

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stimson Center Launches Task Force On Drone Policy Headed By Retired Gen. John P. Abizaid



WASHINGTON - Retired Army Gen. John P. Abizaid, the former commander of the U.S. Central Command, will lead a new Stimson Center Task Force on U.S. Drone Policy, Stimson President and CEO Ellen Laipson announced today.

Abizaid is currently the distinguished chair of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. The vice chair of the task force is Rosa Brooks, former counselor to the undersecretary of defense for policy and currently a professor of law at Georgetown University.

The task force will conduct a 15-month study that will bring together legal, national security, political and military experts, as well as representatives from the defense industry and civil society groups, to formulate nonpartisan policy recommendations regarding drone use by the United States.

"In his National Defense University speech on drones and counterterrorism last week, President Obama maintained that ensuring minimum collateral damage, guaranteeing

accountability and oversight, and safeguarding United States national security are difficult, and sometimes conflicting issues," Laipson said. "President Obama pledged to explore options for addressing these concerns, and our hope is that the task force's work can contribute to this process in a meaningful way. The challenge for U.S. policy is to achieve the delicate balance between ensuring proactive security capabilities and preventing the compromise of core American values."

"Drones have become a complex and divisive technology," Abizaid said. "While they can be an effective means of protecting against a terrorist attack, the rule of law must be considered. I look forward to leading an effort that can lay the foundation for drone policy in the United States."

"Bringing together vital stakeholders and experts in one room, this nonpartisan effort will set a standard and inform the U.S. government about what steps need to be taken to ensure our national security and uphold our country's ideals," Brooks said.

Unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones, are increasingly relied upon as a key component of U.S. foreign policy, national security and military strategy. Although the drone program has had successes - the covert targeted killings of operatives of al-Qaida and affiliated groups, for example - the program has sparked a debate centering on the ethical, legal, economic and strategic implications of the use of armed drones.

The drone program has drawn criticism because of civilian casualties (or more specifically, the drone strike process and the dynamic environment that creates more risk in how drones are employed), the killing of American-born al-Qaida leader Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen by a missile fired from a drone, and concerns over numerous drone crashes.

Stimson will bring together top experts on lethal drones from all sides of the debate. Facilitating dialogue between the experts, the task force will work to form a basic set of policy recommendations regarding the use, manufacture and export of such drones.

The task force will present its recommendations to the Obama administration and to Congress in the first quarter of 2014. Ultimately, these recommendations will be a foundation for further government policy and future dialogue.

Other members of the task force are: Retired Army Lt. Gen. David Barno; John B. Bellinger of the law firm of Arnold & Porter; Stimson Board Chairman Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.; Mary (Missy) Cummings, associate professor of aeronautics and astronautics and engineering systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Janine Davidson, an assistant professor in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University; Peter Lichtenbaum of the law firm of Covington & Burling; Philip Mudd, president of the security consulting firm Mudd Management; and Jeffrey Smith of the law firm of Arnold & Porter.

Note: This news release was updated May 31, 2013 to reflect the addition of Janine Davidson and Philip Mudd to the task force.

Stimson's Drone Commission pictured above (from left to right): Stimson Chairman of the Board Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.; John B. Bellinger, Arnold & Porter; Commission Chairman Gen. John P. Abizaid; Jeffrey Smith, Arnold & Porter; Vice Chair Rosa Brooks, professor of law at Georgetown University; Peter Lichtenbaum, Covington & Burling and Mary Cummings, associate professor of aeronautics and astronautics and engineering systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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