

Prepared Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on “‘Targeted Killing’ and the Rule of Law: The Legal and Human Costs of 20 Years of U.S. Drone  
Strikes”

Wednesday, February 9, 2022

[VIDEO](#)

This hearing will cover issues related to the Department of Defense’s use of force in the war on terror. This will include targeted killings and the use of drones. This hearing explores matters that affect our armed services and our safety as Americans. These are important issues, but they are issues that are more appropriate for the Senate Armed Services Committee.

There are things within the heart of our jurisdiction that we should hold hearings on. I know that the chairman and I, and many members of this committee, are concerned about the growing spike in violent crime, including murders and attacks on police.

The administration has acknowledged that violent crime is up but has unhelpfully tried to pivot to gun control as its only response.

The top priorities of the administration and the Justice Department will include targeting legal gun sellers, with no evidence that they significantly contribute to illegal gun possession or crime.

Ghost guns form a significant cornerstone of the president’s policy. But ghost guns are connected to a fraction of a percent of the murders that are occurring in this country.

The president’s strategy is woefully inadequate to address the spike in murders and police attacks. It will do nothing to stop people from being pushed in front of subway trains, to stop trains from being looted, to stop storefronts from being smashed by flash mob attacks or the many other terrible crimes we are seeing.

We need a more serious policy. Over 21,000 people were murdered in the U.S. in 2020 – 5,000 more than the year before. A hearing would provide crucial oversight and may even help save lives.

But the order of the day by the majority is drones.

We all believe in limiting civilian casualties as much as possible. But I hope we also acknowledge that we must achieve military objectives as well as protect civilians. We must use methods of fighting wars that reduce the danger and risk to service members.

The Biden administration just last week used a targeted operation in Syria to kill the leader of ISIS. That ISIS leader was responsible for an attack on a Kurdish-run prison that killed 500. This attack might not have happened had ISIS been struck earlier. It's what President Abraham Lincoln once called the "awful arithmetic" of war. Our service members take military action to save the lives of others.

Today we're going to hear from experts, at least from our side, about the importance of maintaining the counterterrorism tool of drone strikes. I have received a number of materials from veterans, experts in the law of armed conflict and scholars on the importance of maintaining these carefully planned strikes. Without objection, I will submit those materials into the record.

Drone strikes may become even more necessary after President Biden's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. Members of his own administration have testified that a stronger ISIS or Al Qaeda could launch external attacks from Afghanistan as soon as April of this year. With a loss of intelligence on the ground, strikes on terrorists may be necessary, but I fear they will also be less efficient.

Drones can certainly be very dangerous. They even present a real threat here in the United States. Day after day, we read about drones being used to smuggle drugs across the border. They're used to smuggle contraband into prisons. One would-be Al Qaeda operative even attempted to attack the Capitol and the Pentagon with weaponized aircraft. Across the border into Mexico, one cartel moved to assassinate members of a rival cartel with weaponized drones.

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have asked Congress to help them by criminalizing dangerous uses of drones here in the U.S.

Both administrations approved very similar legislation drafted by experts from across the executive branch. Senators Kelly, Cassidy and I have responded by introducing this legislation, improved by broad consultation with stakeholders, in the Drone Act of 2022.

I hope this committee will swiftly take action on this legislation, and I welcome the members of this committee to join as cosponsors.

