

Policy of US drone strikes likely to continue after November elections

Thomas Seibert

Washington

The US presidential election is likely to confirm drone strikes as key instruments of Washington's counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East, analysts said. Depending on the outcome of the vote between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, even methods some consider torture could make a comeback.

"What do you think about waterboarding?" Trump, the Republican Party candidate for president, asked during a campaign rally in June, referring to a method in which water is poured over a restrained suspect's face, resulting in the sensation of drowning. "I like it a lot," Trump said. "I don't think it's tough enough."

Waterboarding was used in US interrogations of terror suspects following the al-Qaeda attacks of September 11th, 2001, but banned by President Barack Obama in 2009. Trump said the United States should lift the ban and step up its fight against foreign adversaries. "You have to fight fire with fire," he said.

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Despite the tough talk, it is not clear whether Trump as president could reverse the ban on waterboarding. John Brennan, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said in July he would rather resign than oversee a new programme of waterboarding.

Gordon Adams, a professor emeritus

US foreign policy at the American University in Washington, said that, although Trump had not presented a comprehensive plan on security matters, statements by the candidate indicated that "his instincts push him towards such a behaviour". A possible determination by Trump to reintroduce techniques such as waterboarding could lead to a "major battle with the bureaucracy", Adams said.

Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution think-tank in Washington said many in the intelligence community and in the military were against using waterboarding "99.999% of the time". Having called for the reintroduction of the method on the campaign trail, Trump could perhaps get around that opposition by reserving the possibility of waterboarding for very few cases. "He would probably keep it as an option but not use it very often," O'Hanlon said.

As for the use of armed drones, O'Hanlon said the unmanned planes would continue to be used by the next administration but not as frequently as they have been by Obama. "It won't end but we are likely to see less of it," he said.

One reason was that many targets suitable for drone strikes have already been hit. Also, the United States can rely on manned fighter jets in countries such as Syria or Iraq because the presence of US forces in those conflicts is no secret.

Hillary Clinton, the Democrat Party candidate, was known to support Obama's frequent use of drone attacks on suspected terrorists during her 2009-13 tenure as secretary of State.

Adams said he would expect Clinton to continue drone strikes because "this is the policy she endorsed when she was in the administration". Drone attacks are consistent with Clinton's foreign policy stance, Adams said. "She's an inter-



US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks at a campaign rally in Charlotte, North Carolina, on September 8th.

ventionist," he added.

A Trump administration would also be expected to use drones, Adams said. Although Trump was a "wild card in foreign policy", statements by the Republican candidate suggested that drone strikes would fit his approach to foreign affairs. "Drones are such handy things for a president to reach for," Trump has said.

Drone strikes have become a much-used weapon for the United States in its fight against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS). Attacks by unmanned vehicles are less visible and pose less of a risk of diplomatic tensions than strikes by fighter jets. They also carry no risk of human losses for the US military in areas where Washington is unwilling to deploy troops.

Government figures released in July said the CIA and the US military conducted 473 drone strikes

from 2009 through the end of last year. Drones have killed many high-profile extremists, including the US-born Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, a senior figure of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Hafiz Saeed Khan, an ISIS leader in Afghanistan, was killed in a drone attack last month. According to the US government figures, as many as 116 civilians have died in drone attacks since 2009.

Clinton is not expected to endorse a return of waterboarding but one former official who has been named in news reports as a member of a team of security experts advising the Democratic candidate has publicly called for targeted assassinations to demonstrate America's determination *vis-à-vis* countries such as Russia and Iran.

"You're not telling the world about it, right? You don't stand up at the Pentagon and say: 'We did this',

right?" Mike Morrell, a former acting head of the CIA, who is supporting Clinton in the campaign, told PBS interviewer Charlie Rose. "But you make sure they know it in Moscow and Tehran."

In Syria, Morrell said the United States should concentrate on assets close to President Bashar Assad. "I want to scare Assad," he said. "I want to go after his Presidential Guard. I wanna bomb his offices in the middle of the night."

Morrell said he would destroy Assad's presidential plane and his helicopters on the ground. "I want to make him think we are coming after him," Morrell stressed he was not calling for Assad's assassination but for putting him under pressure to make him accept a political solution for the conflict.

Thomas Seibert is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Washington.

Islamicates: A new chapter in the intersection between Islam and sci-fi

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

The intersection of Islam and science fiction goes back centuries but, at a time when Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world with more than 1.5 billion followers, representation of Muslims in the genre is in short supply, a point one project is trying to reverse.

The first of several planned anthologies, *Islamicates* is a free-to-download release of 12 short stories inspired by Islamic culture. Edited by Muhammad Aurangzeb Ahmad, it is the culmination of the Islam and Science Fiction project.

Ahmad highlighted the importance of Muslims engaging with science fiction, a genre that has never been more mainstream than in 2016. "The representation of Muslims [in sci-fi] has gradually increased but it is still nowhere close to representative of their global population... [but] in the last few years, we are also seeing some great science fiction and fantasy being produced by Muslims," he said.

"With respect to the characterisation of Muslims, there isn't any single way to describe how Muslims are portrayed in science fiction. There are many cases in which Muslims are cast in somewhat negative light in sci-fi stories that are set in the near future. On the other hand, stories set in the distant future have rather positive portrayal of Muslims," he added.

The stories in *Islamicates* were chosen from more than 70 submissions to the Islamicate Science Fic-

Islamicates Volume I

Anthology of Science Fiction short stories inspired from Muslim Cultures



Muhammad Aurangzeb Ahmad (Editor)
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tion Short Story Contest organised by the Islam and Science Fiction website. The offerings include tales of alien invasions, time travel and mathematical algorithms that allow humans to predict the future. "The response has been quite good. The anthology was downloaded 4,000 times in the first three days," Ahmad said. "Its release was covered by Tor and io9, which are the premier science fiction websites."

"The best thing, of course, is to see the fan reactions when we receive e-mail from people who love the stories and commend us for the effort."

"Awesome! I really want to read the book. In the north of my country, there is an Islamic population," commented Colombian Sebastian Quintero Santacruz in the news story announcing *Islamicates*' publication. "Excited about the growing diversity in science fiction," tweeted Anand Madhvani.

Islamicates is billed as volume one in a series.

"This volume had a broad focus on science fiction in general that is set or inspired from Muslim cultures or the Islamic civilisation," Ahmad said. "Future volumes will be more thematic in nature, e.g. alternate history, distant future, biotech. As with the first volume, they will have a cash prize competition for inclusion in the anthology."

Despite being under-represented in the genre, there is a long history of intersection between Islam and science fiction. *True History*, written by Syrian satirist Lucian of Samosata in the 2nd century, is considered one of the first examples of science fiction, dealing with travelling to outer space, meeting alien lifeforms and interplanetary war-

fare, staples of what would become the sci-fi genre.

Hayy ibn Yaqhdan by Ibn Tufail and *Al-Risala Al-Kamiliyya fil-Sira Al-Nabawiyya* by Ibn al-Nafis, both written in the 12th century, deal with science fiction themes.

As for criticism of Islam's treatment of women, one of the first feminist sci-fi books, published in 1906, was written by a Muslim. *Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain has been described as a "gender-based *Planet of the Apes*" and has influenced many subsequent female sci-fi writers.

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Islamicates, a term that refers to the cultural output of predominantly Islamic cultures or polity, hopes to increase Muslim representation in science fiction.

"I deliberately chose the term 'Islamicates' to highlight the fact that the Muslim world is a vast collection of people and cultures of varying backgrounds and beliefs. While the core of these cultures is Islamic, people regardless of their religion are part of this civilisation and everyone should be celebrated as such," Ahmad said.

"I think science fiction can help the Muslim world reimagine its future and provide hope in an otherwise abysmal environment."

Mahmud el-Shafey is an Arab Weekly correspondent in London.