brought up about the program were not without merit, Maddow herself was not always the best source to provide answers.

Maddow does deserve credit for bringing guests on who could provide some additional information— such as Jonathon Turley on one show to discuss the legality and Jane Meyer, whose appearance will be discussed in the cable news ethical coverage section of this chapter, on another show to discuss the ramifications of the use of drones in Pakistan.

At this point, the program was openly being discussed, and strategy and the potential legal ramifications were being brought up in limited discussion. By 2010, coverage would increase even more across all three networks, though the program still would not be acknowledged by the Obama Administration for two more years.

Indicative of how much the program was no longer a secret, in 2010 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit to force the CIA to release more information regarding its targeted killing program. Bill O’Reilly on Fox News would immediately latch onto this story, bringing up the drone program ten times on his program throughout the course of 2010. O’Reilly repeatedly made the point that “the drone program has been the most effective antiterrorist strategy we have and has badly damaged the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership” (Colmes, Crowley, & O’Reilly, 2010). O’Reilly had one episode in January of 2010 in which he went into detail the legality of the program and the steps taken before killing a target. In
particular, O’Reilly wanted attorneys and Fox News analysts Kimberley Guilfoyle and Lis Wiehl to explain whether it would be legal if the U.S. government decided to move forward with a targeted killing on American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, who had been found to have ties to al-Qaeda. According to Wiehl, the CIA did have the authority to go after him. Guilfoyle explained that if President Obama signed off on a death warrant, the CIA can go after him, citing “President Bush utilized this in 2002. So there is precedent to establish this. Yes, people in the ACLU and others, they’re not going to like it. Too bad. Because you’re an American citizen doesn’t give you license to commit acts of jihad against the United States” (O’Reilly, Guilfoyle & Wiehl, 2010).

Every one of the stories on The O’Reilly Factor for 2010 revolved around defending the legality and the necessity of the program against the ACLU lawsuit and against statements made by the UN in June 2010 criticizing the program. For a Fox News viewer, the evidence presented by O’Reilly pointed overwhelmingly toward the drone program as effective, legal, and if the viewer, like the ACLU, had questions about either its effectiveness or legality, too bad – because according to O’Reilly, you were wrong. Rather than framing the drone debate as a discussion on a potentially domestically and internationally illegal program, O’Reilly chose to frame the drone debate as part of a larger argument on the ethical killing of terrorists. In short, little true critical discussion and a lot of anti-terrorism rhetoric made up O’Reilly’s discussion of the drone program.

Despite the significance of the ACLU’s lawsuit, none of the other major cable news networks developed the story. The ACLU lawsuit came about after the U.S. government refused to respond to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the ACLU, requesting the government disclose “the legal and factual basis for its use of predator drones to conduct
‘targeted killings’ overseas,” with the ACLU having a particular interest in finding out “when, where, and against whom drone strikes can be authorized, and how the United States ensures compliance with international laws relating to extrajudicial killings” (“Predator Drones FOIA,” 2013, NEED PAGE OR PARA). The CIA denied the request and would not confirm or deny whether the drone program existed. The ACLU contended that was not lawful “because the CIA director and other officials had publicly acknowledged the existence of the drone program,” leading to the ACLU filing a lawsuit against the CIA (“Predator Drones FOIA,” 2013, para. 2). The information the ACLU was requesting was the information that some of the reporters and hosts on the cable news shows had sought themselves and asked of their guests. Why not cover the ACLU lawsuit, then? Perhaps because so far, most of these programs had invited on the very people the ACLU lawsuit was targeting. Though the reporters had brought up questions and asked for answers, showing support for the ACLU lawsuit may have been taking it too far. Even MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow may have been unwilling to show support for the lawsuit – thus far, her criticism had not been directly aimed at the CIA but rather asking about the overarching legal framework that the United States was employing for the drone program. The CIA itself admits that it enjoys “‘relationships with reporters form every major wire service, newspaper, news weekly and TV network… In many instances we have persuaded reporters to postpone, change, hold, or even scrap stories that could have adversely affected national security interests or jeopardized sources or methods” (DiMaggio, 2010, p.117). Covering the ACLU lawsuit may not have been worth jeopardizing networks’ relationships with the CIA.

In 2011, U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki was killed by a drone in Yemen. This killing was a source of controversy because it involved the U.S. government killing an American citizen without any sort of due process (McKelvey, 2012, p.16). And yet, there was very little cable
news coverage of the incident in a way that discussed the legality of the government’s action with al-Awlaki. Fox News was the only channel to bring up “secret panels” for deciding who gets taken out by drone strikes, and the only channel to feature discussion of the al-Awlaki killing beyond it being a successful story of the U.S. government killing a wanted terrorist – and both instances were on *The O’Reilly Factor*.

On the first of the two shows, Bill O’Reilly invited attorney and Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly to comment on the legality of these “secret panels.” When asked if the president had the power constitutionally to launch a drone strike attack, Kelly’s response was, “it depends. I think so… you have to prove… that the person is an imminent threat. And if he’s not an imminent threat, you have to have statutory authority… and they [the U.S. government] have a good argument that it was an imminent threat” (Kelly & O’Reilly, 2011). The second *O’Reilly Factor* show to discuss the legality of drones following al-Awlaki’s death featured another Fox News host as a special guest: Geraldo Rivera, who referred to drones as “the antidote to terrorism” (Rivera & O’Reilly, 2011). In both instances, Fox News contributors were featured as guests as though they were legal and counterterrorism experts rather than pundits. Though Kelly was noted as having a legal background, that alone does not necessarily qualify her to provide a thorough legal analysis and no further information on her qualifications was provided. Rivera, on the other hand, was featured to comment on the issue without even that much of a background to contribute. By featuring fellow Fox News sources without the depth of knowledge to argue with him, O’Reilly was able to effectively keep to the slant he had previously established: drones are good when they fight terrorism, and the U.S. government has a strong argument that it has the power to use drones as it sees fit.
MSNBC featured then-Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul’s remarks on the matter. According to Paul, al-Awlaki should not have been targeted because he was an American citizen. These remarks segued into a discussion with Gary Johnson, former governor of New Mexico, and Josh Marshall, the founder and editor of Talking Points Memo. Johnson, while acknowledging that he might have authorized the same action, also expressed his concern about it being “unprecedented that a U.S. president has targeted for assassination a U.S. citizen… we’re denying him due process.” Marshall, on the other hand, said that he thought the action was legal, given the extenuating circumstances of al-Awlaki’s high-level involvement in al-Qaeda and being located out of the United States (Matthews, 2011). The implication across networks was that though the action might have been somewhat legally questionable considering his American citizenship, al-Awlaki was ultimately a terrorist and thus a perfectly acceptable target for a drone strike. This was a matter on which even MSNBC and Fox News, normally on opposite sides of the political spectrum, could agree.

In 2012, Obama publicly acknowledged the CIA’s drone program for the first time. Other than playing the clip of Obama’s admission, no network discussed it further at this time. This is not surprising, considering that the drone program had been previously discussed even without “official” admission of its existence from the U.S. government. It was not until June that the story was covered further by any channel, when Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly on his show The O’Reilly Factor focused what was now Obama’s drone war, calling him “the drone king” and then a few days later covered Jimmy Carter’s negative comments about Obama’s drone policy.

In the first of these two shows in June, O’Reilly invited on Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist. On this show, Krauthammer made the claim that “protecting us against terrorists is a national security imperative… that is why the hypocrisy and the attacks by the left
in those eight years are so despicable” (O’Reilly, 2012). Between this and O’Reilly’s rants against the ACLU in 2011, the depiction of opposition voices as being against effective national security and counterterrorism efforts proved to be a repetitive theme for O’Reilly. The second show of his in June that dealt with drones focused on President Carter’s criticism of Obama’s drone program: according to guest Fox News strategic analyst Lt. Col. Ralph Peters, though, Carter was attacking “the single program in the Obama administration that has actually worked and done good for the country. Killing terrorists, directly” (Ingraham & Peters, 2012). Once again, dissenting views were characterized as anti-American and against effective national security and counterterrorism efforts.

In 2013, the confirmation hearing for John Brennan for the position of Director of the CIA meant increased scrutiny of his past work as Deputy National Security Advisor and his involvement in the CIA’s drone program. From January through his confirmation hearing in February, there was a significant increase in the amount of coverage of the drone program: the number of stories about the drone program that each network ran in this time frame was greater than the yearly total for stories from each network for every year prior to 2013. NBC broke the story that a judicial memo (the “white paper”) had been leaked that detailed the government’s legal argument for carrying out targeted killings, including against Americans, led to a significant number of stories that dealt with the program. The white paper laid out that an extrajudicial killing of an American citizen could be lawful, if the following conditions are met: the American citizen is a senior operational leader of al-Qaeda or an associated force and in a foreign country; “an informed, high level official of the U.S. government” has determined that the individual poses an “imminent threat of violence against the United states” with capture
infeasible; and the operation is consistent with applicable law of war principles (Department of Justice, 2013, p. 1).

The combination of the leaked memo and John Brennan’s confirmation hearings meant that all three cable outlets ran a number of stories in the early part of 2013 regarding the drone program. Sometimes the outlets only featured video footage of the confirmation hearings, but frequently the shows included a full discussion of the controversy surrounding the drone program. The full discussions rather than the brief updates on the hearings are the focus of analysis.

MSNBC featured seventeen stories during February that questioned the terms used in the white paper memo and the drone program, while Fox ran 13 and CNN ran only 9. Every network would question the language used in the memo and the vagueness of terms like “imminent threat” and “associated forces,” as well as the lack of any sort of review process. A common criticism across networks was the secrecy surrounding the program, specifically the selection process for targets.

MSNBC, which had previously expressed concerns about the legality, brought Lawrence Korb, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, on to The Ed Show with Ed Schultz immediately following the white paper leak. Attorney General Eric Holder had remarked that the program was legal under both domestic and international law. When asked whether he agreed with Holder, Korb stated that he did and that the memo “over and above previous attempts to define this” (Robinson & Schultz, 2013). When another guest on the show, Robert Greenwald of Brave New Films, who had recently directed a documentary called, Drones Exposed, used the term “assassinating” because the program was targeting people with no evidence against them, Korb’s response was to clarify that “acting in self-defense is not assassination,” and that the
president has the authority to make these calls. Korb did add that he thought there should be more oversight on the program, but the segment indicated that the program, though controversial, was legal (Robinson & Schultz, 2013).

Not every guest on MSNBC held the same view, though. Mark Quartermann, research director of “The Enough” project and “Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity” appeared on Melissa-Harris-Perry later in February and stated that “anybody outside the zone of armed conflict is a civilian… so if you see the area of armed conflict as being Afghanistan, for example, that Congress has authorized us to fight in, chasing al-Qaeda all around the world and blowing up Yemen is patently illegal” (Harris-Perry & Witt, 2013). Jennifer Daskal, adjunct law professor at Georgetown University, appeared on Up with Chris Hayes during this time as well, expressing her concerns about the legality of the program and that the white paper offered a “very potentially disturbing and expansive view” of when the United States can use force against an American citizen (Hayes, 2013a). Even when defending the use of drones, such as when Senator Angus King, member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, appeared on an MSNBC Special and said, “I believe that drones are a lot more civilized than what we used to do,” and when compared to previous types of warfare, drones are “actually a more humane weapon because it’s – it can be targeted to specific – to specific enemies and specific people,” King also noted the need for oversight (Brzezinski & Gregory, 2013). According to King, “in the case of targeting an American, I don’t see why they can’t go to a secret court like the intelligence court, that’s already been set up, and get what amounts to a warrant” (Brzezinski & Gregory, 2013).

The slant from MSNBC was decidedly more critical of the program, although as demonstrated even MSNBC featured guests who defended the program. Fox News picked up on many of the same problems with the white paper as MSNBC had, though hosts like Sean
Hannity and Bill O’Reilly used this as the opportunity to criticize the “liberal left” media for hammering the Bush administration for waterboarding while having mostly avoided the drone issue (Hannity, 2013a; Hume & O’Reilly, 2013; O’Reilly, 2013a; O’Reilly, 2013b). Fox News had been supportive of the program before, and remained so even while acknowledging that a more clear legal framework and more oversight would probably be a good thing.

The discussion of the legality of the drone program may have questioned the terms, but the legality itself was generally accepted as true. Retired Air Force Colonel Martha McSally appeared on Fox on the Record with Greta van Susteren on February 7, saying that as far as whether these strikes are legal, “under international law, there’s a strong view that says absolutely,” as well as citing the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force as legal authority to go under any terrorist assets associated with al-Qaeda, regardless of location (Housley & Van Susteren, 2013). When host Greta van Susteren expressed her discomfort with a unilateral decision making process, stating that “it’s very hard with all the intelligence failures for me to feel, you know, an enormous level of comfort with that,” McSally stressed that in her experience the “the scrutiny is very high and these individuals are looked at over many years, their association with al Qaeda, their activities and operations, before they can even get to where they are targetable” (Housley & Van Susteren, 2013). On Journal Editorial Report, Matt Kaminski, editorial board member at The Wall Street Journal, stated that “you are allowed to kill your enemies under international standards of war and law,” a claim that was not argued by the other guests or the host despite the fact that a key component of the controversy surrounding the CIA’s drone program is whether or not the program adheres to those international standards (Gigot, 2013).
A number of Fox News contributors expressed their unease with the vagueness of the terms. For instance, Lt. Colonel Bill Cowen, a Fox News Military Analyst, stated, “I have no problem killing Americans overseas who were part of a terrorist organization. The issue is, is this the beginning of a slippery slope, that we don't see any real boundaries, how long does it take to go from killing Americans overseas with drones to killing Americans here in this country with drones” (Hannity, 2013a). In one discussion on Fox Hannity, host Sean Hannity expressed his concern with the lack of a definition for “imminent” or any real criteria for targeting an American citizen, to which his guest Senator Mike Lee, member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, agreed that before the U.S. government continues to target American citizens, there needed to be “some definable standard against which that citizen is judged and against which that citizen will be determined to be an imminent threat against the U.S. government” (Hannity, 2013b). Another guest on Hannity’s show, Newt Gingrich, also expressed concern about the lack the due process for an American citizen, as well as for the loss of intelligence from killing rather than capturing and the use of drone strikes as a way to avoid thinking about strategy. Hannity agreed with the concerns and again stressed the lack of definition for what constitutes an “imminent threat,” activities,” or “recently” (Hannity, 2013c). Senator John McCain was interviewed on Fox News Sunday during this time, and when asked about drone strikes also expressed that “there has to be a legitimate oversight by Congress, and as open a process as possible” (Wallace, 2013a). Former senior advisor to President Reagan Pat Buchanan, a guest on Fox on the Record with Greta van Susteren, further highlighted that Congress had to get involved and that “there’s got to be some kind of judicial review when you’re killing Americans abroad” (Housley & van Susteren, 2013).
Though CNN did air footage of the confirmation hearings and make brief mention of the fact that the “controversial drone program” was impacting John Brennan’s nomination for CIA director, only seven stories came out in February on CNN that were more in-depth than a line or two about the drone program’s controversy or just airing footage of the hearings. Again, CNN contributors were concerned about the broadness of the terms from the white paper, as was brought up on The Situation Room on February 5 with guests Congressman Keith Ellison and Cliff May, the president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. Both guests were concerned with the broadness of “imminent” and the lack of judicial procedure for an American citizen, with May adding that in addition to imminent, “what does it mean to be unfeasible to capture?” (Blitzer, 2013a). CNN’s Newsroom had two segments discussing the white paper in which the vagueness of the terms “imminent” and “associated forces” were discussed (Baldwin, Goodman et al, 2013; Espinosa, Foster et al, 2013). Due process would also come up, with syndicated columnist and radio host David Sirota suggesting on another episode of Newsroom, “it shouldn’t be too hard if the evidence is so overwhelming that you know you want to execute somebody” to charge that person with a crime before sending in a missile (Baldwin, 2013).

Even as CNN was questioning the extent of the language from the white paper, there was also clearly an attempt to weigh the legal concerns against national security. When CNN legal analyst Sunny Hostin was asked on CNN’s Newsroom how much the American public should know about the program, Hostin replied that there is a tension “between national security and the need to know and the transparency in the law,” acknowledging that “people should be concerned that Americans are being targeted, killed, and assassinated without due process,” but also that “you have this war on terror” (Baldwin, 2013). Ben Stein, a guest on the show, pointed out that
“the whole world has changed,” and that he did not see an alternative to “putting a lot of trust in the president and national security advisor and the CIA to do it right” (Baldwin, 2013).

Richard Haas, former top national security official under both Presidents Bush and President of the Council on Foreign Relations appeared on Fareed Zakaria, supporting a limited use of drones as they had done some good but also increased the risk of alienating populations. Another guest on that same show, Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA and the NSA and a principle with global security advisory firm the Chertoff Group, acknowledge the need for some sort of review but dismissed the idea for drone courts that had been discussed by other guest Jane Harman, former Congressman and director of the Woodrow Wilson Center, with “I’m personally not comfortable with that, putting a judicial body between the president and his operating forces,” at which point the segment wrapped up (Crowley & Zakaria, 2013).

In March 2013, Senator Rand Paul filibustered during John Brennan’s CIA director confirmation hearing. The point of Senator Paul’s filibuster was to get a direct answer from the U.S. government as to whether it would authorize the use of drones on American soil against American citizens. All of the cable news outlets picked up on the story, and it did lead to some further discussion of the drone program, although many of the segments focused more on the use of filibuster as a political tool and what this meant for Paul’s political career. Additionally, Paul’s attempt to get an answer from the U.S. government, while it did keep attention on the drone program, did not really address the larger questions about the drone program.

Paul’s misguided attempt at a drone debate was effectively summed up by an editorial that ran in The Wall Street Journal, which pointed out that Senator Paul had missed the point of Attorney General Eric Holder’s comments that the President could hypothetically authorize the use of lethal military force on U.S. soil. Rather than suggesting that this meant that the United
States could authorize a strike on an American citizen sitting in a café, *The Wall Street Journal* explained Holder’s comments as, “the U.S. government cannot randomly target American citizens on U.S. soil or anywhere else. What it can do under the laws of war is target an ‘enemy combatant’ anywhere at any time, including on U.S. soil. This includes a U.S. citizen who is also an enemy combatant” (“Rand Paul,” 2013). While Paul’s filibuster did continue the discussion on drone use, by framing it in the unlikely scenario of the U.S. government using a drone on an American citizen sitting at a café, the discussion did not progress as much as it could have, especially when compared to the discussion that had been stirred up by the white paper memo.

When discussing Paul’s filibuster and the drone debate, most acknowledged that the drone debated needed to happen, and regardless of the filibuster itself, starting that debate was a good thing. However, Paul’s approach derailed the debate somewhat by turning attention instead to his political stunt rather than the actual issue. Lawrence O’Donnell noted on his show *The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell* on MSNBC that “a discussion of drones and how we use them is fine, [but] what I’m watching is nothing but a fundraising stunt at this point” (O’Donnell, 2013). Columnist Charles Krauthammer, appearing on Fox Special Report with Bret Baier, thought Paul’s extreme scenario was “ridiculous” and urged that “we sit down and establish a code of conduct that would get 90 percent approval in Congress and in the country” (Angle & Baier, 2013). Even while much of the coverage was dedicated to discussing the manner in which Paul had pushed for increased drone discussion, it did so at the same time as highlighting the need for more oversight of the program.

For instance, though Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, thought the drone debate and been “built up” and “hyped up” by Paul, she also acknowledged on MSNBC’s *Hardball* the need for more legislation regarding the use of drones
and that the Intelligence Committee was “trying to draft some legislation” (Herera, Robinson et al, 2013). On CNN, Mike Riggs, columnist at Reason magazine, suggested that the filibuster was an opportunity for the Obama administration to clarify some of the questionable terms of the white paper memo, such as “what it means by a threat being imminent, by what’s feasible and whether or not a court” should be used to review the process (Black, Burnett et. al., 2013). There was also further discussion of the implication of the drone program for U.S. citizens. Senator Ron Wyden, member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, appearing on CNN’s The Situation Room stated, “if you’re talking about an American who is taking up arms against the United States, I can think of plenty of instances where our country need to use lethal force to deal with that kind of particular situation,” and noted the need to clarify what happens “if our country has the wrong person or somebody thinks that they don’t belong to one of those groups and the government does” (Blitzer, 2013c).

Coverage continued into April, with New York Times journalist and author of a book on the CIA drone program Mark Mazzetti becoming a popular guest as cable news shows invited him on to discuss his book on the CIA drone program. Mazzetti would appear on CNN on three different shows – Fareed Zakaria, The Situation Room and The Lead with Jake Tapper – between April and May 2013. The interviews on Fareed Zakaria and The Situation Room would both be re-aired during this time as well, giving Mazzetti a total of five appearances on CNN between April and May 2013. Mazzetti would also appear on MSNBC’s The Rachel Maddow Show in an interview that would be re-aired the next day, giving him a total of two appearances on MSNBC during this time.

On CNN, Mazzetti pointed out certain issues with the drone strikes, noting on The Situation Room that with the deaths, “how many militants, how many civilians, it is hard to
differentiate at this point” (Blitzer, 2013d). Overall, though, Mazzetti was explaining the program in his appearances on CNN and not so much criticizing it or delving into the issues from his recently published book *Dirty Wars*. The second time his interview on *The Situation Room* aired, it was in conjunction with a piece from CNN reporter Nic Robertson whose interview with Pervez Musharraf revealed that Pakistan had admitted to a secret deal for the drone strikes between the United States and Pakistan. This was the real focus of the second *Situation Room* show, with Mazzetti’s interview more of a supporting feature to explain a bit of background detail for the program.

On *Fareed Zakaria*, Mazzetti explained the legal argument for the program but did not take the argument apart, though he did make the distinction “you assassinate political leaders, but you kill soldiers on a battlefield” (Zakaria & Bergen, 2013). Mazzetti’s interview on *Fareed Zakaria* was followed immediately by a clip of former CIA director Leon Panetta explaining that the CIA took all necessary precaution to minimize civilian casualties. *Fareed Zakaria* also included a bit from Yemeni guest Faria al-Muslimi, who was a former U.S. exchange student. Muslimi’s village had been hit by a drone strike and he expressed that the villagers were angry and that drone strikes had become a recruiting tool for al-Qaeda (Zakaria & Bergen, 2013). Finally, *Fareed Zakaria* ended with former director of the CIA General Michael Hayden’s words, which was summed up as “I can think of almost nothing that has contributed more to the safety of the United States than what we’ve been able to do to take senior al-Qaeda leadership off the battlefield” (Zakaria & Bergen, 2013). This episode of *Fareed Zakaria* illustrates the balance between criticism and support that CNN had been demonstrating thus far, though despite the appearances of Mazzetti and Faria al-Muslimi, there were more official sources weighing in on the topic: Leon Panetta, former CIA counterterrorism chief Robert Regnier, CNN in-house
analyst Peter Bergen, and former director of the CIA General Michael Hayden all also gave their opinion on the program.

Mazzetti would take a more critical approach to the program when he appeared on MSNBC and would be given more time on MSNBC as the sole featured guest on The Rachel Maddow Show rather than one of many as he had been for the programs on CNN. In addition, Mazzetti’s interview on The Rachel Maddow Show was prefaced by a long rant from host Rachel Maddow about the problems with the drone program in which she cited issues with selecting targets, comparing the tactic that the United States had taken with their first target – to kill somebody that the Pakistan government wanted dead – to a drug dealer offering the first hit for free. Maddow also brought up the issues with the CIA becoming a “full time killing operation,” that in doing so it had neglected to keep an eye on security issues like the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. When Maddow finally got into her interview with Mazzetti, it was more about teasing out those issues that she had mentioned than having Mazzetti provide background knowledge for the program as he had on CNN. For instance, Mazzetti stated that the CIA has “fundamentally changed into this paramilitary organization,” and Maddow summarized part of his book as documenting that the changes in the intelligence and military communities have “lowered the bar for waging war” (Maddow & Schmidt, 2013). The implications from this Rachel Maddow Show were much more serious about the transparency issues with the government, with Maddow showing significant concern for a spy agency running a killing program and Mazzetti admitting that a major issue is that “nobody acknowledges it. It’s under covert action authority for different domestic political reasons,” and that change would take some time. Referring the CIA as a paramilitary organization was a much stronger indictment of the lack of accountability and oversight with the program. Up until now, there had not been
much discussion of the fact that the CIA held the reigns when it came to the program – criticism had been directly more generally across the U.S. government. CIA directors and officials had made frequent appearances to defend the program. Mazzetti’s comments stand out as part of very little criticism of the CIA as the operating force behind the drone program.

On May 23, 2013 President Obama gave a speech on national security in which he addressed the drone program specifically. This was picked up on by all of the networks and discussed throughout May 2013. Fox News covered the speech on three of its programs. CNN aired four stories covering the President’s comments and one story that dealt specifically with a heckler during the speech. MSNBC aired three segments that dealt directly with the President’s speech, one segment that was a lead-up to the President’s speech and what he might be addressing, and one segment related to drones but that was not explicitly related to the President’s comments during May 2013.

The O’Reilly Factor segment that discussed the President’s comments followed the same vein as previous discussion of the drone program on the program. In particular, in the first show to air immediately after the speech, O’Reilly argued with guest Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, a professor at Columbia University, about the merits of the drone program. Hill was concerned about the Obama administration using drones “in ways that are not transparent, in ways that probably violate late,” whereas O’Reilly contended that Obama had not been challenged on the legality of the program and “the proof is that al-Qaeda has been weakened by them” (O’Reilly, 2013c). O’Reilly went on to further add that the alternative to the drone program would be “to just let them sit up there in the mountains and hatch their plots,” disregarding Hill’s comment that O’Reilly had just made a straw argument. Despite having invited Hill on to presumably present a different view on the program, O’Reilly ignored or argued with all of Hill’s points and
ended the segment with the same premise that had begun it: that the drone program was doing far more things right than wrong. The second program, *Journal Editorial Report*, did not discuss the president’s comments in as much detail, although the hosts did offer that new standards would put “shackles on [Obama] and the national security apparatus” and that “Congress should – certainly should not agree to take away the authorization to use military force” (Gigot et. al, 2013). Once again, Fox News anchors were clearly supportive of any measures that enhanced national security by killing terrorists.

CNN interviewed CNN analyst, retired Army General James “Spider” Marks, about the president’s speech. Marks was very positive on the drone program as a “very precise and specific way” of going after enemies (Holmes, Malveaux et. al.). When asked if control of the drones should be shifted from the CIA to the military, Marks called such a shift a “political move” to provide greater transparency, though at the end of the day there would be no real difference because the intelligence used mixes military and CIA intelligence (Holmes, Malveux, et. al.). What was not disclosed during this interview is that Marks “serves as a venture partner and advisory board member at the Stony Lonesome Group, an investment firm with a defense and national security focus… [and is] also a co-founder of Willowdale Services, a consulting firm that lists ‘global strategic management,’ ‘defense operations,’ and ‘intelligence support operations among its areas of expertise, and ‘geographic and operational risk assessments among its service offerings” (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 22). Such disclosure would have put the supportive comments by Marks in a new light.

During President Obama’s national security speech, a member of the anti-war group CODE PINK stood up and yelled questions at the president about Guantanamo Bay and the drone program. Footage of Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODE PINK, hurling questions at
the president was shown on all of the networks although Benjamin was only invited on as a guest to CNN. Benjamin had previously been interviewed on Fox News for disrupting a U.S. senator’s speech to bring up the impact of drones in Pakistan. This is discussed in the cable news coverage of ethical issues section of this thesis, section 6.1.2.

The CNN interview between CNN anchor Carol Costello and Medea Benjamin was somewhat antagonistic. First, Benjamin argued with Costello over being called a “heckler” rather than an activist or protestor, and Costello flat out said to Benjamin that “a lot said you were hurting your own cause because one, you appeared rude to the president of the United States, and two, you just seemed a little crazy.” Benjamin objected to being called rude, replying:

I think killing innocent people with drones is rude. I think keeping innocent people in detention for 11 years is rude. I think that not respecting the lives of Muslim people who are killed is rude. There are a lot of rude things about our policies, speaking out is not actually rude, but it’s the basis of a democratic society where people use their voices to try to make our country better and our policies more in lean with the rule of law. (Costello, 2013)

Costello wrapped up the interview at that point, making Benjamin’s closing quote her only opportunity to give why she had heckled the president, with half the segment having been an argument over being called a heckler. Though Benjamin’s actions had been discussed on other networks, her only opportunity to speak and give her own reasons for interrupting the speech was this brief interview on CNN.

Following Obama’s national security speech, coverage of the CIA drone program became increasingly sparse across the networks, particularly regarding the legality of the program. The handful of stories that appeared later in 2013 would focus more on the ethics of the
issue, especially with regard to civilian deaths and will be discussed in the following section on cable news coverage of the ethical issues.

The coverage for 2013 reflects the difficulty of balancing national security concerns against the need for transparency, civil liberties and a sound legal framework. Fox News took a specific position on the issue and largely held it throughout the coverage – that is, that the drone program has been an efficient national security tool in taking out terrorists, and despite some legal concerns, the drone program should remain in play. Though CNN made more of an effort to balance out the official sources with alternative voices (for example, Medea Benjamin of CODE PINK and showing Yemeni student Faria al-Muslimi), the overall slant appeared to be leaning toward the argument that national security outweighs those other concerns. The biggest legal issue that was focused on in 2013 from the white paper memo was whether Americans could be killed by the U.S. government on American soil. This was not and is not the only legal issue with the program. International law was a very small part of the overall debate. The Authorization for the Use of Military Force that allows the drone program to exist came up infrequently, though it too is a serious legal issue that drives the entirety of the U.S. legal argument for its actions in the War on Terror outside of Iraq and Afghanistan. MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow was the most consistently critical of the legality of the program, though much of her criticism came in the form of Maddow pontificating. This meant she offered few answers to the questions she brought up. Furthermore, even Maddow missed certain stories such as the ACLU lawsuit in 2010. The increase in critical coverage on MSNBC that Maddow contributed to corresponded to an increase across all networks – namely, during 2013 when the drone debate became a national discussion after John Brennan’s confirmation hearings.
Considering that within the United States, the precedent has often been that national security trumps civil liberties, transparency, and legal recourse – whether through the Patriot Act, which has been accused of undermining civil liberties and allowing the U.S. government to spy on citizens, or through successful invocations of the states secret privilege, which allows the government to block the release of any information in a lawsuit that, if released, could harm national security – this follows a similar pattern of prioritizing national security above all (“Background on the State Secrets,” 2014; “USA Patriot Act,” 2014). Secrecy is certainly a vital component to national security, but within a democracy, this need for national security secrecy must be balanced against the public’s need to know what actions their government is undertaking on their behalf. The press play an important role in that moderating position, of determining when to pursue a news story and considering the national security risks of such actions as publishing leaks. The press also provide a necessary level of oversight to those secretive national security efforts. For news networks to fail to address the full range of concerns associated with the drone program to the extent to which these concerns deserved to be examined is ultimately a failure at providing their function in democracy. Intelligence related activities such as the CIA’s drone program can only be discussed when they are brought into the light, and while the cable news outlets did feature a number of stories in 2013 about the legality of the drone program, they focused narrowly on the impact of the policies on U.S. citizens rather than the overarching constitutionality of the program and its implications for international law. Once the conversation on whether the drone program could be used to kill U.S. citizens on American soil appeared to be resolved, the legal conversation died down.
6.1.2 Cable News Coverage: Ethical Issues

Most of the ethical discussions about the CIA drone program during this time revolved around civilian casualties in Pakistan and whether destroying terrorist networks outweighed the loss to human lives. As drone strikes escalated under the Obama administration, Pakistan would be frequently mentioned as a partner in the drone strikes but also as a site of growing anti-American sentiment. While this was sometimes only mentioned and not discussed further, there were a number of instances from 2009-2013 in which cable news outlets brought on guests and weighed the cost-benefit ratio of the drone strikes. There would also be some stories that finally discussed a different ethical concern of the drone program: the impact operating distant killing machines has on its remote pilots.

Pakistani outrage over civilian deaths sparked a number of stories in 2009. MSNBC briefly covered the Pakistan issue in February 2009 on *The Rachel Maddow Show*. Besides discussing that Pakistan had previously vigorously denounced the drone strikes, Maddow also brought up “that maybe we ought to know the truth about who we are bombing and with whose help” before moving into the next segment of her show (Maddow, 2009a). The *Rachel Maddow Show* returned to the topic again in March of 2009. Maddow invited guest Juan Cole, professor of modern Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian history at the University of Michigan, to discuss the issue. Maddow asked Cole whether there is a “meaningful distinction to make between us having flying robot drones killing people there instead of men with guns killing people there,” to which Cole responded that because the United States was targeting individuals in difficult terrain, it made more sense to use drones (Maddow, 2009b). The distinction in Cole’s eyes apparently was in the type of warfare needed for the situation. Cole did not go into any other differences between drones and soldiers with guns. Discussing the implications of war
carried out by robots rather than actual soldiers is an important part of the ethical debate, and here what could have led into a conversation on that particular area instead was turned into a discussion on how the terrain and tribal aspect of Pakistan lent itself to drone use.

As previously mentioned in the legality section, the show Amanpour on CNN aired two shows about the drone program in November 2009 on different days with slightly different content. The first Amanpour show played footage of the damage from a missile fired by a drone strike, a strike that Pakistanis claimed had killed children (Amanpour & Robertson, 2009). The second Amanpour show recycled elements from the previous show, including the same footage of the damage from a missile fired by a drone, but included a discussion with guest speakers General Talat Masood, a former Pakistani Ministry of Defense official, Peter Bergen, CNN national security analyst, and Vicki Divull, former assistant general counsel for the CIA. Although footage of the damage wrought by drones had been shown, when the only Pakistani invited on for the panel discussion, Pakistan defense official Masood, was asked about the drones, he granted that the drone strikes had “undoubtedly some very good tactical advantage...and there have been some very good targets taken out by the Predators [drones].” Masod’s response – coming from a Pakistan defense official – gave the impression that the U.S. actions in Pakistan were justifiable and doing more good than bad (Amanpour, Niell et. al., 2009).

The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC aired an interview in October 2009 between Maddow and Jane Mayer of The New Yorker. At the time, The New York Times was running a series on the experiences of its reporter David Rohde who had spent seven months living with the Taliban in Pakistan. Maddow quoted Rohde’s account of the presence of U.S. drones, who wrote that the Taliban was helped by the drone strikes and able to gain recruits by exaggerating
the number of civilian casualties. Maddow’s discussion of Rohde’s experience highlighted her point that the drone strikes might not be the best strategy, as she cited that “counterinsurgency experts” say the civilian casualties make drone strikes “overall a bad bet. They say in the big picture, they are counterproductive,” due to their recruiting use for militants (Maddow & Olbermann, 2009). Maddow then turned to guest Jane Mayer to ask her opinion of the use of drones, to which Mayer replied, “I think policymakers like the idea of drone strikes because they’re supposedly surgical strikes. That said, one of the things you documented that it took 16 drone strikes to kill Baitullah Mehsud, the Taliban leader. The first 15 drone attacks trying to get him missed”” (Maddow & Olbermann, 2009). Mayer went on to cite that since 2006, between 750 and 1,000 people had been killed in drone strikes, of which only a small fraction were actually connected to al-Qaeda. Mayer’s comments about the accuracy of drone strikes stand in contrast to the claims that government officials had consistently made about drones being the most accurate tool they had available. By providing an alternative source that presented an argument counter to the official stance on drones, MSNBC had provided viewers with additional information to form their opinion on the drone program.

January 2010 saw both Fox and CNN briefly discuss the benefits of the drone program versus civilian casualties. On Fox Off The Record with Greta Van Susteren, host Greta Van Susteren interviewed Senator John McCain about the Obama Administration’s national security policies in January of 2010. McCain offered that the drone program was an important tool for the United States, that despite the problems the program had faced with public opinion in Pakistan, “it has disrupted Al Qaeda. It has significant beneficial effects” (Van Susteren, 2010). McCain’s comments continued the pattern of support for drone strikes that had been established on Fox News.
That same month, *CNN Sunday Morning* featured Peter Bergen, CNN national security analyst, to discuss the same issue. While acknowledging that the program has been successful in taking out some key leaders, Bergen also said that “Catherine Tiedemann, a colleague of mine at New America Foundation, and I calculated that about a quarter of the victims are civilians.” But, Bergen added, drone strikes that take out leaders such as Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban, who are responsible for the deaths of “literally thousands of Pakistani civilians… is a calculation that should also enter this” (Holmes & Nguyen, 2010). Though Fox News has the tagline of “fair and balanced,” in this instance at least it would appear that CNN was attempting to provide a more balanced view of the drone strikes – that though civilian deaths occur, some of the targets themselves are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Pakistani civilians.

In March, CNN’s *American Morning* discussed the civilian casualty aspects of drones. When asked if the rates of civilian casualties would allow the Taliban and al-Qaeda to turn Pakistanis against the United States, guest Gary Berntsen, a former CIA officer who was also at the time a Republican candidate for a congressional district in New York, claimed that “boots on the ground” would “create great hostility” than using drones (Roberts & Chetry, 2010). Then, in May, CNN aired three more stories: one on *Joy Behar Show*, one on *Anderson Cooper 360*, and one on *The Situation Room*. Similar to the previous shows on the issue, these too featured guests who expressed difficulty coming to a conclusion on the utility of the drone strikes given the civilian casualties. On *Joy Behar Show*, guest Reiham Salam of *The Daily Beast* put it as, “one of these thorny things,” while on *Anderson Cooper 360*, guest David Rohde, a *New York Times* reporter who had been kidnapped by the Taliban, said that “they are effective…that said I think the drone strikes are not a long term solution” (Behar, 2010; Cooper, 2010). On *The Situation*
Room, guest Brett McGurk, a National Security Council staffer for Presidents Bush and Obama, said it was a tough trade-off between “the risk of action,” of civilian deaths and increased anti-American sentiment, and “the risks of inaction,” of allowing terrorists a sanctuary in Pakistan (Blitzer, 2010).

CNN’s set of stories was followed by a similar segment in June on MSNBC, in which NBC News terrorism analyst Roger Cressey offered that though there’s always collateral damage, drones are “lethal and extremely effective.” When asked how the middle class people of Pakistan feel about the strikes, Cressey stated, “they’re torn, I think,” between wanting to be rid of the Taliban and the civilian casualties that result (Matthew, 2010). For 2010, both CNN and MSNBC conveyed the tension in the program between the effectiveness of drones and the cost to the people living where the strikes occurred. The consensus on this particular ethical dilemma from the guests appearing on cable news networks appeared to be tentatively supportive. It is also worth noting that a number of these guests (Senator John McCain, Brett McGurk, Gary Bertsen) had ties to the U.S. government.

Guest host Chris Hayes detailed the moral issues with the drone program on The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC on December 29, 2011. This was the longest portion of a show yet that had been devoted to laying out concerns about the program. Hayes stressed the problem of the secretive nature of the program in knowing how many had been killed, stating, “we don`t know for sure the ratio of civilians killed by mistake to genuinely dangerous militants killed on purpose because the government`s official position on the CIA drone program is that it does not exist” (Hayes, 2011). After pontificating on the ethical costs of the drone strikes, Hayes transitioned into the interview portion of the show with guest Spencer Ackerman, national security journalist at Wired.com. Their conversation continued in the same vein of asking the
true cost to civilian lives and goodwill, noting the difficulty of maintaining an accurate death count due to lack of disclosure from the U.S. government. Though Hayes had engaged in a lengthy rant and brought up many valid concerns about the impact drones have on the civilians in the areas where they strike, the program ultimately ended on the note that the lack of transparency and oversight meant it was unlikely that answers would be found anytime soon. Though this program was important in that it was the first program-long rant on the ethical issues of the drone program to be aired, it was also frustrating in that it could not provide any real answers. Furthermore, despite the passion Hayes displayed in this particular program, the ethical issues would be not be brought up in detail again by any network, including MSNBC, until 2013.

The early events in 2013 of John Brennan’s confirmation hearings and Senator Rand Paul’s filibuster kicked off some discussion of the ethical issues of the program, though not as much as had occurred on the legal issues. As both the white paper and the filibuster had focused on the legality of the U.S. government targeting American citizens, there were not too many stories that focused on the other, ethical aspects of the drone program between January and March 2013.

MSNBC brought up collateral damage multiple times in early 2013. In January, guest host Ezra Klein on The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell brought up that John Brennan had argued there hasn’t been a single collateral death from the drone campaign, which, Klein noted, is “a claim experts find preposterous” (Klein, 2013a). A few days later, also in January, Ed Schultz interviewed Robert Greenwald, the director of the documentary film, Drones Exposed. Greenwald used the opportunity to highlight his concerns about the civilian casualties and rising anti-American sentiment where drones are used (Schultz, 2013). On Up with Chris Hayes, host Hayes stated that the civilian casualties is a “massively important strategic consideration and
moral consideration,” and that the lack of transparency made it difficult to evaluate the program – both concerns which would be mentioned by other shows and other networks (Hayes & Reid, 2013).

Meanwhile, on Fox News’ The O’Reilly Factor, guest host Juan Williams interviewed Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODE PINK, an anti-war group that had disrupted John Brennan’s Senate hearings. Benjamin was given the opportunity on the show to explain her recent travels to Pakistan and her first-hand knowledge of what it’s like for people living under drone strikes, as well as how drone strikes had become “the best recruiting tool for extremist organizations” (Williams, 2013). Williams objected to this point, telling Benjamin, “you know that people are not joining al-Qaeda primarily because of drones… that’s just not true” (Williams, 2013). Benjamin suggested that Williams travel to the tribal areas of Pakistan, talk to the people there and then decide whether a secret government program “that is killing hundreds of innocent people” was a good program for the United States, to which Williams asked Benjamin to travel to Afghanistan and ask the people there about life under the Taliban (Williams, 2013). While Williams clearly disagreed with Benjamin’s stance that there needed to be a policy change on the drone program – though he did agree with a need for more transparency – Benjamin was able to make her case without the discussion devolving into an argument.

CNN was not left out of the conversation on ethical concerns, with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria going into a long rant on drones on his show Fareed Zakaria following Senator Rand Paul’s filibuster. Zakaria questioned the constitutionality of the program and power granted to the executive branch as well as bringing up the civilian casualties. Zakaria acknowledged “there’s no doubt that drone strikes have helped us get rid of a number of influential terrorists
without the cost of ground assaults,” but that in doing so we had also killed a number of innocent civilians and a precedent for other governments to one day justify doing the same thing (Zakaria, 2013). Zakaria cited the International Institute of Strategic Studies as having identified fifty countries actively using unmanned aerial vehicles, and then questioned what would happen if al-Qaeda got its hands on one, or even if China began using drones against what it regards as terrorists because “that’s what America does” (Crowley & Zakaria, 2013b). Zakaria hit on a number of important questions, ending with a call to “put in place legal procedures and limits so that we do not usher in a global free for all with drones” (Crowley & Zakaria, 2013b).

Another story that aired on CNN shortly after Zakaria’s rant was part of The Lead with Jake Tapper. The story started with the drone kill count, citing the New America Foundation as estimating nearly 4,000 people having been killed by drones – a number comprised of both targets as well as “several hundred innocent civilians in Pakistan and Yemen” (Blitzer, Foreman et al, 2013). Tapper mentioned that “international rights groups say that there is no recourse for the victims’ families,” and that “human rights groups argue that there are serious constitutional questions about the program, specifically the extrajudicial targeted killing of enemy combatants, and, most notably, American citizens” (Blitzer, Foreman et al, 2013). In addition to these points, when introducing the segment, host Jake Tapper did also include the White House’s argument that drones are effective and preferable to sending in troops. Later on, guest Christine Fair, senior fellow at Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and assistant professor at Georgetown University, stated that “our data don’t actually say” that drone strikes create more terrorists than they kill, and furthermore from her own travels to Pakistan those living near the strikes are less willing to “blanket say that they hate them [drone strikes], in part because they understand the options are the Pakistan military or living under the regime that the terrorists
would prefer” (Blitzer, Foreman et al, 2013). In this particular program, Tapper cited the New America Foundation as his source for drone strike casualties, a nonprofit think tank, rather than a government source. The New America Foundation casualty count reflects much more poorly on the government than does the government’s own, lower, official count. Using the higher casualty count made a much stronger point as to the weight of the issue. Though the program appeared to be slanted against the drone program, or at least to be very concerned with the number of civilian casualties, the appearance of Fair changed the tone toward the end. By noting that Pakistanis are unsure how to feel about the drone program, Fair marginalized their anger over the program and instead characterized it more along the lines of confusion. Fair also set up the drone strikes as against a great evil: the Taliban. Given that, drone strikes seemed like the much better option even with the civilian casualties.

CNN’s Jake Tapper returned to the topic again in April 2013. *The Lead with Jake Tapper* on April 12, 2013 showed a Pakistani man living in the tribal areas where the drone strikes occur saying that his brother and son, who were both killed in a drone strike in 2009, were not terrorists – and that, given the chance, he would kill those responsible: “I will kill them. If Allah give me this opportunity, I will kill them because they are responsible for killing my brother and son” (Tapper, Robertson et al., 2013). CNN reporter Nic Robertson then offered that “of the estimated 2,000 or more killed in Pakistan, upwards of 200 are thought to be civilians” (Tapper, Robertson et al, 2013). Though the rest of the segment took on a more critical tone as to whether the drone program was creating more terrorists than it killed, showing a vengeful Pakistani man and quoting a number on the lower end of the estimates for civilian deaths (the Living Under Drones project cites *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* as estimating the number of civilian deaths anywhere from 474-881 [“Living under drones,” 2014,
para. 6]) – does not have the same effect as if the reporter had chosen to use higher numbers for the civilian casualties or provide a more sympathetic face to the victims than a Pakistani man saying that he would kill both the president of the United States and the director of the CIA if given the chance (Tapper, Robertson et. al, 2013). This segment also featured as a guest Tommy Vietor, who had recently left his position as national security spokesman for the Obama administration and was in the process of starting up a political communication firm with former Obama speechwriter John Favreau. Though host Jake Tapper pointedly asked Vietor whether the strategy was creating more terrorists than it was killing, Vietor did not provide any answers that deviated from the administration’s stance, defending the accuracy of drones and adding that the president did “absolutely” wrestle with the ethical issues surrounding their use of drones (Tapper, Robertson et al, 2013).

MSNBC’s Up With Chris Hayes also looked at the ethics of the program in April 2013, featuring an interview with Farea al-Muslimi, a young Yemeni man who had spent time in the United States as a foreign exchange student. One of the residents of Muslimi’s village had been killed in a drone strike that terrified the entire village. This interview gave a very sympathetic face to the innocent victims of drone strikes, as Muslimi expressed that his time in the United States was “one of the best years of my life,” and that villagers do not understand the America that he knows and loves but rather are filled with terror and intense anger towards the United States (Hayes, 2013b). Besides the interview with Muslimi, the program also included a panel discussion with Joshua Foust, national security correspondent for “Need to Know” on PBS and former contracted defense analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency; independent analyst Madiha Tahir; and Ali Gharib, senior editor at The Daily Beast open blog, “Open Zion.” Their discussion focused on Muslimi’s comments to a Senate hearing on the drone program, in which
Muslimi had shared the same sentiment: that he was disappointed that his village had such hatred and anger towards the United States when he had lived in the country and grown to love both America and Americans. The sentiment of the discussion was critical of the program: guest Tahir clarified that in her opinion, “this is not a targeted killing program, it’s just a killing program,” though other guest Foust jumped in to note that despite the civilian deaths, “there haven’t been that many people killed by drones compared to the Pakistani military or even compared to the Taliban” (Hayes, 2013b). Even so, the segment ended on Haye’s comments that policymakers need to understand “that human feeling that we all feel, everyone around the world when they watch someone that they love perish in an instant” (Hayes, 2013b). Between Hayes and his guests, the slant from the program was very clearly against the drone program due to its impact on civilians.

Over the summer and through October 2013, the coverage that did appear would focus more on the civilian casualty aspect of the drone program as well as on the impact of the program on its operators. MSNBC and CNN aired three stories while Fox News aired two.

MSNBC’s The Rachel Maddow Show aired a story in June 2013 on NBC chief correspondent Richard Engel’s revelation that, after reviewing classified documents detailing 114 drone strikes in Pakistan in 2010 and 2011 that contained information about locations, death tolls, and alleged terrorist affiliations, U.S. officials actually don’t know how many are killed in the drone strikes. Of those 114 strikes, only one acknowledged a civilian casualty. Engel also found that a quarter of those noted are listed as “other militants,” a generic term that implies that officials are unsure who exactly they killed other than a male of about the right age (Maddow, Mitchel & Engel, 2013). The implications for this finding are troublesome: how can the government justify their targeted killing program if they are unable to say with certainty that
they are targeting the right people? The segment was justifiably critical of the program based on these findings, and Rachel Maddow would return to the topic again the next day to underscore how shocking she found the story, and Chris Hayes would also bring up the story on his show, where he too expressed concern about a targeted killing program with such poor accounting of its targets (Hayes & Alter, 2013). This NBC expose would not be picked up by the other news networks.

Bill O’Reilly would also discuss the drone program during June 2013, in a segment on his show The O’Reilly Factor in which he argued with Fox News political analyst Kirsten Powers that drones are a successful counterterrorism tool. Powers told O’Reilly that she didn’t believe there was enough evidence to prove that drones were keeping the United States safe, at which point O’Reilly blasted her for her opinion and proceeded to boil her argument down to, in his words: “in war on terror you’re not supposed to attack the enemy because they might get mad” (O’Reilly, Cameron et. al, 2013). Once again, O’Reilly was not interested in hearing alternative opinions on the drone program but rather steamrolling his guest with his own thoughts on the matter. O’Reilly and Powers would get into it again later in July 2013, with essentially the same argument unfolding between the two over the efficacy of the program (O’Reilly, Wiehl, et. al, 2013).

In October 2013, only CNN ran a story covering a report from Amnesty International regarding drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan and the deadly toll on civilians. This report, discussed on The Lead with Jake Tapper, included as guests Mustafa Qadri, Amnesty International’s Pakistan research and Jeremy Bash, who was chief of staff for Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and later founder and managing director of Beacon Global Strategies, a national defense advisory firm. Bash stated his support for the program and drones, as “a very precise,
very effective weapon that can take out terrorists before they plot attacks against us,” and expressed frustration at claims that the program targets civilians or kills them en masse (Elam & Tapper, 2013). After this, Tapper turned largely to Qadri for the rest of the interview. Qadri, an Amnesty International employee, clearly supported the document he had helped produce, and he identified the largest problem as a lack of accountability for the deaths caused by the program. Qadri’s response dominated the interview and it would appear just from the amount of speaking time that Tapper offered to him rather than Bash that Tapper too was interested in discussing the need for accountability within the program.

The last segment of note on the ethical issues of the program came on CNN in an interview with a drone operator. The former drone operator expressed his frustrations at being unable to get help with dealing with the deaths that he had caused, and that he was not prepared or ready for what his job entailed. Another drone operator, whose identity was concealed, also expressed their frustration with the lack of assistance to help the operators process the full impact of their job, saying that drone operators are “affected by this just as much as people on the ground” (Costello, Cabrera et. al, 2013). This was the only time a drone operator had been interviewed and the issue looked at from the mental health standpoint. Even though drones are operated in the sky and far away from their operators, their actions are real – the operators may not be present, but they are causing death and destruction to people who are not always guaranteed to be the bad-guy terrorists. With other countries adapting drone technology and drones poised to be an increasingly large part of military strategy for the United States and other countries, understanding the psychological effects of the drone program on its operators is an important, yet little discussed aspect of the drone debate.
As they had in between 2002 and 2008, civilian casualties again dominated the ethical
discussion of the drone program. There were many more stories during this time period than
previously, which is likely due in part to the drone debate becoming a national discussion
following the filibuster and CIA confirmation hearings in 2013. The story that CNN ran on a
school and Taliban training grounds in Pakistan reflects a large investment from the network on
a news story. However, this investment came only after drones had become a larger news story.
The conversation would become much more critical when alternative sources were given the
chance to speak. Guests such as Jane Meyer and Medea Benjamin provided far different
accounts of the drone program – with Meyer citing higher numbers of civilian deaths than the
U.S. government was willing to admit, and Benjamin arguing that in her time on the ground in
Pakistan, these people were furious at the United States government. Still, compared to the
number of official sources presented, alternative voices made up a much smaller part of the
discussion. Furthermore, a number of the ethical questions were brought up in the form of
Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes or Fareed Zakaria going off on a rant on their show. Though the
questions they brought up were often ones that should be considered, their opinions do not
provide real information from which viewers can draw informed opinions.

Even with the larger number of stories, the overall tone continued to be supportive of the
policy even if unsure about the tactics taken to achieve it – though civilian casualties would be
brought up, so too would a reminder that we are in a War on Terror. War crimes were never
mentioned – if so many civilians are dying as a result of this tactic, is the proportionality no
longer appropriate? If not, the use of the drone program would certainly come into scrutiny as a
war crime. This was never mentioned. Civilian casualties occur with every war, but when the
technology used is being used specifically because it can aim with precision and minimize
collateral damage, significant civilian casualties become a much bigger discussion. Additionally, even though the number of stories increased for the years analyzed in this portion, there were still not many – for 2013, CNN and MSNBC aired only three stories and Fox News only one that dealt with the ethical issues. Though coverage of the ethical issues did increase, it still fell short of the amount and depth of coverage that the ethical issues should receive.

6.2 Broadcast News Coverage from 2009-2013

6.2.1 Broadcast News Coverage: Legal Issues

There was no notable broadcast news coverage in 2009 for the legal issues of the CIA drone program. It was not until 2010 that such coverage appeared, starting with ABC running a story that discussed the ACLU case against the CIA. Guests on the show included Paul Gigot of The Wall Street Journal, Peter Beinart from The Daily Beast, and Jane Mayer from The New Yorker. Anchor Jonathon Karl pointed out that the lack of official acknowledgement from the U.S. government also meant no justification for the drone strikes was ever given. Gigot called the program “one of the administration's major anti-terrorist successes so far.” Beinart offered that he felt the administration was pursuing inherently contradictory policies by continuing to use drones but by also attempting to win the hearts and minds of the Pakistani people. Finally, Meyer added that the drone strikes were only successful in the short-term but that a long-term “hearts and mind” strategy would be more effective (Karl, 2010). The variety of guests, particularly the inclusion of Jane Mayer who had recently written a feature for The New Yorker criticizing the drone program, provided for a range of opinions outside of the usual official sources. Though guest Gigot had defended the program, both guests Beinart and Meyer were far more critical of the long-term effectiveness of the program. Compared to past coverage hewing to official
sources, this was a shift towards allowing different viewpoints to comment on the drone program.

ABC and CBS both featured stories covering the June 2010 statement made by United Nations official Phil Alston regarding the drone strikes, in which Alston said that “in a situation in which there is no disclosure of who has been killed for what reason and whether innocent civilians have died, the legal principle of international accountability is by definition comprehensibly violated” (Tapper, 2010). Leon Panetta was invited to discuss the remarks on ABC’s Good Morning. When asked by ABC reporter Jake Tapper if everything the CIA was doing in Pakistan complied with domestic and international law, Panetta responded:

There is no question that we are abiding by international law and the law of war. Look, the United States of America on 9/11 was attacked by Al Qaeda. They killed 3,000 innocent men and women in this country. We have a duty, we have a responsibility to defend this country so that Al Qaeda never conducts that kind of attack again…. And anyone who suggests that somehow, you know, we're employing other tactics here that somehow violate international law are dead wrong. (Tapper, 2010)

This would be the final statement on the ABC program about the UN’s remarks, with Panetta leaving the matter settled as a program operating with the parameters of international law. CBS chose a different route to cover the remarks. Rather than invite an U.S. government official as a guest, CBS correspondent David Martin interviewed Philip Alson, the UN official who authored the report claiming that drone strikes were akin to a license to kill without accountability. Alson stressed the fact that “the rules we’re setting for ourselves now are the rules we’re also setting for others later” (Couric, 2010). Though
international law is a huge aspect of the legal issues surrounding the CIA drone program. CBS and ABC were the only two broadcast networks to discuss the remarks in detail. Coverage on Alson’s report was not seen on cable news networks, outside of Bill O’Reilly’s show on Fox News where he took the opportunity to criticize the United Nations rather than discuss the implications of their statement.

In 2011, ABC News featured a constitutional discussion that included discussing the legality of the drone program. Guest Richard Stengal, editor-in-chief of Time Magazine, argued that “George Washington would not have known what to do about whether drone warfare qualifies as an act of military engagement and therefore it engages the War Powers Act. The War Powers Act itself may be unconstitutional. It has never been tested in the Supreme Court” (Amanpour, 2011). However, the other participants in the discussion, George Will of ABC News and Michael Dyson, professor at Georgetown University, both agreed that the authors of the Constitution could not have foreseen the technological advances of today, and as such did not automatically disqualify the drone program from functioning legally. This type of debate over the program’s constitutionality was not seen on any other network, broadcast or cable. Though the legality of the program had clearly been discussed prior to this particular show, this was the only one to have an emphasis on the Constitution and to look at the War Powers Act and discuss its constitutionality. The constitutionality debate provides some much needed context for understanding the underlying legal issues of the CIA drone program, especially with regard to the War Powers Act. Whether or not the War Powers Act is constitutional impacts the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force under which the CIA drone program derives its legality. Up until this point, the War Powers Act constitutionality issue
as it relates to the CIA drone program rather than the War on Terror as a whole had not been addressed in-depth by any news network.

Shortly before the white paper story broke, PBS had actually run a lengthy segment on *NewsHour* with guests Seth Jones, who worked for the commander of U.S. special forces in Afghanistan from 2009-2011 and was currently a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, and Chris Anders, senior legislative counsel at the ACLU. Jones noted that both the Republican Bush administration and the Democratic Obama administration had used the 2001 AUMF to argue legal self-defense when pursuing suspected terrorists, as well as the complete lack of transparency and the inability to know what rules were being applied. As Anders put it, the secrecy raised questions of “to what extent is this administration relying on the 2001 AUMF, or are they relying on self-defense or some combination, or nothing at all?” Anders went on to further note that the legal opinion that had been drafted by the Justice Department a few years previously had been so tightly held that not even Senator Wyden, third-ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, had been able to see it (Brown, Ifill & Sreenivasan, 2013). Not long after this interview, the paper memo would break and that legal opinion would become a point of much discussion.

Just as with cable networks, broadcast networks covered the white paper memo fairly extensively throughout the early part of 2013. In particular, NBC had broken the white paper memo story and would devote significant time to this story. All of the broadcast networks would also be following the John Brennan confirmation hearings and air footage of the confirmation hearings. While coverage of the confirmation hearings was certainly important and it did address the idea that a controversy existed around the drone
program, playing video coverage did not fully convey the extent of the controversial aspects of the program. To fill this gap, all networks also aired at least some stories that offered at least some explanation of the drone debate.

NBC’s investigative correspondent Michael Isikoff broke the story on the judicial memo, the white paper that laid out the legal argument to justify the U.S. government’s use of drones for targeted killings including against American citizens. Isikoff would appear multiple times throughout the month of February on NBC to further discuss the memo, usually inviting at least one other guest on to get a dialogue going about the drone program. The first such instance occurred on February 5, 2013, when Isikoff laid out the contents of the white paper and its legal arguments. On this show, guest Jameel Jaffer, Deputy Legal Director of the ACLU, expressed his concerns that the “limits are really vague and elastic, and it’s very easy to see how they could be manipulated,” although NBC analyst and former counterterrorism official Michael Lighter offered instead that the vagueness was intended to “allow some flexibility” for senior officials (Costello, Gosk et. al., 2013).

Throughout the rest of the coverage in February for NBC, discussion of the legal arguments would weigh the vagueness of the terms versus the need for national security. For instance, when Representative Eric Cantor appeared on NBC’s Meet the Press, he said he was glad the memo had been released and that the House and the Senate would examine the memo and “be about oversight.” Cantor also added that there are still terrorists out there trying to kill Americans, “and if we’re going to continue to be the leading force for peace, prosperity and security in this world, we’re going to have to have the tools necessary to do so” (Gregory & Isikoff, 2013).
On CBS’s *This Morning* on February 6, correspondent Bill Plante was yet another voice bringing up the wide latitude of “imminent threat” and the need to clarify what kind of review the U.S. government has in place for the drone program. However, when Republic Congressman Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, appeared on CBS, he stated, “there is plenty of oversight here” (Bernard, Cordes et. al., 2013).

*Newshour* had two guests on to discuss the legal arguments present in the paper: Matthew Waxman, professor of law at Columbia Law School and Hina Shamsi, director of the ACLU’s National Security Project. Shamsi pointed out that for “imminent threat,” “for a high-level official to determine that a threat is imminent, he doesn`t or she doesn`t need clear evidence, there doesn`t need to be a specific plot, and there doesn`t need to be any indication that the person is near or on a battlefield. And so what you have is imminence defined out of its plain meaning and what appear like restrictions are no restrictions at all.” Waxman, on the other hand, viewed the document as “careful and narrow” and as a “serious effort to articulate limits to the president’s power to engage in targeted killings.” Shamsi laid out a number of concerns with the white paper that primarily had to do with the lack of judicial review for the government’s actions, while Waxman argued that “due process doesn’t necessarily mean judicial process” (Brown, Ifill et. al, 2013). The discussion made up most of the *Newshour* program, offering both criticism of it as well as an explanation for why it could be a solid legal document.

PBS would continue to feature fewer, but more in-depth stories on the topic throughout 2013. This may suggest that as PBS has made up for lost government funding with increase corporate underwriting, PBS has developed more ties to the military-
industrial complex that would not be pleased with extensive negative coverage. Of particular note for the relationship between PBS and the military-industrial complex is that the PBS documentary *Rise of the Drones* that aired on January 23, 2013, was sponsored by drone manufacturer Lockheed Martin. The documentary provided a “mostly upbeat look at surveillance and weaponized drones” without disclosing that its sponsor, Lockheed Martin, has significant ties to the drone industry (“PBS Drone,” 2013, para. 2). Thus, there is evidence to suggest that PBS has been, and was at the start of 2013, the recipient of funding from the defense industry. Considering the drone documentary aired right around the time the drone debate took off, it brings into question whether PBS’s coverage of the drone program was completely free of corporate influence.

In March, two episodes of *The Charlie Rose Show* on PBS aired that discussed the use of drones. Both times, drones were the focus of the majority of the show and the discussion centered on the legality of the drone program. On the first show on March 28, guest Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, told Rose that targets were carefully selected and that the United States had a right to go after a member of al-Qaeda. Levin stated that he didn’t think “you can give an American citizen or anyone else immunity to be part of a group that has declared war on the United States,” citing that “the President is authorized under our resolution [2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force]” (Rose, 2013a).

The next day, March 29, *The Charlie Rose Show* continued the drone debate, inviting on as guests Rosa Brooks, professor of law at Georgetown University, Scott Shane of *The New York Times*, Michael Boyle, former counterterrorism advisor to President Obama, and Peter Singer of the Brookings Institution. Shane gave a brief
description of how the Department of Defense and the CIA use different processes to create what end up being different lists of targets, although both ultimately end up in the White House in front of President Obama – a rare explanation to hear, as few other outlets had gone into such detail about the process. The guests both acknowledged the reasons why the administration would be using drones, such as cost-effectiveness and keeping American soldiers safe. However, the conversation focused on the negative aspects of the program: Brooks mentioned how the drone strikes have generated immense local hostility toward the United States; Singer talked about the precedent the United States was setting for other countries with military robotics programs; Scott cited the *New York Times*' own issues with getting the government to comply with a freedom of information request as evidence of the administration’s unwillingness to provide transparency to the program (Rose, 2013b). These followed same vein of criticism that had been demonstrated on other networks, both cable and broadcast, and did not raise any new questions. So far, the coverage provided by PBS, though in-depth, hour-long segments, looked much the same as what had been provided on other networks. The discussion of the legal argument for the term “imminent,” the need for transparency and civilian deaths were all the same issues that had been discussed on other networks. Despite devoting so much time to the interviews, viewers did not walk away with significantly different criticism of the program than had they watched another network. There was still no mention, not even on PBS, of issues such as the spending on drones or the fact that an intelligence agency was carrying out a traditionally military activity.

Mark Mazzetti, who had been featured on a number of cable news networks during this time, also made the rounds on broadcast news outlets in April. Mazzetti appeared on
CBS’s *Face the Nation* on April 7. Mazzetti discussed the complexities of figuring out “the playbook” for drones, what with different rules in different places for the use of drones as well as the need to clarify what the threshold is for war and the “imminence of threat to the United States” when authorizing a drone strike (Schieffer, 2013). On April 23, Mazzetti appeared on PBS’s *Newshour*, making similar points about the shift in the CIA towards killing operations brought up concerns about the CIA that needed to be addressed moving forward with the program (Brown, de Sam Lazaro et. al., 2013). Mazzetti also appeared that same month on *The Charlie Rose Show* on PBS, once again stressing that more attention needed to be brought to the program along with greater transparency (Rose, 2013c). Similar to his interviews on cable news, Mazzetti offered a critical but not definitively negative view of the program. In all of his interviews, Mazzetti acknowledged that though it had transparency and accountability problems, the program was not wholly ineffective.

In May 2013, ABC would run a segment that discussed the legality of the program in which former director of national intelligence, Admiral Dennis Blair, would stress that the drone program needed to be turned over to the Department of Defense, “where they’re run under the rules of law, the rules of war, the national rule of armed conflict” (Raddatz, 2013). Dennis also contended that the program would be far better run and regulated at the Pentagon where the institution is step up to handle weapons (Raddatz, 2013). This was a topic that had been tentatively broached on multiple networks after the president’s national security speech in May 2013 had indicated the possibility of moving the drone program from the CIA to the military. No action would be ever be taken to actually move the program. Though limited, this coverage from ABC did bring up one important
question: if moving the program to the Department of Defense would ensure the program was operating within the rules of law, did that mean that in the hands of the CIA it was not or could not be operated within the rules of law? The program did not explicitly address whether the drone program should have ever been in the hands of the CIA, but the implication was clear that for the program to be run legally it would have to be under the military. The only other program that ABC ran in May 2013 discussing the president’s speech would not offer much analysis on the speech, simply noting that drones are “now only to be used on targets posing an imminent and ongoing threat to the U.S.” (Harris, 2013). This short program did not contribute much to the discussion, serving more as a direct reporting of the contents of the president’s speech.

NBC would also address the president’s comments, with MSNBC host Joe Scarborough and Rick Santorum both invited on as guests to Meet The Press. Scarborough expressed surprise that Obama had adopted “a lot of Dick Cheney and George W. Bush’s approach to the War on Terror,” a comparison here seemed negative but had previously garnered Obama praise from Bill O’Reilly (Gregory, 2013). Though the portion of the program reviewing the drone part of the national security speech was short, Scarborough’s comments implied that Obama was following down a poor path for the War on Terror.

CBS provided more analysis of the president’s speech, adding in footage of CBS reporter Elizabeth Palmer on the ground in Islamabad. Palmer covered that Pakistan had just ruled the drone strikes illegal – a legal move that other networks apparently missed. Palmer interviewed Pakistani attorney Shazad Ackbar, who was responsible for the legal victory. Ackbar showed Palmer an image of a child who had died in a drone strike, and Palmer shared with viewers that at a funeral for two of Ackbar’s clients the crowd had
burst into a chant of “any friend of America is a traitor” (Pelley, Garett et.al, 2013). The implication was quite clear that the drone program in its current form was doing a significant amount of damage in Pakistan. Even without seeing the images, the fact that Palmer was directly in Pakistan was likely a powerful supplement to the news she was delivering. A viewer could get a very good idea as to why Pakistanis would want to make drone strikes illegal.

PBS’s The Charlie Rose Show would offer a more in-depth look at the president’s comments. The guests were Davlid Kilcullen, former senior advisor to General David Petraeus in Iraq and special advisor to the Secretary of State; Philip Mudd, former deputy director of the National Security at the FBI and Counterterrorist Center of the CIA; Karen Greenberg, directory of the Center on National Security at Fordham University Law School; Micah Zenko, from the Council on Foreign Relations; and David Ignatius of The Washington Post. There was not a conclusive slant to draw from the comments given on the speech, though all seemed in agreement that it did not go far enough in terms of providing real answers about the direction for future national security policies. Zenko noted that with the increase in other countries having drones, if the United States wants “to have a normative influence on others we have to align our legal principles and justifications with our practice on the ground” (Rose, 2013b). The difficulties with the secrecy of the drone program were discussed, and the transfer of the program to the military was acknowledged as a potential way to increase transparency because it would no longer be a covert operation. However, no guest firmly spoke out as to how the drone program should be handled. Rather, instead they noted the same problems that had been previously discussed with the program. The overarching consensus from this show was the
need for the president to clearly define U.S. national security policies and to clearly redefine the War on Terror in today’s terms.

Once again, broadcast news coverage fell short in terms of numbers compared to cable news. The same limitations apply here as previously. Broadcast has a much more limited number of news hours to show, and the drone program completes with many more stories. 24-hour news networks have far more hours to fill and can air many more stories during the same time period. In many respects, the coverage looked very similar for the broadcast news networks as it had on cable news, suggesting that perhaps broadcast news is not so distinguishable from its cable counterparts. However, there were some areas of concern that were easily discussed: transparency, the white memo, the filibuster and whether Americans could be targeted. It would have been very surprising had there not been overlap of discussion on these particular issues within the legality discussion of the drone program.

There were some instances of the broadcast coverage looking at very different aspects: ABC’s 2011 piece on the constitutionality of the program; ABC and CBS’s 2010 stories addressing UN comments on the U.S. drone program; ABC’s 2013 story that suggested the program should, for legal purposes, be put under the Department of Defense. NBC, not any of the cable networks, broke the story of the white paper memo. PBS, despite being presented as an alternative to commercial news, did not break the mold with its coverage, offering fewer (though longer) stories on the legality of the drone program - and placed its coverage in the realm of conflict of interest by accepting funding from a drone manufacturer to produce a favorable documentary on drones. Though PBS
did not shy away from discussing the same issues and criticism as found on other news shows, it also did not discuss anything different from those same issues.

6.2.2 Broadcast News Coverage: Ethical Issues

PBS featured a number of stories from 2009-2010 that touched on the ethical use of drones, with stories discussing the civilian casualties in Pakistan as a result of the drone program. The first was in February 2009, as a part of PBS’s *Newshour*. Pakistan’s foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, appeared on the show. When asked about the drone attacks by anchor Margaret Warner, Qureshi stated that Pakistan did have an issue with the drones, and that they were requesting that the United States review their strategy. According to Qureshi, “there is collateral damage that is linked to the drones and that has alienated people there,” and Qureshi stressed the need to have the support of the local people: “if we want to win this fight, we cannot do it by military means alone. We’ve got to have the people of that area, the people of Pakistan, with us, and these drones alienate the people” (Brown, Ifill et. al., 2009). When asked if a more collaborative drone program between Pakistan and the United States would be less inflammatory, Qureshi indicated that Pakistan was open to the possibility, although they had not gotten an answer yet from the Obama administration (Brown, Ifill et. al., 2009).

In April of 2009, PBS’s *The Charlie Rose Show* featured an interview with Ashraf Ghani, the finance minister and adviser to President Karzai from 2002-2004 and a potential presidential candidate for the next presidential election in Pakistan. Host Charlie Rose asked Ghani about the drone program in Pakistan. Ghani hedged on the topic, saying that “you don’t attack another country which is supposed to be an ally,” but allowing that public opinion in Pakistan was changing because the Taliban was perceived as the greater threat: “they’re saying, well, middle class opinion now in Punjab, in many of the cities is saying, well, you know, if the army is not
killing the bad guys and the Americans are killing the bad guys, well, maybe it is not such a bad thing” (Rose, 2009). When Rose stated, “and if there are some civilian casualties, that’s the price of war,” Rashid responded, “Well, yeah, I mean, and -- I mean obviously people can’t, you know, support the Predators publicly in that thing” before going on to add that recent surveys had shown an increasing number of Pakistanis who didn’t view the program as such a bad thing (Rose, 2009).

Civilian deaths came up again on PBS in a segment on The Charlie Rose Show in January 2010. Guest Hentry Crumpton, a former CIA official, appeared on the show. When asked about civilian deaths caused by the drone program, Crumpton agreed that civilian deaths must be avoided but went on to add, “But I don’t agree with you, Charlie, about drones killing large numbers of civilians or even many civilians. If you look at the Hellfire missile, it’s a very small warhead, it’s extremely accurate and extremely precise, and I think to date the record in terms of precision has been outstanding (Rose, 2010). The discussion then turned away from the drone program, suggesting that the issue had been sufficiently resolved by Crumpton’s response.

In February 2010, PBS’s Newshour featured a segment on how military technology has reshaped warfare, especially the use of drones. Contributing editor to Wired Noah Shachtman was featured on the show, explaining that “the risks are all one-way. In today’s wars, right now, the pilot gets to do all the shooting and never gets shot at. And that creates a very different attitude than somebody who is both dealing out risk and is accepting risk” (Dretzin, Solman et. al, 2010). The segment also featured Colonel William Brandt from the U.S. Air Force, who explained the biggest issue they experience is the difficulty the sense of detachment to the aircraft and to the battlefield. Finally, the segment ended with a mention of the civilian casualties that can result, although without going into much discussion: Shachtman’s final thoughts on the
subject were, “They do take a lot of care about civilian casualties. It is very much on their mind. But there’s no way for them to really tell. All they see is the bomb going into that building, and it blowing up. They don’t necessarily see what happens afterwards. A drone can’t dig through the rubble and see what the consequences of that Hellfire missile was. It can’t” (Dretzin, Solman et al, 2010). This program continued what was beginning to be a pattern for PBS of acknowledging the regrettable civilian casualties and then explaining why drones were still the best technology.

In July 2010 The Charlie Rose Show returned again to the topic of civilian casualties caused by drone. This time the guest was Abdulkarim al-Eryani, Yemen’s former prime minister and the then-advisor to Yemen’s president. al-Eryani assessed the drones as having had a “mixed impact” because of the civilian causalities, but when asked if the United States should use drones, said “very carefully and with sufficient grand information and coordination with Yemeni authorities” (Rose, 2010). Though al-Eryani had problems with drones due to the civilian casualties, he did not say that drones should not be used, just that they should be used carefully. Once again, PBS supported the view that despite civilian casualties, drones should still be used.

In May 2010, ABC ran a segment discussing the drone program and its impact in Pakistan. The segment featured video from a Taliban commander saying “as long as the drone strikes continue, we’ll continue our attacks.” Guest Peter Singer of the Brookings Institute then added, “are we getting the leaders, but also creating more followers? And that's crucially important when you're fighting these kind of battles that aren't just about killing, they're about a broader war of ideas that's out there” (Muir, 2010). Peter Singer appeared again later in 2010, this time on a CBS segment in June in a segment discussing the remarks made by UN official Philip Alston earlier that month. Singer expressed concern that the drone program “allows us to carry out acts of war without having to go through the debates that we would have in the past”
(Couric, 2010). Though a good point to raise, Singer did not get into further specifics about what debates about war drone use allows us to circumvent, such as whether the use of drones makes decisions about war easier because of the distance drones create between operator and target. Time constraints may have prevented him or host Katie Couric from delving further into the issue, but more discussion on the types of decision making shortcuts that drone use allows would have added significantly to the quality of the segment. However, in both instances, Singer’s relationship to the Brookings Institution was disclosed without acknowledging the significant funding the Institution receives from the defense industry (Armstrong & Yax, 2013).

ABC featured one story in 2011 that addressed the cost of civilian lives with the drone program. Reporter Nick Schifrin had interviewed a Pakistani teenager who had lost an eye and a leg when a CIA missile struck his home. According to Schifrin, the teenager had lost “so much more” than that, though – the teenager was then shown saying that he had dreamed of becoming a doctor but now couldn’t even go to school. Schifrin then told viewers that this teenager ended up being killed by another drone strike shortly after returning home from an anti-drone conference. The segment then quickly featured Clive Stafford Smith, the anti-drone conference organizer, who stated that “Until we get the people of the United States and the West to see the dead children of Pakistan the same way we’d see our own dead children, we’re not gonna win this battle” (Schifrin, 2011). This program too lack a government official, and was even more diverse in its sources by including a Pakistani teen and an activist rather than a think tank researcher or journalist. In doing so, ABC put a face to the unintended victims of drone strikes and to members of the anti-drone movement. The segment was weighted much more heavily towards the victim, who did make a good news story, having lost an eye and a leg in a drone strike and speaking of broken dreams. The anti-drone activist did not get much air-time, though considering the strong
anti-drone message the story of the Pakistani teen had conveyed that may have not reduced the strength of his anti-drone message by very much.

Later, in June 2013, PBS returned to the ethical issues of the drone program with *The Charlie Rose Show* taking a long at the film *Dirty Wars*. The show included clips from the film, and Rose interviewed director Richard Rowley and producer Jeremy Scahill. Scahill also penned the book the film was based on. The intention of the film was to show what life is like for those who live in the areas affected by drone strikes. Both Rowley and Scahill expressed their disbelief that a teenager – the son of Anwar al-Awlaki – had been killed in a drone strike sanctioned by the U.S. government. According to Scahill, “the answer to that question, why this kid was killed will say a lot about the extent of how out of control our counterterrorism policy as become” (Rose, 2013c). The interview portion was brief, but Scahill’s opinion on the program was clearly negative: either the program intentionally targeted a teenager, or the targeting process is not as accurate as proclaimed.

On yet another *Charlie Rose Show* – this time in October – the ethical implications of the drone program would be discussed. This time, John Miller, formerly of the FBI and currently with CBS News, would share with host Rose that though the drone strike is not the perfect weapon, it has killed more al-Qaeda leaders than any other system. Miller acknowledged the charges levied against the drone program – that it makes more enemies than it kills, and too many civilians died – but ultimately came to the conclusion that it was the best solution to the al-Qaeda problem. Miller’s sentiments were similar to those that many with ties to the military had expressed: unwilling to disregard the efficacy of the drone program or to say that it should be dismantled, but willing to admit that the program was not perfect and that there were legitimate concerns about certain aspects of the program (Rose, 2013g). This falls in line with most of the
coverage that PBS had shown regarding the drone program: outside of the Scahill interview, most interviewees had, even while addressing the program’s flaws, not been entirely opposed to the program. PBS, the one network that should have had the freedom to produce much more critical pieces without fear of advertisers pulling dollars or undue corporate influence, had offered nothing distinctive in its coverage. This suggests that the increasing corporate funding for PBS has had the effect of transforming the network into a very similar product to its commercial competitors.

The last notable broadcast story on the ethics of the program was an investigative report in October 2013 done by CBS that found that the CIA was paying cash in Afghanistan to make the process of carrying out its operations in the region easier (Miller & Simon, 2013). Though a brief segment, it was a news story that was only covered by CBS and not by any of the other networks. The cash paying extended across military and intelligence operations, including the drone program. Knowing that the CIA was paying bribes adds an additional level to understanding the resentment of the program in the areas affected: not only are the civilians on the ground being impacted by drones in a direct way by the damage and deaths caused, but those at the top are profiting off of the process. This is significant because it was an entirely new story on ethics that had not yet been covered, and only CBS took it on. The lack of coverage for other networks may have been due to an unwillingness to damage relationships with official CIA sources. As stated earlier, the CIA has admitted to having close relationships with all major media outlets, including television networks, in order to ensure that it gets the best possible coverage, and the CIA had continued to provide a number of sources to news channels during this time frame (DiMaggio, 2010 p.117). There is also the possibility that due to the late nature
of the story airing October 27, 2013 and the end of the period of analysis for this thesis ending October 31, 2013 that perhaps the other networks had not yet picked up on the story.

Similar to cable news, broadcast news had largely characterized the civilian casualty discussion as a regrettable result of a necessary program. To reduce civilian casualties to such a pragmatic approach marginalizes the ethical considerations of the program. Civilian casualties were given the impression as unintentional mistakes – and while it would be ridiculous to say that the U.S. government deliberately targeted civilians, it would not be a stretch to question whether the high number of civilian casualties crossed the line from regrettable mistakes to negligence on the part of the United States. And yet, none of the networks were willing to go so far as to make that suggestion.

6.3 Sources Used from 2009-2013

6.3.1 Cable Network Sources

The sources were much more varied during this time frame, although the amount of coverage also significantly increased. Both official and unofficial sources were invited on as guests, although each network clearly had their favorites who were invited back multiple times. Some sources would make their way around the various networks. One such guest was Jane Meyer of The New Yorker, who had an article on the drone program published in 2010 that resulted in her appearing on a number of outlets (MSNBC, PBS). Chris Anders from the ACLU made many appearances on behalf of the ACLU across cable networks (Hayes & Reid, 2013). Mark Mazzetti also appeared multiple times across networks, and Jeremy Seahill was another common guest. Senator Rand Paul would appear across cable networks for interviews following his filibuster, and a number of relevant national security officials such as Leon Panetta would
also show up as guests on many different news shows. A list of the sources and the networks they appeared on may be found in Appendix C.

Some of the regular contributors to the cable news outlets held other titles as well. For example, Eugene Robinson is a columnist for *The Washington Post*, David Corn is Washington bureau chief for *Mother Jones*, Rula Jebreal is a *Newsweek* foreign policy analysts, and Ari Melber works at *The Nation*. All are MSNBC political analysts. Mara Liasson is a correspondent for NPR, but also works as a Fox News contributor. Charles Krauthammer appeared a number of times, and though he was identified as a “national syndicated columnist,” he is also a Fox News contributor. Steve Hayes, though identified as a senior writer for *The Weekly Standard*, is also a regular Fox News contributor. CNN, though it does have regular contributors with other titles, did not feature any such guests during this time for the stories analyzed.

Though the sources seemed quite varied by having these alternate titles, having them also be on the payroll of the networks whose shows on which they are appearing calls the level of true diversity into question. While a regular viewer for a particular network might already recognize some of the names and faces as contributors for that network, MSNBC would always acknowledge the secondary “MSNBC contributor” title, whereas guests on Fox News were typically introduced by their other work without adding “and a regular Fox News contributor.” While the political lean to both networks is generally understood and regular viewers likely gathered that certain contributors appeared very regularly on particular shows, it is still important to have that contributor status explicitly stated so that viewers understand that the relationship between the network and its guests. By being a contributor for a network, that person becomes on the payroll for that corporation and the same considerations that come into play for the anchors also apply to that contributor.
All of the networks also made use of their own in-house experts. For instance, CNN’s national security analyst Peter Bergen, legal analysts Jeff Toobin, CNN international correspondent Hala Gorani, and CNN Pentagon Correspondent Chris Lawrence would appear across CNN shows. MSNBC would use its own contributors and reach out to NBC’s as well. In the case of the white paper memo and the review of the drone strike casualties between 2010 and 2011 that had shown poor accounting of deaths, MSNBC utilized its relationship with NBC to capitalize on its scoops and would invite the relevant reporter onto MSNBC to discuss his/her findings. This had the effect of showing the same story, often with the same people across networks, which is hardly diverse (although it is cost-effective). Furthermore, designating a “Pentagon correspondent” or “national security analyst” position meant that the same person was usually featured on multiple shows on the same network, giving the same information and viewpoint. Those types of positions also encourage close relationships with official sources by having the same people cover multiple stories that involve frequent, direct contact with government institutions and the cultivation of a “golden Rolodex” of contacts.

Fox News had many instances of Fox News commentators appearing across programs. For instance, Bill O’Reilly invited another Fox News commentator, John Stossel, to contribute to the discussion on O’Reilly’s show regarding the ACLU lawsuit against the CIA in 2010. While John Stossel was intended as an oppositional voice to O’Reilly, inviting another Fox News commentator on for more Fox News channel airtime is a questionable entry for presenting diverse viewpoints. Other guests on O’Reilly’s show included attorney and Fox News anchors Megyn Kelly, Kimberly Guilfoyle and Lis Wiehl, as well as Fox News host Geraldo Rivera. The choice to use Fox News anchors and hosts to be the guests on Fox News shows to discuss the president’s use of drones, a program for which Fox News and the O’Reilly show in particular
had previously shown support, did not further the discussion of the legality or ethical uses of
drones or question the official stance on the program and government’s use of imminent threat as
rationale for targeted killings. If Fox News wants to continue to call itself a news network rather
than a purely political opinion channel, then it should include a far more diverse group of sources
and consider re-evaluating whether one’s position as a Fox News host or anchor is sufficient
background to stand-in as the national security expert on another Fox News talk show.

Official sources made up a large number of the sources used across networks. This
included both current and former government officials. In particular, there were a number of CIA
officials: Gary Berntsen, a former CIA officer, Vicki Divull, former assistant general counsel for
the CIA, Leon Panetta, former director to the CIA, John McLaughlin, the CIA’s former acting
director, Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA and NSA, and Reuel Marc Gerecht, former
Middle East Specialist at the CIA’s directorate of operation all appeared on cable news shows.
Though CIA officials offer insight into a secretive part of U.S. government, they also showed
general support for the program and did not really criticize it. The reliance on CIA officials
provides a very narrow view of national security policy and of the drone program. These are
insiders whose entire careers have been made within this organization, and are unlikely to make
harsh criticism publicly. Politicians were also frequent guests, with Senator John McCain and
Senator Rand Paul making multiple appearances. Regardless of political affiliation, no politician
came out swinging hard against the drone program, keeping his/her criticism to calls for more
transparency and oversight by Congress. Considering the ease with which Bill O’Reilly called
critics of the drone program soft on terror, it would not be surprising if many of those politicians
saw supporting the drone program as the politically smart move to make.
There was also a number of source backgrounds that were not mentioned that would have provided new context for the source’s comments. For instance, Senator Diane Feinstein was featured on MSNBC in 2013. Her third largest campaign contributor in 2012 had been drone manufacturer General Atomics (Barry, 2013). CNN military analyst General James “Spider” Marks also had industry ties that were not disclosed. NBC News counterterrorism expert Roger Cressey was used as a source, though the fact that he served as vice president with Booz Allen Hamilton, who provides services to the defense and intelligence industry, until 2013 went without mention (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 15) Michael Hayden appeared on CNN and was identified as a retired general and former CIA director. What was not mentioned was his role as a principal at the Chertoff group, a global security consulting firm (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 18). These types of relationships must be disclosed to viewers.

Even with the number of official sources used, there were still quite a few alternative sources included in this last batch. Mark Mazzetti was critical of the program and invited on many shows to discuss the problems with it. Jeremy Scahill had produced a film that looked into the Anwar al-Awlaki case and found the death of al-Awlaki’s son deeply problematic: he too was invited on to multiple shows. Jane Meyer made the rounds to discuss her negative findings about the drone program. Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the anti-war group CODE PINK, was even invited onto *The O’Reilly Factor* despite have a drastically opposing view to the drone program than host Bill O’Reilly. Including this range of voices is vital to ensuring that news coverage represents an open debate

The occasional inclusion of Pakistani voices offered a more empathetic understanding of the drone program when they appeared. Yet, despite the number of times civilian casualties were discussed, the rage Pakistanis felt against drone strikes, and the use of drones as a recruiting tool,
Pakistanis were only shown a handful of times. Far more often in the debate on the civilian casualties were official sources, who were brought on to defend collateral damage versus effective counterterrorism. In doing so, the media were able to maintain the anti-terrorism filter described by the propaganda model: yes, there were regrettable civilian deaths, but how could you not support our most effective tool against terrorism? The frequent pairing of addressing the civilian casualties aspect of the program with an official source meant that the government had an opportunity to address the issue and explain that drones are actually very precise and the best tool to minimize collateral damage.

For instance, when Jake Tapper showed an on-the-ground piece on the impact of drones in Pakistan in 2013, his coverage appeared to depict the civilian casualties in a negative way. But then, after showing the on-the-ground video, the show returned to the studio where Tapper interviewed Tommy Vietor, former national security spokesperson for the Obama administration. While this was likely done out of an attempt to present a more balanced conversation about the program, at the same time, official sources already dominate news coverage. The administration’s view is known. Alternative views, on the other hand, are not. More coverage and time to speak afforded to them provides a better balance of information to weigh against the official stance.

Think tanks would also provide a number of guests to shows: the Hoover Institution, Center for American Progress, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, Center for Social Inclusion, and Woodrow Wilson Center were all represented on cable news shows during this time. Most of the think tank guests would be found on MSNBC, who featured guests from the Hoover Institution, Center for American Progress, Center for Social Inclusion and Woodrow Wilson Center. No further information about any of the think tanks was noted with the guest,
although perhaps it should have been for some. Two of the largest donors to the Center for American Progress are Lockheed Martin and Boeing (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 33). Such a connection is worth noting if a guest from that think tank is going to talk about the drone program. CNN brought on a guest from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a neoconservative think tank that has been accused of being a source of “fear-mongering Islamophobia” and being hardcore Zionist supporters – a relevant background to know if the guest is going to be talking about counterterrorism tactics in the Middle East in predominantly Muslim countries (Walt, 2011).

On the whole, despite the increase in alternative voices during this time, the news continued to be dominated by official sources. Even the non-official sources tended to be established journalists writing for mainstream media outlets, who were often listed as contributors for the networks on whose shows they were appearing. In some cases, official sources became contributors on the networks where they had once been guests: former White House press secretary Robert Gibbs was interviewed about the secrecy of the drone program on *Up With Chris Hayes*, only to appear the next day on *The Rachel Maddow Show* and be introduced as a new MSNBC contributor (Hayes, 2013b; Maddow, 2013a). Though not “official” sources, using the same journalists as repeat guests – ones who write for mainstream publications such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* – limits the range of voices. Mainstream journalists should be included in the discussion, but panels that consist of four journalists (some of whom might be regular guests on a network) and a national security advisor, there are still a number of perspectives that are missing: academics, activists, and the civilians from the areas impacted by the drone strikes all come to mind. They were also the least represented sources. The ACLU was the only civil liberties group to make an appearance on any
of the news channels. Code PINK was the only activist group to be invited on as a guest, and provided the same spokesperson each time. Only five guests were brought on who were identified as professors. Considering that one of the primary components of the discussion for this time period was the legality of the white memo, more legal scholars could certainly have contributed to the discussion on the legality. Instead, legal analysts and government officials weighed in on the discussion.

Criticism of a government program is unlikely to happen in any real measure when the majority of the critics have ties to the government. Views held by large numbers of people – activists, scholars, and citizens – will not be heard, and in a democracy the marketplace of ideas cannot be limited to those who at the top with media insider access.

6.3.2 Broadcast Network Sources

Broadcast news featured a range of sources for its news stories, including official sources, academic sources, and industry experts. There were fewer sources with broadcast, but also fewer stories. Broadcast also relied more on its reporters whereas the format of the cable news shows as mostly talk shows meant that frequently multiple guests were invited on to the same show, and it was not uncommon for a panel to feature four or five special guests. The broadcast news networks followed a similar pattern of the cable news networks, including both official and unofficial sources but leaning more toward the use of official sources.

Broadcast news also had issues with shared sources. Just as MSNBC reached out to NBC, so too would NBC reach back to them to borrow analysts. The same problem exists here for NBC as it did for MSNBC: transferring reporters and stories back and forth means that essentially the same story gets produced with little to no variation. This does not provide viewers with a fresh take on the story, and blurs the lines between MSNBC and NBC as distinct news
providers. The broadcast channels also featured many of the same guests, as people like Jane Meyer and Mark Mazzetti made the rounds between broadcast and cable news shows. This meant that the same views and same criticisms were being made on different programs, offering little diversity even though sources like Jane Meyer and Mark Mazzetti fall outside the realm of official government sources.

Think tanks were also present: Peter Singer from the Brookings Institution, a conservative think tank, made appearances on ABC and CBS. The Brookings Institution receives millions of dollars in support from the defense industry, including from companies such as Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grum (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 25). The RAND Institute, a conservative think tank with major support from the defense industry, supplied a speaker to PBS. The majority of RAND’s budget comes from the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense and other national security agencies plus the U.S. Army and the U.S. Air Force (“How We’re Funded,” 2014). Neither think tank’s ties to the defense industry were disclosed. The Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) also supplied guests, though their appearance did not include any comment on the fact that the CFR has “a robust corporate membership that includes many of the top companies in the defense industry, including Booz Allen Hamilton, DynCorp, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northman Grup, Raytheon, Palantir. Each company paid between $30,000 and $100,000 for varying levels of access to CFR’s experts and directors” (Armstrong & Yax, 2013, p. 30). In short, there was no discernible difference between the reliance on sources for cable news and broadcast news.

This lack of viewpoint diversity is especially problematic with PBS, whose public television format means that it should be the most dedicated to providing a forum for public discussion that includes room for all voices in the community. Instead, PBS featured some of the
same journalists that had also appeared on the other news channels such as Jane Meyer and Noah Schachtman. Again, having the same journalists does not interject new perspectives into the public debate. The only activist organization to be present on PBS was the ACLU, and the same representatives as had appeared on other major networks were the guests on PBS. There were no unique guests to PBS in terms of background, and many of its guests were the exact same as on the broadcast and cable news channels. While many of these guests were highly qualified to be discussing the drone program, repeatedly using the same sources does not interject fresh perspectives into the debate and may not capture the full spectrum of views on the issue. Of all the news channels to promote a public debate in which a full range of perspectives are included, public television should be the one to represent the spectrum of American opinion and include a more diverse range of sources in its reporting.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE VISUAL COVERAGE

Utilizing the transcripts showed how the dialogue on the issue of the drone program varied across network and from cable to broadcast. However, the transcripts cannot provide the visuals that accompanied the text, which may have been significantly different across news outlets. The images and footage that accompanied the dialogue adds an additional layer of meaning to the words.

April 2013 was selected as the time frame for video clips. It came a few weeks after the CIA confirmation hearings and Senator Rand Paul filibuster, which means that continued coverage would be due more toward the perceived weight of the issue by the network and there would be fewer stories to sift through that were caught in the search filter for mentioning the word “drone” but did not involve actually discussing legal or ethical issues of the drone program. Because the text has already been covered in great detail in the last chapter, the emphasis here will be on comparing images, footage, tone of voice, and other non-text factors. These additions to news stories – images, video footage, etc. – are the components that influence whether the news piece sticks with the viewer and can influence how the viewer perceives the story. For example, video footage of destruction wrought by drones is much more compelling than an anchor sitting at a desk in the newsroom, and a mocking tone used to describe the president’s policy may influence the viewer’s interpretation. The cable and broadcast news clips will be divided by network in order to more clearly identify any common visuals across a network’s coverage. The clips covered are those that were available through the website Archives.org and may not include every news show. In particular, an episode of MSNBC’s Up With Chris Hayes from this month was found on the LexisNexis database but could not be located on this website.
7.1 Cable News Clips

The search results yielded three distinct clips for MSNBC, and one clip that was a re-airing of the same Rachel Maddow Show for a total of four clips for MSNBC. Fox News had four distinct clips, and CNN had three. For many of the clips, the networks were conducting interviews with guests, and the visuals were not as dramatic as they could have been, with the camera focused mainly on the host or the guest, and for many of the programs, few pictures or videos were integrated into the segment. However, this was not always the case, and in some instances additional video or images contributed to the interpretation of the piece.

On April 9, Rachel Maddow interviewed Mark Mazzetti, New York Times journalist, about his new book, The Way of the Knife, about the CIA drone program. The same interview aired again on April 10, making it account for two of the results for April 2013 for MSNBC.

As the transcripts examined leading up to April 2013 have shown, Rachel Maddow had on multiple occasions criticized the way the drone program was being run and questioned its legality. With Maddow’s opinion of the drone program already clearly established as negative, it is not surprising, then, that she would at times take on a mocking and sarcastic tone when discussing the program. In particular, when Maddow discussed the cover story the Yemen government had concocted for the first Yemeni drone strike victim, she sarcastically referred to the government’s claim that the victim had died with gas can as “a terrible domestic accident that killed this unfortunate soul!” (Maddow & Schmidt, 2013b).

This show was an interview, and there were not many images shown as the emphasis was on the words of Mazzetti. However, Maddow did make use of some clever visuals, such as starting the show with a graphic displayed next to her of a desert background and the word “spooky” with the “oo” in the middle made up of binoculars. From there, Maddow launched into
clips of protests in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia to underscore her claim that the CIA had been too busy chasing down drone strike targets to predict other security threats. The on-the-streets footage was certainly more powerful than only mentioning that protests had taken part in other Middle Eastern countries. The inclusion of this footage showed dramatically the level of violence and unrest that our intelligence agency had apparently missed. U.S. intelligence agencies did, in 2012, admit that they had missed the warning signs and been caught off guard by the Arab spring (“U.S. intelligence official,” 2012). The role of the CIA is to collect intelligence, not to assassinate terrorists around the world. Maddow’s implication that the reason that the CIA failed to predict the unrest in the Middle East because they had been too busy planning drone strikes is a serious indictment of the CIA’s abilities and the long-term strategic plan of the United States. Are our goals in the Middle East better served by eliminating terrorists one by one, or by promoting a more stable and democratic region? Missing the Arab Spring was a huge intelligence failure, and Maddow’s pointed criticism was only strengthened by her choice of footage of street protests to accompany it (Maddow & Schmidt, 2013b).

During the actual interview, the only break taken between shots of Maddow and Mazzetti was to show a montage of pictures of John Brennan. These pictures showed Brennan at his confirmation hearings, Brennan talking, and Brennan getting off a plane. Juxtaposed with the dialogue that was describing the confirmation hearings, the images were not anything unusual and not anything that would appear to elicit a strong reaction (Maddow & Schmidt, 2013b).

The tone of voice and the intense focus with which Maddow regarded her guest Mazzetti conveyed most of the weight of the program, rather than the supporting visuals. There were no jokes or light-hearted moments during the program. Maddow was clearly in agreement with Mazzetti, as she nodded along frequently, would agree with Mazzetti before moving on and did
not put Mazzetti on the defensive about the claims in his book. For a viewer of this program, the interview underscored the same critical points that Maddow had made previously (Maddow & Schmidt, 2013b).

MSNBC’s *NOW with Alex Wagner* on April 10 also covered Mark Mazzetti’s book. Unlike *The Rachel Maddow Show*, the program *NOW* was not an interview but rather a recap and featured more images to accompany Wagner’s comments. Though a short piece, the segment had a strong visual accompaniment. For instance, the clip showed a chart of “CIA Drone Strikes in Pakistan 2004-2013,” with the numbers written out: “Total US Strikes: 366; Total Reported Killed: 2,537-3,581; Civilians Reported Killed: 411-884; Total Reported Injured: 1,174-1,465” (Wagner, 2013). Having the chart provide the information while Wagner spoke over it made those statistics more salient than had Wagner simply listed a series of statistics with large numbers to her audience. This segment also featured side-by-side clips of John Brennan at his confirmation hearing and Senator Paul at his filibuster without audio, while Wagner spoke over the clips. This video provided a more interesting visual than simply Wagner talking but did not contribute anything dramatic. Wagner’s tone took on a mocking quality as she got the Paul’s filibuster, which she described as an “old timey film filibuster” and a stunt she felt detracted from the real issues at hand (Wagner, 2013).

Wagner also played a clip of President Obama clarifying that he didn’t believe the president has the authority to do whatever he or she wants “under the guise of counterterrorism” (Wagner, 2013). Wagner’s tone was aggressive throughout the segment, indicating her negative attitude towards the program and the administration’s handling of it. The tone of the piece was further underscored by the ironic choice to use a clip of Obama saying that he didn’t believe he had the authority to do whatever he wants – even as Wagner made it clear that she felt there were
legal problems about the program, implying that despite Obama’s statements, his actions showed that he did feel he had the authority to do what he deemed necessary with the drone program.

The last two clips from MSNBC came on April 23. On Morning Joe, Jeremy Scahill, author of Dirty Wars, a book that covered the CIA drone program, was the featured guest. A number of interesting visuals accompanied Scahill’s interview. When Scahill began discussing the Anwar al-Awlaki case, first a headshot of al-Awlaki was shown – not an unusual choice. Next, though, an old picture of al-Awlaki with his son as a baby was shown as Scahill began talking about how al-Awlaki’s sixteen-year-old son had been killed in a drone strike shortly after his father’s death. The baby picture was followed by a picture of the sixteen-year-old smiling into the camera. The choice of including these baby pictures showed a more human side of the victims of drone strikes, and the youthful teenage picture drove home just how young al-Awlaki’s son had been at the time of his death. Throughout the interview, other images related to Scahill’s book and the documentary that had come out of it were shown. Two pictures of Scahill somewhere in the Middle East were shown – one was just Scahill and the other was Scahill with some unidentified people. In that second picture, a man’s chest with ammunition strapped to it was featured prominently in the background behind Scahill – it was unclear if this was a soldier, a terrorist, or some other militant behind Scahill, but had the impact of conveying that Scahill had been in a place that was very much an active conflict zone (“Morning Joe,” 2013).

There was also a short clip of footage from the related documentary Dirty War that was played without sound while Scahill continued to participate in the interview. The very quick montage of pictures shown in that clip gave the impression of war, destruction, and fear through images such as a helicopter circulating, night vision footage of a soldier breaking down a door and a blindfolded man, destroyed buildings, and U.S. soldiers walking around in full gear
somewhere in the Middle East. As with the other interviews on MSNBC, the tone was quite serious for the interview. However, though the hosts appeared to be convinced by Scahill’s arguments, their tone was not nearly as pointedly critical of the administration as Wagner or Maddow had been earlier on MSNBC (“Morning Joe,” 2013). This may have been due to the show’s format as a morning talk show, where more light-hearted, entertaining fare is usually presented for morning viewers than the content on the evening news.

The final clip from MSNBC on the subject of the drone program came from The Cycle. This featured all of the many MSNBC anchors who contribute to The Cycle as well as guests Dan Klaidman from Newsweek and The Daily Beast and NBC chief correspondent Richard Engel. This program was nearly entirely “talking heads,” with the panelists apparently not in the same place though all were seated in front of a typical television newsroom background. The only extra footage that was included in this program were stock footage of drones taking off, landing and in-air, stock footage of the Capitol building, a clip of Obama speaking at his most recent State of the Union address, and a video-only clip of a senator giving a speech. The majority of the program was straight-on shots of each of the commentators. As far as the commentators, despite the content of their statements, their demeanors were focused and serious, but their tone of voice and facial expressions did not give away any deeper meanings to their statements. Neither the guests nor hosts became incredibly worked up, and unlike Rachel Maddow and Alex Wagner, no one took on a mocking tone when discussing the program (“The Cycle,” 2013). The Cycle is more of a news program than the opinion-based Rachel Maddow Show and NOW with Alex Wagner, and the anchors on The Cycle likely felt more of an obligation to keep their opinions in check for the duration of the program.
The program also included images of two quotes in addition to the ongoing discussion between the panelists. The first was a quote from Klaidman’s recent book on counterterrorism: “the president is not a robotic killing machine. The choices he faces are brutally difficult, and he has struggled with them – sometimes turning them over in his mind again and again.” The second, appearing towards the end of the program, was a quote from the Department of Defense’s task force report on the role of autonomy of department of defense systems: “as a result, over 50 countries have purchased unmanned surveillance vehicles, and the international market for the technology is very robust” (“The Cycle,” 2013) By emphasizing these quotes in addition to the hosts’ comments, The Cycle was able to highlight certain points to the audience. In this case, they chose to underscore the difficulty of these decisions for the president and the fact that this is a technology that is rapidly being adopted by countries outside of the United States. However, since The Cycle relied largely on talking heads in boxes (at one point, there were six different heads shown on the screen), the visual impact was not as strong, and constantly switching hosts with different questions made the segment a bit disjointed to watch and detracted somewhat from what the guests had to say, as so many MSNBC hosts took the screen. The format of the show was sensory overkill, with the MSNBC ticker and social media icons constantly on the screen and continually switching between hosts and guests. Though the content of the story brought up good points, this particular show seemed designed to quickly pull in an audience with a short attention span rather than engage a viewer on the issue for an in-depth analysis. For this type of news story, though, a lengthier analysis would likely benefit the viewer much more as this already short segment was about one-half MSNBC host comments and questions rather than actual information from the guests.
CNN had much more dramatic visuals, including a special feature on *The Lead with Jake Tapper* that was filmed on the ground in Pakistan and featured interviews with Pakistanis and footage from inside a jihadist school. The program’s premise that drone strikes have the unintended effect of creating more terrorists in the areas where these strikes are launched was made much more effective by showing footage of the people impacted. This included shots within schools in Pakistan, showing the boys who are the recruiting targets for the Taliban and speaking with a female teacher, whose comments about the drones strikes increasing the influence of the Taliban were made even more salient by her refusal to show her face on camera for fear of reprisal. An interview with Karim Khan, a Pakistani man whose brother had been killed, was interspersed with an image of his dead brother prepared for burial. There was also footage of Pakistani men wandering the scene after a drone strike and of a Taliban training camp where men practiced shooting guns. This cut to a destroyed building that had been hit by a drone strike, killing nine Taliban members, followed by a scene of mass Taliban graves. Comments from an attorney representing the families of drone strike victims and a former Pakistan prime minister were also included in this special feature. This special feature was followed by the rest of *The Lead With Jake Tapper* as an in-studio program, with host Jake Tapper interviewing Tommy Vietor, the former national security spokesman for the Obama administration. The lead-in footage of the Taliban camps in Pakistan made Vietor’s attempt to lessen the claim that drone strikes create terrorists by noting, “I think it is a fact that any time you do a military operation whether with a drone or any other means you’re going to potentially sow frustration with the population,“ seem like less of an acknowledgement of a real potential downside to drones and more like a politically astute dodging of the question. Furthermore, the anger expressed by Khan makes an even stronger statement when coupled with images of full Taliban camps. That being
said, the images presented could be used in support of two different arguments: that the drone strikes are worsening the situation in Pakistan and should be removed – or, that they are effective (evidenced by the mass Taliban graves), and if there are increases in recruiting, then more drone strikes should be used (Tapper, Robertson et. al, 2013b). Though the reporters in this instance appeared to be leaning toward the argument that drone strikes are too useful of a recruiting tool for the Taliban for the United States to be using them extensively, it would be also not be unreasonable if a viewer left the programming thinking that drone strikes are more useful to us than the Taliban.

The other two clips for CNN for April came from The Situation Room, with an interview between CNN’s Wolf Blitzer and New York Times journalist and author Mark Mazzetti that aired twice. This was less visually impactful than the Jake Tapper piece, as it was Mazzetti standing at the table with Blitzer discussing the program. Neither got especially worked up over the issue though their tone was quite serious, and the only visual accompaniment to the discussion was a series of still images of drones in the background and one brief clip of President Obama walking alone across the White House grounds. The lack of exciting visuals made the interview feel less important, as though it was only a filler piece between larger stories on the program. The fact that Blitzer and Mazzetti both remained standing further contributed to the sense that this was not an important piece, as Mazzetti wouldn’t even be there long enough to justify taking a seat. This does not convey the weight of the issues with the drone program, and altogether it created a forgettable interview for what should be an important subject to viewers (“The Situation Room,” 2013).

The Fox News clip from Happening Now on April 8 featured an interview with retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Martha McSally giving her thoughts on the legality of the drone
program. This interview featured just McSally and host Jenna Lee. The interview was brief, only three minutes in length. McSally’s tone was mostly serious, though she did seem to find the term drone humorous as she felt it implied far less of a connection to the operation of the vehicle than is actually present. Her tone then immediately shifted back to serious as she discussed the actual process of operating the drone and that she did feel that the program was in fact legal (“Happening Now,” 2013). No images or video clips accompanied the interview.

Almost all of the cable news shows were in-studio interviews. These are much less costly to produce, but are also less engaging than dramatic on-the-scenes footage. Because Fox News and MSNBC focus nearly entirely on talk shows and political punditry rather than straight news, their clips were in line with that was expected by being interviews. CNN does more reporting, though it too has a significant number of talk shows, and the footage of a CNN reporter in Pakistan was not unusual for the network. CNN’s Jake Tapper, whose program produced the news video, had around this time begun to speak more on the cost of the program in terms of civilian deaths. Combing this example of the visuals for his program shows that Tapper’s visuals matched up with his rhetoric, making a much more powerful program for his viewers regarding civilian casualties caused by the drone program.

MSNBC’s visual coverage also matched up to what its hosts had been saying around this time as well. Maddow had been critical of the program, and she conveyed that in her interview with Mazzetti. The interview with Scahill on Morning Joe had stronger visuals – including pictures of Anwar al-Awlaki with his infant son and wartime clips from Scahill’s documentary – but the hosts seemed vaguely uncomfortable the whole time, as if perhaps this news story was too serious for a morning television news show. Host Joe Scarborough’s conservative politics may have also influenced his decision to not dig too deeply, as Morning Joe is, after all, a talk
show on liberal MSNBC and viewers likely subscribe to the political views espoused by the network.

As for Fox News, there were very limited visuals – only the host and guest, both seated on stools in the studio with a plain background. However, the tone of guest McSally’s voice demonstrated the strength of her convictions about supporting the drone program and verged on laughing when she mentioned how the word drone does not convey the relationship between pilot and plane. The positive tone of voice continued to support Fox News’ established pattern of supporting the drone program, although the program itself may have been forgettable to viewers.

7.2 Broadcast News Clips

Only PBS and ABC had clips during the month of April 2013. ABC’s clip was quite brief (only two minutes long) and aired a total of three times. PBS had two special programs on the topic air during April 2013 that were much longer interviews. NBC and CBS did not air any relevant news clips.

For PBS, the clips included an episode of The Charlie Rose Show from April 9, 2013. This program featured an interview between host Charlie Rose and author Mark Mazzetti. The format of The Charlie Rose Show--focusing on only a few guests per episode--allows Rose to delve more deeply into the issues brought up by his guests. In this instance, Rose spent 27 minutes of his hour-long show interviewing Mazzetti. This meant that Mazzetti had the opportunity to explain in detail his new book, The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth, about the CIA drone program. The visuals for this show, or rather the lack thereof, put the emphasis on Mazzetti’s words. Rose was generally off-screen throughout the interview, with the camera focused on Mazzetti. The background was simply black. No video footage or photographs accompanied Mazzetti’s words. There was one clip
played, of General Stan McChrystal from an earlier appearance McChrystal had made on *The Charlie Rose Show*. This clip meant that host Charlie Rose did not have to paraphrase McChrystal’s comments and that the viewer was able to get the comments with the exact tone and facial expression with which McChrystal had delivered them. However, Mazzetti’s words and face made up the overwhelming majority of his time on-screen. This had the effect of making the show all about Mazzetti’s statements, which were critical of the program and its lack of transparency, and gave little indication about how the editors of that particular program may have felt about the drone program (Rose, 2013d).

The other PBS program that aired a feature on the drone program was *Newshour*. This episode of *Newshour* featured an interview with Mark Mazzetti as well. Similar to *The Charlie Rose Show*, the interview format meant that the camera focused exclusively on Mazzetti with a *Newshour* logo background. There were no additional video footage or images accompanying Mazzetti’s interview. Again, the emphasis was on Mazzetti’s words and the lack of additional content made the tone of the piece entirely Mazzetti’s. As he had been on *The Charlie Rose Show*, Mazzetti was again critical of the program, laying out points of concern without becoming emotional or explicitly laying judgment on the program or government. And, as on *The Charlie Rose Show*, the host remained off-screen for the duration of the interview (Brown, de Sam Lazaro e. al., 2013b).

Interview format shows are cheaper to produce, and PBS also skipped the type of fancy graphics package that the cable news channels used to show charts and images. The simple setting of Mazzetti in front of a *NewHour* logo was also likely at least in part a budgetary decision. With this lack of extras, *NewsHour* can hardly be accused of sensationalism. It would be believable, though, for *NewsHour* to be occasionally accused of being boring. A lengthy
interview with very little to consider other than the guest could be a turn-off to some audience members. Though Mazzetti was engaged in the interview and the content was thought-provoking, the lack of extra visual reinforcement could very believably cause some of the show’s audience to lose interest and change the channel.

The ABC news clip that discussed drones was a very brief (two minute) segment on a protest against drones that the Answer Coalition had held in San Francisco. This very short clip showed a good-sized turnout for the protest and included a comment from Answer Coalition member Maza Majidi who explained why they were protesting. Majidi gave a clear, coherent answer, was wearing an Answer Coalition t-shirt and overall appeared to be a fair choice to give comment on the protest. There was no additional footage incorporated into this segment that might have added to why the protestors were demonstrating. This same footage would be aired two more times on ABC for a total of three on-air showings. There was no particular slant taken by ABC for the story, and there was no extra discussion of the drone program during any of the instances in which the clip appeared. Of all the clips discussed, this was perhaps the most basic news oriented one – simply laying out that a protest had occurred, providing some short commentary from the anchor giving context, and giving one of the protestors a moment to give his message on-camera (“ABC 7 News,” 2013).

The conclusions that can be drawn from the coverage reviewed here is that the cable news networks are much more interested in capturing viewers. The MSNBC and CNN clips in particular were designed to be engaging and to grab viewers, at least for a few minutes with the shorter clips. The PBS program, on the other hand, did not make such an attempt to grab viewers through its visuals. Instead, it presented a visually bland interview with the assumption that viewers are watching for the content, not the special effects. The shorter clips from ABC and Fox
News made it a bit more difficult to analyze, but ABC was simply reporting the news in a straightforward, factual way. Though short, ABC presented actual news, showing footage of an anti-drone rally, giving some context and quickly getting a comment from one of the protestors. Fox News, on the other hand, spent three minutes discussing former Air Force Colonel McSally’s opinions on whether the drone program was legal even though McSally has no legal background, and did not provide anything new or of real substance in the segment. When there are 24-hours in a news cycle, wasting a few minutes here and there seems insignificant.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1. Broadcast and Cable News Coverage Comparison

Comparing the broadcast and news coverage was far more difficult than had been imagined for this project: while cable news coverage wins the numbers game, broadcast news coverage covered stories that weren’t seen on cable news, and the biggest scoop of the program’s coverage came from broadcast network NBC. The need to make news profitable is responsible for a style of programming on 24-hour news channels that features mostly talk shows and opinion-based discussion shows.

The stories that aired on broadcast news but not on cable news were ones that, according to the propaganda model, a corporately owned news channel might be wary to cover. This included the UN’s 2010 report on the drone program, which was critical of the U.S. government. Rather than maintain that the government’s actions were right, especially under the guise of counterterrorism efforts, and should be supported, CBS and ABC both covered the unflattering details. NBC was the only network to break the white memo leak. None of the cable news networks presented the same type of scoop on anything related to the drone program. CBS ran the story on the drone manufacturers donating huge sums of money to congresspersons. Though limited, the fact that any coverage of these topics happened at all on the broadcast news networks still puts broadcast ahead of cable in terms of providing some stories that deviated from the small established spectrum of debate.

For both cable news and broadcast news, though, the debate itself was driven in large part by the discussion of the drone program by Washington’s political elite. The most discussion occurred with the John Brennon confirmation hearings and Senator Rand Paul’s filibuster in
early 2013. Prior to then, coverage had been sporadic – occasionally appearing when a confirmed drone strike had a greater impact than anticipated, such as when the American citizen was killed in Yemen in 2011. However, these were far shorter lived increases in coverage than what was observed in 2013. Though coverage dropped off after May 2013, there were still a number of stories that occurred through the end of October 2013. The drone program was not completely forgotten or set aside as a news story, though it was certainly overshadowed by other news stories. In particular, the NSA spying scandal that broke in the summer 2013 had an impact as it became the predominant national security news story and drones took a back seat in the discussion of national security policies. Once again, as Washington moved on, so did the news networks. The problems with the drone program had not been resolved, but a new news story had taken over as the talk of the Hill.

Both broadcast and network news relied heavily on official sources for their coverage. Drones are a military and national security issue: government sources are very much to be expected. However, it is when they dominate the dialogue that the function of the news media as a marketplace of ideas and different viewpoints becomes questionable.

The propaganda model seems apparent in a number of ways in the coverage analyzed. The fact that the drone program only became a debate when it became a contentious issue for the elite level of politicians and policymakers in Washington indicates that only the opinions of the political elite matter when it comes to driving a national conversation on what policy issues matter. The number of official sources, and how often their responses were accepted as good enough, especially during the early part of the drone program, further shows the power given to those in Washington to dictate discussion. Both are troubling when it comes to the role journalism is supposed to play in a democracy of promoting healthy debate with a range of
perspectives. PBS offered a very direct example of how sponsorship dollars can call coverage into question, as its coverage following the Lockheed Martin-sponsored documentary Rise of the Drones included a number of military and industry sources and none that were anti-drone. The other networks that were able to run some of the more controversial stories such as the General Atomics campaign donations were the broadcast news channels. While they still appeared to share many of the same characteristics of the cable news coverage, broadcast news – perhaps because ratings drive them into less of a frenzy than cable news, with viewers remaining steady according to the 2013 State of the Media Report – might be better able to weather fluctuations from coverage that strays from the networks’ established format, allowing them to pursue more of what they consider newsworthy and less of what they consider necessary for the network (Jurkowitz, Hitlin et. al., 2013).

The propaganda model also suggests that coverage will stick to policy and justify military involvement. Fox News very clearly supported the drone program throughout, as Bill O’Reilly would frequently bring it up as the most effective antiterrorism tool the United States had and to not support it was to be against American counterterrorism efforts. The civilian casualties was the most frequently discussed ethical issue, and nearly every story ended with a pragmatic view that sometimes tough decisions need to be made for national security and counterterrorism. The legal issues were only a major news issue in how they affected Americans, who were never the ones going to be targeted by drones in a café on Main Street, USA. Those are the types of legal discussions that do not actually change anything within the program, because that type of threat was never part of the program. Americans were never going to be targeted within the United States and have an infinitesimal chance of being targeted outside of the United States. Instead, the legality conversations that could have actually been meaningful in terms of generating
change – such as international law, violating sovereignty, constitutionality – made up a very small part of the overall coverage.

Throughout the drone debate at the beginning of 2013, it was cited by many of the news programs that most Americans support drone use, despite acknowledgements that this was a largely secretive program. The idea of “manufacturing consent” comes into play here – if most Americans are unaware of the CIA drone program, considering the program’s secrecy and the lack of coverage prior to 2013, then do most Americans really support drone use? Or is this the result of an uninformed American public, who hear from pundits like O’Reilly that this is the most effective tool against terrorism we have, and from CNN that the CIA has the right to go after al Qaeda operatives where they are, regardless of sovereignty issues or American citizenship?

The lack of truly distinct differences in coverage between broadcast and cable news is likely due to broadcast and cable news not really being run all that differently. Even though broadcast news has a special obligation to serve the public interest, they are also part of larger corporate structures who demand profitable news operations. PBS, though it has an even more clearly defined purpose of serving the public, is also not immune from these pressures as it relies on outside funding to supports it operations. No one other than CBS addressed the money involved in the drone industry, and even for CBS that was just one story in 2006. Drones represent a significant part of government defense spending. Information that portrays drones as being used for illegal purposes (and especially as tools for killing Americans without due process) and that would reduce public support for the use of drones is not conducive the interests of those manufacturing drones. The federal government has awarded at least $12 billion in contracts for drones and their supplies and maintenance since 2005. Drone manufacturers, for
their part, have made nearly $1 million in campaign contributions to congresspersons between 2009 and 2012. The Unmanned Systems Caucus, which advocates for drones, includes eight members who also sit on the House Committee on Appropriations (Replogle, 2012). The infusion of defense industry dollars into Congress makes reliance on official sources even more suspect. Senator Diane Feinstein, who appeared on MSNBC’s *Hardball* to discuss the drone debate following Senator Rand Paul’s filibuster, is one of the top recipients of campaign donations from drone manufacturer General Atomics: General Atomics was Feinstein’s third largest campaign contributor in 2012 (Barry, 2013). This was not disclosed on the program. Other guests with industry ties such as Roger Cressey and General James “Spider” Marks” would have their backgrounds left at their official government titles and not their private sector activities. Similarly, the funding for think tanks was never disclosed, even when it was relevant. To have these sources appearing as experts without disclosing their industry ties is a violation of public trust, and a failing on the part of news media. To have those with a vested interest in the drone program participate in the debate without informing the audience of their ties does not promote a true, healthy discourse on the topic. The fact that network analysts such as Cressey and Marks can be former government officials, work in the private sector for the defense industry and appear on network television to give their opinion as experts only serves to underscore the idea that the close ties between the defense industry and media companies is problematic. Network analysts who draw a significant portion of their income from both a news outlet and the defense industry cannot report on military and national security issues without a conflict of interest. Instead, it calls into question whether the analysis and reporting shown on news networks is the result of real journalism or furthering the military-industrial complex agenda. The fact that these types of omissions happened on both broadcast and cable, the same
range of issues were discussed, and many of the same sources used on both suggests that despite the idea that broadcast is in the public interest, it is not immune to the same political and economic pressures that influence cable news.

8.2. Limitations of Study

Because the nature of the analysis in this thesis meant that far more discussion based shows – the types that dominate cable news networks – were included, this also had the impact of including far more opinion in the analysis. Thus, even while MSNBC and Fox News ran a number of stories on the drone program, much of their programming focused on the opinions of the hosts – Rachel Maddow and Chris Hayes for MSNBC, and Bill O’Reilly for Fox News. This is not to say that there were no facts presented on their shows, but that the analysis provided for the audience was usually clearly colored by the host’s opinion.

With 24-hour news channels, there is far more time to devote to analysis of issues. This is where pundits come in: to provide additional expert knowledge and analysis to news events. Pundits aren’t just the regular hosts and anchors. Paid contributors are featured regularly as special analysts on cable news. In particular, military analysts – often retired military officers – were added to the payroll of many news channels right around the start of the 2003 Iraq War (Tugend, 2003). However, this type of paid expert on hand has been criticized by journalists as “checkbook journalism,” restricting debate and leading to overhyped stories (Tugend, 2003). For the coverage analyzed here, the reliance on regular contributors did show the same names appearing multiple times – which meant the same views being conveyed repeatedly. This form of limitation on debate is something that did not appear until the 24-hour news network and is directly attributable to a news structure in which channels are competing against each other for viewers 24 hours out of the day. Having the best analysis available can help garner those
viewers, and having big names associated with the contributors (for instance, some like former deputy director for intelligence John McLaughlin, who was a CNN national security analyst during the 2003 Iraq War) is yet another draw – although that can mean limiting the debate to those whose title would mean something to the audience. All of the regular contributors on the cable news networks who were not strictly network analysts or hosts were either former government, military, or associated with a mainstream media publication that would garner immediate recognition. This drive to get the best pundits who can attract the most viewers for the least cost puts a higher value on profit returned than on the news itself.

Because this analysis focused heavily on the actual discussion, this meant that interviews and discussion shows weighed more into this thesis than strictly news shows. This is a significant reason why there were so many more instances of cable news programs that were discussed within this thesis than broadcast news network as there are simply more of those types of shows aired on cable news networks. When it came down to the most commonly covered topics within the legal and ethical issues (e.g., the legality of targeting American citizens, civilian casualties), there were always more instances of coverage on cable news networks than broadcast news networks. This is largely explained by cable news networks having far more screen time of the types of program that would offer more detail on the issue – discussion and talk shows.

8.3. Where Do We Go From Here

The fact that coverage increased during 2013 is a promising sign that the drone debate is beginning to receive the attention that it deserves. However, the fact that it only truly became a matter of public debate once Congress began to take issue with the drone program is troubling. It had been reported on prior to 2013, yet no network grabbed on to the story. Once coverage began, it focused on a limited number of issues regarding the drone program and ignored some
of the larger ones. The use of drones against Americans is not largest legal issue with the drone program, yet that was the direction the debate took after the “white paper” leak. The deaths of civilians was the only ethical issue to receive real attention from the news media, and even that was generally spun in a pragmatic way that allowed for continued support of the drone program.

There were some activist voices included, and some Pakistani and Yemeni voices as well. These are good inclusions to the news because they can speak with authority on the conditions of living under drone strikes and provide for a richer discussion on the topic. However, these voices were frequently repetitions: Farea al-Muslimi, Medea Benjamin, and Hini Shamsi were alternative voices, yet they were used multiple times rather than reaching out to include others in their same categories of Yemeni civilian, anti-drone activist and civil liberties activist, respectively. Future coverage should strive to include more voices such as theirs in order to present a fuller spectrum of debate.

The American public cannot fully consent to their government undertaking something like the drone program unless the news media fulfill their democratic obligation to provide information and serve as a marketplace of ideas in which the drone program can be debated. The military-industrial complex benefits from an American public kept in the dark about the specifics of its activities. The news media must keep a critical eye on their activities and report back to the public. Yet, so long as the military-industrial complex shares close connections to a corporately owned news media, there remain difficulties in ensuring that the news makes it out without undue influence from industry insiders.

With respect to this, news outlets must ensure that they disclose industry ties for all sources. More voices must be included in the future debate. The commercial interests of cable news and even broadcast news are difficult influences to extract due to their corporate
ownership, but when it comes to public television, there is a relatively easy way to ensure that there is no conflict of interest when it comes to programming: provide sufficient funding so that PBS does not have to turn to a drone manufacturer to underwrite their documentary on drones.

There are still more discussion to be had on the future of the U.S. drone program, but if the increased quantity and quality of the coverage continues, more satisfactory answers to questions like who makes the decisions and by what criteria, how U.S. citizens should be treated under this program, and the extent to which the drone program has damaged the U.S. image abroad, may be found.
APPENDIX A

NEWS COVERAGE BREAKDOWN 2002-2008

Table 1. Cables News Coverage of Legal/Ethical Implications of the CIA Drone Program, 2002-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNN</th>
<th>Fox News</th>
<th>MSNBC</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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Table 2. Broadcast News Coverage of Legal/Ethical Implications of the CIA Drone Program, 2002-2008

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<th>NBC</th>
<th>PBS</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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### Table 3. Cable News Coverage of Legal/Ethical Implications of the CIA Drone Program 2009-2013

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<th>MSNBC</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
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### Table 4. Broadcast News Coverage of Legal/Ethical Implications of the CIA Drone Program 2009-2013

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>CBS</th>
<th>NBC</th>
<th>PBS</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
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# APPENDIX C

## LIST OF ALL SOURCES BY YEAR/TYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Citation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Baer, Robert</td>
<td>Former CIA Operative</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, McIntyre &amp; Wallace, 2002; Blitzer, McIntyre &amp; Savidge, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clark, Wesley</td>
<td>Retired General; Former NATO Supreme Commander</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, McIntyre &amp; Wallace, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harman, Jane</td>
<td>Representative (D-CA), Head of the House Intelligence Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blitzer, McIntyre &amp; Savidge, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shepered, Don</td>
<td>Ret. Major General (U.S. Air Force); CNN Military Analyst</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Costello, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woosley, James</td>
<td>Former CIA Director</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer &amp; Morton, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Hadley, Stephen</td>
<td>National Security Advisor</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer &amp; McLaughlin, 2005; Blitzer, Robinson et. al, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Bayh, Even</td>
<td>Senator (D-IN)</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, Bergen et. al., 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lott, Trent</td>
<td>Senator (R-MS)</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, Bergen et. al., 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McLaughlin, John</td>
<td>Former Deputy Director for Intelligence; CNN National Security Analyst</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, Bash et. al., 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title/Position</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Source/Authors</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Zardari, Asif Ali</td>
<td>President of Pakistan</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Smith, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divull, Vicki</td>
<td>Former Assistant General Counsel for the CIA</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Amanpour, Niell et. al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghani, Ashraf</td>
<td>Former Finance Minister of Pakistan; Former Adviser to President of Pakistan Karzai</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Rose, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masood, Talat</td>
<td>General; Former Pakistani Ministry of Defense Official</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Amanpour, Niell et. al., 2009</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rumsfeld, Donald</td>
<td>Former Secretary of Defense</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Kilmeade, 2009</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Qureshi, Shah Mahmood</td>
<td>Foreign Minister of Pakistan</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Brown, Ifill et. al., 2009</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Al-Eryani, Abdulkarim</td>
<td>Advisor to Yemen’s President; Former Prime Minister of Yemen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alson, Philip</td>
<td>UN official</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Couric, 2010</td>
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<td>Berntsen, Gary</td>
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<td>CNN</td>
<td>Roberts &amp; Chetry, 2010</td>
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<td>PBS</td>
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<td>Cumpton, Henry</td>
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<td>PBS</td>
<td>Rose, 2010</td>
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<td>McGurk, Brett</td>
<td>National security council staffer for Presidents Bush and Obama</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, 2010</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Panetta, Leon</td>
<td>Director of the CIA</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Tapper, 2010</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peters, Ralph</td>
<td>Lt Col.; Fox News strategic analyst</td>
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<td>Former Governor of New Mexico</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Matthews, 2011</td>
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<td>Paul, Ron</td>
<td>Republican Presidential Candidate</td>
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<td>Matthews, 2011</td>
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<td>Congressman</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Baldwin et. al., 2012</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lt. Colonel and Fox News Strategic Analyst</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Ingraham &amp; Peters, 2012</td>
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<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Bash, Jeremy</td>
<td>Former chief of staff for Defense Secretary Leon Panetta; founder and managing director of Beacon Global Strategies, a national defense advisory firm</td>
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<td>PBS</td>
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<td>CNN</td>
<td>Costello, Cabrera et. al., 2013</td>
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<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Brzezinski &amp; Gregory, 2013</td>
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<td>NBC</td>
<td>Gregory &amp; Isikoff, 2013</td>
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<td>Ellison, Keith</td>
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<td>CNN, ABC and MSNBC</td>
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<td>Faust, Joshua</td>
<td>Former contracted defense analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>Senator (D-CA); chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee</td>
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<td>Gibbs, Richard</td>
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<td>Former Speaker of the House</td>
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<td>Grenier, Robert</td>
<td>Former CIA counterterrorism chief</td>
<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Haas, Richard</td>
<td>Former top national security official under both presidents Bush; president of</td>
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<td>Former Congresswoman; director of the Woodrow Wilson Center</td>
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<td>Former director of the CIA and NSA; principle with global security advisory</td>
<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Jacobs, Jack</td>
<td>Colonel; MSNBC Military Analyst</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>Johnson, Jeh</td>
<td>Former Pentagon general counsel</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>Jones, Seth</td>
<td>Worked for the commander of U.S. special forces in Afghanistan from 2009 to</td>
<td>PBS</td>
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<td>2011, currently senior political scientist at RAND corporation</td>
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<td>Kilcullen, David</td>
<td>Former senior advisor to General David Petraeus in Iraq and special advisor</td>
<td>PBS</td>
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<td>Skinner, Kiron</td>
<td>Former foreign policy advisor to Mitt Romney and director of the Center for International Relations and Politics at Carnegie Mellon University and fellow at the Hoover Institution</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Wasserman Shultz, Debbie</td>
<td>Congresswoman, chair of the Democratic National Convention</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<td>West, Allen</td>
<td>Former congressman (R-FL)</td>
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<td>Senator (D-OR); member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence</td>
<td>MSNBC, CNN, NBC</td>
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### Network Analysts/Contributors

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<td>2005</td>
<td>Priest, Dana</td>
<td>NBC News National Security Analyst; <em>Washington Post</em> reportor</td>
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<td>NBC News terrorism analyst</td>
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<td>Guilfoyle, Kimberly</td>
<td>Fox News Legal Analyst</td>
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<td>Weihl, Lisa</td>
<td>Fox News Legal Analyst</td>
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<td>Fox News Anchor</td>
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<td>Rivera, Geraldo</td>
<td>Fox News Host</td>
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<td>Fox News contributor</td>
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<td>Corn, David</td>
<td>MSNBC Political Analyst ; Washington bureau chief for <em>Mother Jones</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bacon, Perry</td>
<td>MSNBC contributor and political editor for MSNBC sister site, Grio.com</td>
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<td>Beckel, Bob</td>
<td>Fox News Host</td>
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<td>Benjamin, Medea</td>
<td>Code PINK activist and co-founder</td>
<td>CNN and Fox</td>
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<td>Fineman, Howard</td>
<td>NBC News political analyst and editorial director of “The Huffington Post”</td>
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<td>Hostin, Sunny</td>
<td>CNN Legal Analyst</td>
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<td>Jebreal, Rula</td>
<td>MSNBC Contributor; <em>Newsweek</em> foreign policy analyst</td>
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<td>Krauthammer, Charles</td>
<td>Fox News Contributor; syndicated columnist</td>
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<td>Liasson, Mara</td>
<td>Fox News Contributor; NPR national political correspondent</td>
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<td>Melber, Ari</td>
<td>MSNBC Contributor; journalist at <em>The Nation</em></td>
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<td>Powers, Kirsten</td>
<td>Fox political analyst</td>
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<td>Reagan, Ron</td>
<td>MSNBC Political Analyst</td>
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<td>Robinson, Eugene</td>
<td>MSNBC Political Analyst ; Columnist for <em>The Washington Post</em></td>
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<td>Scarborough, Joe</td>
<td>MSNBC reporter</td>
<td>NBC</td>
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<td>Williams, Juan</td>
<td>Fox News Political Analyst</td>
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<td>Al-Muslimi, Faria</td>
<td>Yemeni student</td>
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### Activist/Local

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<td>Beinart, Peter</td>
<td><em>The Daily Beast</em> journalist</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<td>Gigot, Paul</td>
<td><em>The Wall Street Journal</em> journalist</td>
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<td>Meyer, Jane</td>
<td><em>The New Yorker</em> journalist</td>
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<td><em>New York Times</em> reporter</td>
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<td>Salam, Reiham</td>
<td><em>The Daily Beast</em> journalist</td>
<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Schactman, Noah</td>
<td>Contributing editor to <em>Wired</em></td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>Marshall, Josh</td>
<td>Founder and Editor of <em>Talking Points Memo</em></td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Matthews, 2011</td>
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<td>Stengal, Richard</td>
<td>Editor-in-chief of <em>Time</em> magazine</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Amanpour, 2011</td>
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<td>Editor at <em>Wired</em> magazine</td>
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<td>Editor-in-Chief of <em>The Daily Download</em></td>
<td>CNN</td>
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<td>Chandrasekaran, Rajiv</td>
<td>Senior correspondent and associate editor at <em>The Washington Post</em></td>
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<td>Senior editor at the <em>Daily Beast</em>’s Middle East open blog, “Open Zion”</td>
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<td>Journalist at <em>The New York Times</em></td>
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<td>Syndicated columnist and radio show host</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Shamsi, Hina</td>
<td>ACLU lawyer</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Amanpour, 2012</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Ackpar, Shazed</td>
<td>Human rights lawyer</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Anders, Chris</td>
<td>Senior legislative council with the ACLU</td>
<td>MSNBC and PBS</td>
<td>Brown, Ifill &amp; Sreenivasan, 2013; Hayes &amp; Reid, 2013</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jaffer, Jameel</td>
<td>ACLU Deputy Legal Director</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Costello, Gosk et. al., 2013</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kebraei, Pardiss</td>
<td>Senior attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>Shamsi, Hina</td>
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**Think Tank**

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<td></td>
<td>Korb, Lawrence</td>
<td>Senior fellow at the Center for American Progress</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May, Cliff</td>
<td>President of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Blitzer, 2013a</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Carney, Tim</td>
<td>Senior Political Columnist of <em>The Washington Examiner</em>; visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Hayes, 2013c</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Daskal, Jennifer</td>
<td>Adjunct Law Professor at Georgetown University; fellow at the School Center of National Security and the Law; Former counsel to the assistant attorney general for national security in the Obama Justice Department</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Hayes, 2013a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Epstein, Richard</td>
<td>Senior fellow at Stanford University, Hoover Institution, and law professor at NYU</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Johnston, David Cay</td>
<td>Author of <em>The Fine Print</em> and professor of law at Syracuse University</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Harris-Perry &amp; Witt, 2013</td>
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<td>Scahill, Jeremy</td>
<td>Writer/producer of book and documentary <em>Dirty Wars: The World</em></td>
<td>MSNBC and PBS</td>
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Skinner, Kiron  
Director of Carnegie Mellon University Center for international relations and politics; research fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution

Stein, Ben  
Economist and author

Waxman, Matthew  
Professor of Law at Columbia Law School and fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations

**Filmmaker**

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<td>Rowley, Richard</td>
<td>Directory of the documentary <em>Dirty Wars</em></td>
<td>PBS, MSNBC</td>
<td>“Morning Joe,” 2013; Rose, 2013c</td>
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t/2623/end/2683

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Darcy Bedgio holds undergraduate degrees in Political Science and International Affairs from Florida State University. This master’s thesis is the culmination of her work towards a Media and Communications degree (M.S.) from Florida State University. Her research interests include political economy of media, political communication and media and democracy.