Avery Plaw, Matthew S. Fricker, Carlos Colon. *The Drone Debate: A Primer on the U.S. Use of Unmanned Aircraft Outside Conventional Battlefields.* Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016. 356 pp. $34.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-4422-3059-0.

Reviewed by Paul Springer

Published on H-War (June, 2017)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Avery Plaw, Matthew Fricker, and Carlos Colon are political scientists linked through the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, where Plaw is a professor and Fricker and Colon founded the Center for the Study of Targeted Killing. Their current work is an examination of how the United States went from condemning targeted killings in 2001 to openly embracing them less than a decade later. By the time of the work's publication, targeted killing had become the most prominent form of military operation used by the United States in the War on Terror. The authors collectively agree that the United States should maintain armed remotely piloted aircraft (which they refer to as "drones" for the sake of simplicity) within the national arsenal. However, they disagree about when and how said devices should be used. The work is topically organized into six sections dealing with the history of drones, the strategic utility of the aircraft, the ethics of drone warfare, legal issues surrounding the current drone usage, the influence of political considerations on the pursuit of drone warfare, and the most likely implications for future utility. Within each chapter, case studies are provided to illustrate the most important and challenging points.

The work contains a detailed analysis and an exhaustive search of open-source, unclassified materials that are accessible to any reader of the work. Their citations are thorough and extremely helpful, although the lack of a bibliography for the volume is an unfortunate oversight. The authors have presented a balanced study of each of their topic areas, and where applicable, have presented all sides of an open debate without forcing the reader to accept their perspective. In that regard, this is a wonderful introduction to the subject of remotely piloted aircraft and how they have been recently utilized by the United States.

The first chapter examines the history of drone warfare. It is a quick but effective study of the development of unmanned aircraft. There are some gaps in their analysis, and there is a decided habit of not digging too deeply into the reason for some of the weaknesses of drones. For example, the authors note that unmanned aircraft have much higher accident rates than those with a pilot aboard, but fail to illustrate that the repair rate for unmanned aircraft is also much higher, and that the cost savings provided by not utilizing redundant safety features more than make up for the higher accident rates. Chapter 1 also provides an outstanding explanation of the difficulty of accurately counting drone strikes and the casualties they create, and demonstrates the four main sources of data that underpinned much of this

work. The chapter concludes by noting that as drone technology and usage has matured, civilian deaths as a percentage of total casualties in drone strikes have plummeted, suggesting that their use is becoming more accurate and discriminating.

Chapter 2 debates the different strategies that have been employed in the wartime use of drones. In particular, the authors are attempting to determine if drones have provided an effective tool for combating al-Qaeda. In general, the authors conclude that drones represent a triumph of tactics over strategy, and while they may kill high-value targets on a fairly regular basis, in the big picture, they are not actually very effective. In fact, the use of drones may have the paradoxical effect of triggering an expansion of al-Qaeda, in part because the long-term approach to stalking and killing al-Qaeda leaders is not fast enough to prevent their immediate replacement. However, the usage of drones is definitely triggering a resentment of the United States around the world, which aids in terrorism organizations' recruitment efforts. The United States is typically seen as aggressive, arrogant, and heavy-handed, waging war with impunity without accepting the normal risks of combat. Because the United States eschews the use of ground troops, it cannot secure the scene of most drone strikes, and thus it loses any opportunity to control the post-strike narrative. In the authors' minds, the US crossed a major line when it decided to target American citizens operating in support of al-Qaeda, and yet, it seems to have done so without much thought or introspection.

The third chapter is a fairly frustrating one to read—it presents all of the arguments regarding the legality of drone warfare, but never really adopts a stance so much as outsources the argument to others. The authors make a lot of key distinctions, including the applicability of the laws of armed conflict to war against nonstate terror groups, the importance of geographic differences, and the types of drone strikes (personality, signa-

ture, and double-tap). However, the authors back away from truly harsh criticism, even when it might be warranted, and yet refuse to offer even tacit support for some strikes. Thus, they attempt to show what others have stated regarding the laws of warfare and the use of drones, but at no time do they offer their own interpretations or analysis of the relative merits of each argument.

Chapter 4 examines the ethics of drone warfare. It begins by laying out the tenets of ethical behavior in warfare and the current dominant arguments regarding the ethical use of drones. According to the authors, drones are not inherently more or less ethical, they are simply a different mechanism for conducting traditional wartime missions. There is a very solid walkthrough of the basic elements of Just War theory, using examples of drone strikes to demonstrate that the United States undertakes a substantial effort to fight in an ethical manner, but is not perfect. The authors note that drones offer a moral hazard, in that senior leaders in the United States might begin to believe in the possibility of a "bloodless war." The US will have to accept that other nations will develop and field similar technology, and will have little opportunity to protest their use on ethical grounds. However, drones might also encourage humanitarian intervention efforts, if they can be conducted with less risk. The chapter concludes with the vague suggestion that drones might be eroding military virtues, but also notes that the lack of targeting transparency makes any assessment difficult. The authors would prefer an independent ethics review of US processes, but offer no practical suggestions of who might be authorized and capable to conduct such a review.

The fifth chapter examines the politics of drone warfare and how the use of unmanned targeting platforms might alter the US approach to international conflict. The authors note that the US president, as commander-in-chief, can deploy drones without congressional approval because no troops are placed in danger, and hence, notifi-

cation of Congress under the War Powers Resolution might not be necessary. Political campaigns and polling efforts have both demonstrated strong public support for drone campaigns from the US citizenry, although specific aspects of the use of drones have proven less popular. In particular, signature strikes (drone attacks conducted without positive identification of the target, based upon observable behavior patterns) caused enough concern that they were largely abandoned by 2015, although not formally banned. Warrantless killing of US citizens, regardless of their connections to terror groups, also caused consternation, as did the suspicion that the United States had shifted its priorities from the capture of terrorists to the killing of them, largely as a matter of convenience. Foreign polls show far less support for the US drone campaigns, although the data generated appears to be largely dependent upon the questions asked by the polling organizations.

Chapter 6 addresses emerging issues within the field of drone warfare. In particular, there is currently a massive expansion in the number of countries that are employing armed drones, with at least twenty-three countries currently possessing such technology. In theory, there are international limits upon the proliferation of drone technology and exports of drone aircraft. The Missile Technology Control Regime and the Wassenaar Arrangement both serve to limit conventional weapons technology and the export of dual-use items. However, Israel, the largest exporter of drone technology, is not party to the Wassenaar Arrangement, and has proven quite willing to sell its developments on the international market. According to the authors, the rapid diffusion of technology is far outpacing any ethical developments, which is a significant cause for concern. They note that drones are expensive to develop and maintain, and require a substantial manpower commitment to be used in the field. For these reasons, they believe terror organizations are unlikely to use drones, particularly when other methods of inflicting violence are available and cheaper. Drone usage by a terror organization might be for psychological rather than physical effects.

In the conclusion, Plaw, Fricker, and Colon demonstrate that they have a general agreement on many aspects of drone warfare, and contend that their arguments tend to be on the fringes. In particular, the use of military and nonmilitary organizations for counterterrorism operations is a major source of friction between them. Ultimately, the authors believe that the current focus upon drone operations is because the United States likes them, they seem military in nature, they are "spooky," and they seem irresistible in modern conflict. Ultimately, they have unique capabilities, and if the question of whether they are an acceptable means to target terror groups is not solved, the question of how and when drones can be used in other forms of conflict will not be settled, either.

This work is a very readable and practical introduction to the key elements of contention regarding the utility of drones in modern conflict. While it tends to raise more questions than it answers, it is an excellent starting point for scholars seeking to determine the primary schools of thought regarding unmanned vehicles in combat, and is a worthy addition to the shelf of any individual interested in modern warfare, military technology, and the ethics of conflict.

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Citation: Paul Springer. Review of Plaw, Avery; Fricker, Matthew S.; Colon, Carlos. *The Drone Debate: A Primer on the U.S. Use of Unmanned Aircraft Outside Conventional Battlefields.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. June, 2017.

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