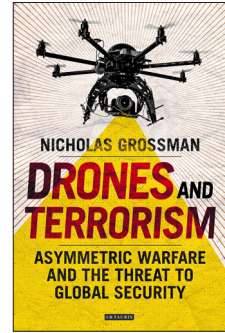


Book Reviews

DRONES AND TERRORISM: ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND THE THREAT TO GLOBAL SECURITY

BY NICHOLAS GROSSMAN

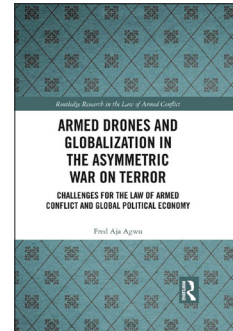
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ARMED DRONES AND GLOBALIZATION IN THE ASYMMETRIC WAR ON TERROR

BY FRED AJA AGWU

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REVIEWED BY GROUP CAPTAIN CLARE MUIR¹

Biography: Group Captain Clare Muir is Director, RAF Division at the Joint Services Command and Staff College. She completed a Chief of the Air Staff's Tedder Fellowship at Cambridge in 2013, studying International Relations, and attended the Royal College of Defence Studies in 2018. She has a keen interest in legislative, regulatory and technological developments in the fast-paced UAS sector.

“We are building a bridge to the future while standing on it.”²

INTRODUCTION

Drones and Terrorism follows in the footsteps of texts such as P W Singer’s *Wired for War*,³ Richard Whittle’s *Predator*,⁴ and Singer and Cole’s *Ghost Fleet*,⁵ all of which have featured in previous Chief of the Air Staff’s reading lists and which aim to contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding emerging UAS technologies in an accessible manner for the non-specialist.

Grossman begins by defining and explaining the characteristics of asymmetric warfare before going on to describe the panoply of technological advancements in the UAS sector. Having set the contextual bedrock on which to build his argument, Grossman moves on to examine the options available to the protagonists of asymmetric warfare. He first assesses the strategic value of the United States’ drone campaign before outlining the options available to terrorists and insurgents who may wish to exploit this technology to further their own strategic ends. In his concluding chapter, Grossman proposes a ‘smart SWARM [Systematic Warfighter-Assisting Reconnaissance Measures] strategy,’ advocating the development of *information*-focused (as opposed to *strike* focused) robotic warfare as a winning strategy for states who wish to lessen the informational advantage, which he argues are characteristically held by insurgents and terrorists.

With regards to supporting evidence, Grossman quotes a BBC article which states that ‘a drone hit the front of a British Airways flight approaching Heathrow;’⁶ however, as subsequently reported in open source, this particular ‘strike’ was never confirmed and the ensuing investigation closed due to lack of evidence.⁷ Highlighting this inconsistency could seem pedantic; however, it planted a seed of doubt in the reviewer’s mind about the reliability of other media references used to support Grossman’s arguments.

Nevertheless, Grossman successfully argues that robotics, ‘will significantly alter asymmetric warfare,’⁸ and his lively and accessible text provides a balanced exploration of how the technology provides both opportunities and threats for the stronger and weaker protagonists. Irrespective of the veracity of the reported drone attack on the Venezuelan President in August 2018, commentators and policymakers may yet find themselves reaching for this topical text, to further understand the potential capabilities of these systems.

From the title alone, *Armed Drones and Globalization in the Asymmetric War on Terror* would appear to occupy the same discursive space as *Drones and Terrorism*. However, *Armed Drones* speaks with a more obviously scholarly tone, and is aimed towards researchers, academics, legal and security professionals rather than a general readership. In this book, armed drones (and globalization) are not the *subject* under examination; instead they serve as a *lens* through which the global war on terror is examined.

Through this lens, *Armed Drones* focusses on the broader legal debates surrounding the use of armed drones to prosecute the war on terror. The author explores whether the 'War on Terror (WoT)' should have been declared in the first place, whether terrorist attacks met the United Nations' *casus belli*, and whether the 'War' should instead be characterised as a law enforcement issue. Within the broad context of International Humanitarian Law, the book assesses the drone as a weapon of engagement; discussing such issues as 'signature' strikes as well as the implications of United States' drones coming under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense, Air Force or Intelligence Agencies. The book has an unashamed focus on the United States; nevertheless, the conclusions drawn can be applied to the UK, although Agwu disappointingly fails to reference or acknowledge the UK's own armed drone capability.⁹

Agwu outlines the challenges of the war on terror's 'nomadic' frontline and explains why drones are 'tailor made' for asymmetric warfare.¹⁰ He investigates some of the important legal questions which quickly bubble up when 'technology out-paces the law.' Here, Agwu devotes special attention to ethics and 'chivalry' as dual 'institutions of restraint',¹¹ which he argues 'get a short shrift'¹² in asymmetric warfare. The seven chapters at the centre of the book are perhaps the most interesting and relevant for those readers who are less interested in the context and are more interested in drones and their associated capabilities and challenges, and illustrate that reliance on this capability alone will not win the war on terror;¹³ however, the penultimate chapter, 'Globalization, Postmodernism, and the WoT,' tacks sharply away from the narrative flow. While this is intended to frame the collective, multilateral and unified responses to the war on terror proposed in the concluding chapter, this argument might have been better placed adjacent to those chapters which discuss the antecedents for asymmetric warfare. Although Agwu offers suggestions for ways to effectively prosecute the war on terror in his concluding chapter, he emphasises that his book is 'more of a...prognosis rather than a solution.'¹⁴

While the books are not close companions, (their differing arguments and style making them too distinct for such a neat coupling) they both individually shine a light on this important subject matter. *Armed Drones* has a narrower, more intense beam, whereas *Drones and Terrorism* widens the aperture to allow a broader, more accessible, if less detailed, approach.

There is growing acceptance that we are witnessing what has been described by many as a 'drone revolution.' The UAS industry has been described as the 'most dynamic growth sector of the world aerospace industry,'¹⁵ and there is an almost universal assessment by opponents and advocates alike that drones in civilian and military life, if not ubiquitous, will be at the very least vastly increased in both number and capability in the near future. Of specific relevance to air power advocates are the ways in which drones are 'democratising and transforming air power.'¹⁶ We should therefore be seeking to shine an array of lights on the subject. As an oft quoted strategist observed,

twilight... often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are. Whatever is hidden from full view in this feeble light has to be guessed at by talent, or simply left to chance.¹⁷

UAS are rapidly developing into a transformational air power paradigm and clear-sighted knowledge of the capabilities, strengths and weaknesses of this technology will avoid us having to ‘trust to talent or to luck.’¹⁸ It has been observed that, ‘if you go anywhere now, you are going to get attacked by UAVs,’¹⁹ and there is an urgent need to develop and embed counter UAS doctrine at a pace which matches both technological advancements as well as the inventiveness of our opponents. As the US Colonel quoted at the start of this review notes, ‘we are building the bridge while standing on it.’ Whether the analogy is a bridge or a dark pathway, we are fortunate that the contemporary wave of books, articles and commentary on the subject helps us to navigate our way forward.

Richard Whittle observed in *Predator* that, ‘after genesis came the flood;’²⁰ as we journey forward, we therefore would be wise to pick up our pace...

NOTES

¹ Group Captain Muir would like to thank Dr Kate Utting, King’s College London, and Squadron Leader Phil Clare, Royal Air Force Division, Joint Service Command and Staff College, for their invaluable editorial inputs.

² U.S. Army Colonel quoted in P W Singer, *Wired for War* (London: Penguin, 2009), 19.

³ Singer, *Wired for War*.

⁴ Richard Whittle, *Predator* (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2014).

⁵ P. W. Singer and August Cole, *Ghost Fleet* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷ The Guardian, “Heathrow Plane Strike Not a Drone Incident,” *The Guardian*, 28 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/28/heathrow-ba-plane-strike-not-a-drone-incident> [last accessed 22 Aug 18].

⁸ Grossman, *Drones and Terrorism*, 7.

⁹ Agwu, *Armed Drones*, 156.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹² *Ibid.*, 242.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁵ The Teal Group quoted in Singer, *Wired for War*, 62.

¹⁶ Trevor Taylor, “Costs of Combat Air Power,” in John Andreas Olsen (ed). *Routledge Handbook of Air Power*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 283.

¹⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Howard, Peter Paret, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 140.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Operation Inherent Resolve Senior Commander, quoted September 2018.

²⁰ Whittle, *Predator*, 299.

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