

The drone age: how drone technology will change war and peace

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on terrorism. But despite these minor weaknesses, the book is of high academic quality, and its structure and empiricism make it a valuable resource.

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The drone age: how drone technology will change war and peace, by Michael J. Boyle, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, 336 pp., £22.99 (Hardback) (UK), ISBN 9780190635862

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), more commonly known as drones, have become a reality in contemporary war. They are also a symbol of industrial prestige for the countries that produce them. In this book, Michael Boyle, a political scientist at La Salle University, provides a comprehensive academic analysis of drones. Using qualitative methods including case studies and interviews with practitioners, Boyle offers us nine chapters of useful information, applying a framework of analysis that consists of technological evolution, formation, and development of drone technology. Interestingly, for readers of this journal, the book addresses the use of drones both by and against terrorists.

The author traces the historical evolution of drones, from flying bombs, the rudimentary and inaccurate devices used during World Wars I and II (33), to the emergence of drone reconnaissance aircraft during the Cold War. While these devices did not have the technological sophistication to serve as combat platforms (63), during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath they did play a role in artillery and in target practice, as well as reconnaissance (78). The computer revolution, artificial intelligence, satellite navigation, and digital maps changed all that, to enable drones to wage combat and kill directly.

The use of drones against terrorists began under George Bush Jr., and continued in all subsequent United States administrations. Drones came to the forefront after 9/11, when the Bush Jr. administration authorised their use against Al Qaeda. The Obama administration institutionalised an extra-judicial killing program that included an internal “kill list” (Mazetti 2013, 104–105), and Trump continued these policies, even escalating the drone assassination policy to include people who were not classified as terrorists by the United Nations, such as General Qasem Soleimani of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps and Mr Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the Commander of Iraq’s Popular Mobilisation Units.

It is worth noting that both men were commanders of duly authorised, state approved paramilitary forces, meaning that killing them constituted an act of war. The anniversary of the extra-judicial murder of Muhandis was marked by massive protests in Iraq, and that particular drone operation would lead other countries like the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Iraq and Pakistan to use them too. That said, drones were used against people nearly universally acknowledged as terrorists with some success and nearly no controversy. Among those killed were Al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan (55–65), including Baitullah Mehsud, the Pakistani Taliban leader (61) and the Al Qaeda leader in the Arabian Peninsula, Anwar al-Awlaki, although the latter's United States citizenship has led to controversy and litigation in the United States.

The technological evolution of drones has made the gap between detection and destruction of a target very narrow, which the author calls "find, fix, and finish" (77–79). In earlier times, this was not the case. Predator drones had detected Osama bin Laden on several occasions, but they were not ready to strike him (71). The United States had to send cruise missiles or manned aircraft to strike him (65), and the time between detection and destruction on these occasions allowed him to escape.

The book's central argument is that drone technology alters the strategic choices of its users in two ways. First, drones transform risk calculation. Given that most US drone operators work from control centres in the United States and can return home after work, there is a perception that drone operations are less risky than more conventional operations (79). The book argues that this perception is a myth. Drone operations simply redistribute the risk and alter its nature. For example, drone pilots suffer higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder precisely because they are more directly involved in the daily and family lives of their "targets." They also witness the horrific aftermath of their attacks through their cameras, thereby increasing their risk for depression, burnout, and other mental health disorders (18). The drone pilots attempt to rationalise their actions by dehumanising their targets, calling them "bug splats," and those running away from the drones "squirters" (89). Others use euphemisms like "mowing the lawn" for their work to de-personalise it while de-humanising their targeted individuals by reducing them to errant grass (Pilkinton, 2015).

The second change in calculus concerns the permissive environment that the drones appear to create. The technology allows the United States to conduct killings in far off places like Yemen, where terrain is difficult and it is politically untenable to put boots on the ground. But the same technology, in rudimentary form, can be deployed by terrorist organisations, rebel movements, and even state-authorised paramilitary movements against the United States. Daesh (aka the "Islamic State") attacked United States forces in Syria using drone-carried improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (87). Drones are therefore a double-edged sword and Boyle argues that they will be a weapon of choice for terrorist groups in the future.

The book's conclusions are a valuable contribution to security scholarship. These include the idea that drones undermine traditional laws of war, ethical restraints on killing and extra-judicial violence, and arguably run against fundamental political ethics that protect citizens against excess from their own governments. Drones can easily become a tool for surveillance and repression outside the counter terrorism framework as well (206). They will also intensify conflict and competition in conflict zones, thereby increasing risks; indeed, this has already happened in the disputed region of Kashmir and on the Korean peninsula (27).

The overall quality of the book is very high and it clearly constitutes a serious academic contribution to a complex problem. It does have minor flaws. For example, it does not consider the ideological reaction to drones by those targeted as understood by the school of critical terrorism studies. Drones clearly play a role in further

radicalising terrorists, as demonstrated in the references to drones in their propaganda materials. The book also omits to discuss the effects of civilian and bystander casualties (so-called “collateral damage”) on the support and growth of terrorist movements. However, despite these shortcomings, the book will be a valuable work for critical terrorism studies scholars seeking to assess the impact of technological change on contemporary warfare and counter-terrorism operations.

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Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter, by Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 348 pp., £59.99 (Hardcover) (UK), ISBN 9783030219611

Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham and Katherine Brown bring a wealth of insight to a topic that is both essential and immensely complex – gender in countering violent extremism (CVE). Using an innovative approach to gathering data, their research offers new and much needed perspective on what it means to consider and account for gender in both violent extremism (VE) and CVE programming.

Right from the outset, the authors establish gender in VE and CVE as two separate but interrelated things. This helps to assert that there are a complex range of considerations needed when addressing this topic, which has often been simplified down to the inclusion of women. They emphasise that CVE needs to be reframed to include a better understanding of gender, a social construct which applies to all individuals, and its associated power dynamics. The beginning chapters of the book set out the history of CVE and the evolution of gender perspective within it, highlighting where approaches have sometimes left gaps and negatively impacted the effectiveness of CVE programming – including people’s willingness and ability to participate in it.

Throughout the book, gendered radicalisation is explained and illustrated with the data, emphasising the importance of gender to how men and women radicalise. The authors set out to investigate two ideological contexts, Islamist and far-right, using a social milieu approach – essentially, gathering data through listening to the perspective of communities that have been impacted by radicalisation, VE and CVE. This research was conducted from 2015–2016 in five case countries: Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. With the rapidly changing impact of social and political contexts, it is important to note that this was