

Review

Avery Plaw – Matthew S. Fricker – Carlos R. Colon: The Drone Debate – A primer on the U. S. use of unmanned aircraft outside conventional battlefields.²⁷

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The government of the United States of America uses armed drones to hunt and kill suspected terrorists outside of conventional battlefields. *The Drone Debate*,²⁸ with a well-organized structure, aims to inform American citizens about the U.S. covert drone program, and to get them acquainted with the debates that have emerged around it in laymen's terms. The book makes it possible for the reader to come to conclusions of their own, and make independent judgments about the drone issue.

In the past one and a half decades, targeted killing by remotely controlled aircrafts, commonly known as drones acquired significant importance. The drone campaigns differ in one key aspect. On the one hand, there are drone strikes which take place on the conventional battlefields *i.e. Afghanistan*, while on the other hand there are targeted killings which occur outside the scope of conventional battlefields, *i.e. Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia*.²⁹ According to the book – which clearly states that there is not enough reliable information available about the drone programs, due to their covert nature – around 4.000 persons were killed in these targeted killing processes outside conventional battlefields. This makes it easy to understand why the program attracts enormous attention among various scholars, in different field of studies, such as military sciences, law, philosophy, politics and international studies. The authors' goal is to present all the ongoing and resolved debates of the abovementioned fields of studies, without advancing the opinion of their own, which makes this book valuable for those who have already formed an opinion about the topic, and those who are neutral as well. Each chapter of the book culminates in a case study.

The Drone Debate is divided into six chapters with a brief introduction of the topic, and the goals of the book. The first chapter³⁰ begins with a historical overview of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones. In this part one can find out about the evolution of drones, from target practices before World War II through the first surveillance drones in Vietnam, to the early Predators in the Kosovo conflict. Lastly it deals with the MQ-9 Reaper, the 'big deadly cousin' of the Predator. The chapter also reviews U. S. drone campaigns outside of conventional battlefields, and provides fatality statistics. The authors also explain the difficulties posed by the absence of reliable data and the importance of the open source

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²⁸ Avery Plaw & Matthew S. Fricker & Carlos R. Colon: *The Drone Debate – A primer on the U. S. use of unmanned aircraft outside conventional battlefields*. Roman & Littlefield, Lanham-Boulder-New York-London, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4422-3059.

²⁹ There was one drone strike outside of these countries as well. It took place in the Philippines. *Ibid.* p. 42.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 13-64. – A Brief Overview of Aerial Drones and Their Military Use by the United States. Case Study: The U.S. Drone Campaign in Pakistan.

databases they use, to determine the quantity of the strikes. The chapter ends with a detailed case study about Pakistan, where a covert U.S. drone program takes place.

The second chapter³¹ deals with the debate over whether targeted killing operations are strategically wise decisions, or if there is any other possible choice or tool against terrorist organizations. The chapter provides opinions on the positive effect and strategic dimensions of the drone campaigns, including decapitation of the terrorist organization, neutralization of threats which are only in operations phase, and even creating fear among the lines of foot-soldiers, making it harder to recruit new members. On the other hand, it also discusses the negative consequences of targeted killings by UAVs, such as increased sympathy for the terrorist organizations' struggle, the negative attitude towards the USA because of possibly illegal and/or disproportionate strikes. The chapter concludes with a case study about the drone program in Yemen, and the Yemeni consent to such operations.

The third chapter³² explores the debate over the legality of the drone program under international, and U.S. domestic law. The overview begins with the national law aspects of the topic, and deals for example with the constitutional issues of drone strikes against U.S. citizens like Anwar al-Awlaki. The chapter also includes findings about the Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. The international law aspects of the drone campaign are far more complex. The chapter deals with the *jus ad bellum* question, i.e. whether the U.S. drone strikes have generally taken place in a context of an armed conflict, which will determine the applicability of international humanitarian law, or human rights law. The authors consequently turn to the *jus in bello* aspect of the topic, namely, are the drone attacks compatible with the applicable rulings of humanitarian law, such as humanity, proportionality, distinction and necessity. The chapter ends with a case study of signature strikes, where the attacks occur based on 'patterns of behavior' not hit lists or personality strikes.

In the fourth chapter³³ the authors examine the ethical debate surrounding the U.S. use of armed drones outside conventional battlefields. The authors review the criteria of the *just war theory*, such as just cause, last resort and probability of success. This part also engages in the ongoing debate over whether the use of armed drones makes it easier to wage war against other countries, or non-state organizations, like terrorist groups, and the interesting question of the use of UAVs in humanitarian interventions. Finally, the chapter briefly examines the theory of using autonomous unmanned systems for tracking and killing persons. The case study at the end of this chapter focuses on the accountability and the oversight of the U.S. drone strikes.

The fifth chapter³⁴ provides the reader with an overview of how political factors, such as surveys of U.S. attitude towards drone strikes seem to shape the use of UAVs nowadays, and how they have changed over time. The authors also examine the global reception of the use of drones for killing terrorists in the Middle-East, *inter alia* based on UN reports, and the resolution adopted by the European Parliament. The case study deals with the question of additional polling on the future of drone campaigns.

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 65-110. – The Debate over Strategy: Are Drones Helping to Defeat al-Qaeda and Associated Forces? Case study: The Drone War Reaches Yemen.

³² *Ibid.* pp. 111-165. – The Debate over Legality: Are Drone Strikes Permissible under U.S. and International Law? Case Study: Signature Strikes.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 166-224. – The Ethical Debate: Are Drone Strikes Consistent with the Ideals of Just War? Case Study: Oversight and Accountability.

³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 225-280. – The Politics of Drone Strikes: What Political Considerations Shape the U.S. Drone Policy? Case Study: Additional Polls on Attitudes to Drones.

The last chapter³⁵ focuses on the proliferation of armed drones, and the possible use of these UAVs in more and more armed conflicts worldwide by other countries citing the U.S. precedent. The authors examine the question whether the existing international law framework and agreements will suffice to control the use of armed drones or not. They then turn to the debates over the future of warfare. Are drones truly revolutionizing the conduct of war? The question remains unresolved. The last case study deals with drone strikes related to China and Israel.

Last but not least, the book culminates in a brief conclusion³⁶ that explores the possible common points of different sides of the argument that are often obscured in the give and take of the drone debate.

The authors are evidently at the top of their respective fields. Avery Plaw is an associate professor of political sciences and director of the university honors program at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Matthew S. Fricker and Carlos R. Colon are co-founders and analysts of the Center for the Study of Targeted Killings – which is one of the open source databases scholars tend to use to get a clear picture of the drone strikes – also at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.³⁷

To give a comprehensive conclusion and evaluation of the book reviewed above one should not forget about the goal of the book, which is to inform the public about the ongoing debate concerning the U.S. drone campaign and to reveal its serious issues. As a consequence, there is no room for more detailed and deeper analysis of serious issues, like whether there is or could at all be an armed conflict between a state and a non-state organization like a terrorist organization, or the Hydra-effect concerning the decapitation of the terrorist groups' leaderships. In overview one can conclude that despite these 'intentional deficiencies' of the book, it clearly reaches its goal by giving each and every one of us a chance to make up our own minds, and reach a conclusion on our own about the serious challenges of tracking and killing persons by remotely controlled aircrafts.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 281-326. – Emerging Issues: Will Armed Drones Proliferate Rapidly, and What Impact Will They Have on International Security? Case Study: Non-U.S. Drone Strikes.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 327-337. – Conclusion: The Age of Drones?

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 345.