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Drone: Remote Control Warfare (MIT Press)



Synopsis

"[A] thoughtful examination of the dilemmas this new weapon poses." -- Foreign Affairs
Drones are changing the conduct of war. Deployed at presidential discretion, they can be used in regular war zones or to kill people in such countries as Yemen and Somalia, where the United States is not officially at war. Advocates say that drones are more precise than conventional bombers, allowing warfare with minimal civilian deaths while keeping American pilots out of harm's way. Critics say that drones are cowardly and that they often kill innocent civilians while terrorizing entire villages on the ground. In this book, Hugh Gusterson explores the significance of drone warfare from multiple perspectives, drawing on accounts by drone operators, victims of drone attacks, anti-drone activists, human rights activists, international lawyers, journalists, military thinkers, and academic experts. Gusterson examines the way drone warfare has created commuter warriors and redefined the space of the battlefield. He looks at the paradoxical mix of closeness and distance involved in remote killing: is it easier than killing someone on the physical battlefield if you have to watch onscreen? He suggests a new way of understanding the debate over civilian casualties of drone attacks. He maps "ethical slippage" over time in the Obama administration's targeting practices. And he contrasts Obama administration officials' legal justification of drone attacks with arguments by international lawyers and NGOs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gusterson makes it clear why we don't speak clearly about drones. Only by muddying the waters

can we bear to acknowledge what we have invented: a new and oddly intimate way station in the mechanization of death. (Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauz, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology, MIT; author of *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*) Hugh Gusterson's *Drone* is the most intelligent analysis of drone warfare currently available -- and the most probing critique of how the United States is using drones in places like Pakistan and Yemen. (Michael Walzer, author of *Just and Unjust Wars*) With his discerning anthropologist's eye, Hugh Gusterson has simultaneously produced both a wide-ranging and a focused study of the role of drones in current U.S. military policy. No relevant piece of evidence has escaped his attention, but he uses his sources economically to extract the most telling details. He concludes with a choice of dystopian (his word) and utopian (mine) drone futures that would convince me to bet -- however reluctantly -- on the former. Compellingly written throughout, Gusterson's book marks a major contribution to a crucial debate. (Matthew Evangelista, coeditor of *The American Way of Bombing: Changing Ethical and Legal Norms, from Flying Fortresses to Drones*) [I]nsightful. (Publishers Weekly) Among a blizzard of new books probing drone warfare, Hugh Gusterson's slim volume is among the most careful, concise and insightful.... Even anyone who thinks they know all there is to know about drone warfare will profit from Gusterson's rich and penetrating study. (Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture) In this excellent book, the anthropologist Hugh Gusterson argues that drones have fundamentally transformed the nature of war. (Prospect Magazine) [A] thoughtful examination of the dilemmas this new weapon poses. (Foreign Affairs)

Hugh Gusterson is Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs at George Washington University. He is the author of *Nuclear Rites* and *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*.

Prior to reading this book I considered drone warfare to be a very attractive way to project power and lethality without putting American lives at risk. While the book did not totally turn me against the use of drones in warfare, it made me realize the topic is much more complicated and fraught with unintended consequences than I realized. This a well-written, thought-provoking work will make the reader re-think and re-evaluate their opinions on the uses of drones in modern war fighting.

I found this book highly readable, entertaining, and informative. It is very scholarly and well researched, but not at all stodgy. The subject is reviewed from a broad variety of perspectives, and

includes extensive footnotes for further reading. Gusterson paints some frightening but plausible scenarios for the future, which we all need to think about. I strongly recommend this book for politicians, generals, and anyone else concerned about the future of warfare and civil liberties.

I read this book for an anthropology class I am taking in grad school. I was expecting more of a traditional ethnography based on Gusterson's past work, but this one was unique. It blurs the lines at times between an academic work of anthropology and a piece of journalism. But either way it is a great read that kept me interested all the way through, which is not something that can be said for a lot of the readings in grad school. Gusterson brings a level of analysis to the subject that is rarely seen. He examines the issue thoroughly from multiple perspectives providing some nuance on an issue that is often seen as very black and white. It's probably not going to satisfy the dogmatic folks on either side of the argument, but I think that is what makes this work important.

My only criticism of this book is the subtitle, "Remote Control Warfare": it fails to convey its essence. An anthropologist, Gusterson not only sets out in chilling detail what warfare has become, he challenges the fiction that it is anonymous and precise. As Sherry Turkle notes (on the back cover), "Only by muddying the waters can we bear to acknowledge what we have invented: a new and oddly intimate way station in the mechanization of death." Gusterson explores the subjective underside every aspect of this mechanization, from commuter warriors to unexamined assumptions in design and deployment, and why it matters. This book is indispensable reading for everyone concerned about drone warfare.

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