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## "Unmanned: Drone Warfare and Global Security (Book Review)" by Ann Rogers and John Hill

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Ann Rogers and John Hill. *Unmanned: Drone Warfare and Global Security*. London: Pluto Press, 2014. Pp. 184.

Drone usage has become constant and pervasive in modern warfare. Though used in one form or another since the First World War, the attacks of 9/11 launched drones into their current prominence. Dramatically increased use has been matched by a dramatically increased debate over their use in articles, essays, and books. Ulrike Franke, writing in *Parameters* in 2014, grouped the current literature into four main categories: Winning the Battle but Losing the Hearts and Minds—The Importance of Drone Perceptions; The Macro View; Stop the Drones—The Activist’s View; and Gut Instincts are not Enough—Academia’s Contribution. This book clearly falls into the third category in which Medea Benjamin’s *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control* (2013) sets the standard. The authors tried to examine the phenomena of drone warfare through Marshall McLuhan’s unique system of analysis, the media is the message. This requires reflecting on the system within which they are employed and then analysing what their use reveals about the system. The authors divided their study into eight chapters to frame their view of the system. The first two chapters chart the development of drones, and the third explores the relationship between them and military doctrine. The perspectives of those on opposite sides of the cross-hairs are examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 outlines legal aspects while the last two chapters are focussed on the implications of killer robots and the revolution in military affairs (RMA).

There are three structural problems with this book. The first is the over-usage of grammatical patterns and terms. The authors scatter colons liberally throughout their text, which are often enough incorrectly used to be distracting. More importantly, the term “controversial” is so overused that it nearly becomes an undifferentiating adjective. The second structural issue is that the chapters do not have strong conclusions, nor does the book. Chapters do not end strongly by reinforcing or re-stating the key points discussed therein but muddle to a close, and the end chapter that discusses the RMA does not summarise or truly close the book. Better editing could have corrected both these faults. The third structural problem is a major flaw. Marshall McLuhan’s perspective, well explained in his *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (1964), is a fascinating potential framework to consider the systemic influence

of drones, but the authors' use of it is incomplete and only partially explained much too late in the volume (p. 136). Even if the authors had explained McLuhan in sufficient detail, they failed to discuss several aspects of the system of modern warfare, which detracts from their overall arguments.

To understand something's place in a system one must have a good view of the overall system itself. From a detailed knowledge of the specific components of the system, one can generalise about the overall system and hopefully discover the "message." On the surface of it, the authors have failed to demonstrate the mastery of the fundamentals of the components of the system itself to allow them to draw their generalisations. This is revealed particularly in how they treat the RMA, how they understand joint doctrine, and how they conceive of counter-insurgency operations. Their placement of drone warfare within the modern or latest RMA is lacking. Drones have certainly revolutionised the access front line combatants have to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance information. The authors studiously downplay this fact, but it is a clear example of McLuhan's view of the extension of the senses. It is not revolutionary though that an aerial platform has been weaponised, a common practice from bi-plane, to jet, to helicopter and beyond. Further, the modified assembling of existing technologies such as the Hellfire missiles and electro-optical sensors reflects more of adaptive and innovative usage than revolution. There are issues with their chapter on doctrine. A substantial portion of the United Kingdom Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/11—*The UK Approach to Unmanned Aircraft System* is re-stated in this chapter. A JDN is a device to stimulate debate and fill an urgent doctrinal gap, but the authors treat it as if it has much authority, agreement and direction than it by far actually possesses. The discussion of United States doctrine is largely absent. This is curious as the US operates the preponderance of these systems and the information is readily available. Finally, the authors' grasp of the nuances of counter-insurgency seems limited, but this is a common failure in the West. First, they seem unaware of the importance of sanctuary in this type of warfare: why the French built the Morice Line in Algeria or why the US tried to deny the use of the Ho Chi Min Trail. A platform that effectively denies sanctuary will not be casually discarded. Second, they seem unaware of the role of extremist in this type of warfare. Beyond the rhetoric of "hearts and minds" and "population-centric operations," there is an infrastructure

of dedicated organisers within the ranks of the opposition that will have to be removed. Formerly, the hard core were eliminated by techniques such as pseudo-gangs, deep jungle patrols, ambushes or massive months long food control operations, whereas now they are targeted by special forces and drones.

This book is about the American “way of warfare,” but it does not really discuss it. This is a serious weakness. Even the most general of American warfighting preferences are not discussed in detail: force protection - to keep casualties to a minimum; firepower—maximising the use of fires from the maximum stand-off distance possible; high technology—the continual seeking of a qualitative edge to overcome quantitative deficiencies; and air power—a hopefully surgical and coercive application of force. The easily identified benefits of drones can be seen in these traits: they greatly increase the surveillance and intelligence available to battlefield commanders so the force and civilians can be better protected; they remove their pilots from immediate threat on the battlefield which may allow them to make better engagement decisions; and their technical capabilities allow for penetration, persistence and precision. The interrelationship between the evolution of airpower and the development of precision bombing is not discussed in this book but is fundamental to understanding how drones have been integrated into the modern warfare system. Where in some passages the authors give the impression that the use of drones is pragmatically about bombing civilians, it shows that the sophistication and restraints in the modern targeting processes have not been fully considered. Studies from Iraq have shown that airpower was not the major source of civilian casualties but as has been lamented the more precise airpower has become the more it remains a focus of complaint.

So, why read this book. First, there is value in a work that examines the system aspects of warfare. While the authors’ proposal to label modern operations as nano-war is both unhelpful and unnecessary, there are aspects of the use of drones that need to be more fully explored, and they have highlighted a number of them. For instance, international norms on the use of force do evolve, and they must be properly and fully debated. The double-tap process (p. 98) seems a questionable practice and actually controversial. Similarly, targeting “pattern of life” criteria may not be sufficiently discriminating given the general weaknesses of purely technical intelligence and the difficulties of interpreting the cultural norms of others. Second, in the

McLuhan village where the media is the message, this book reveals much about activist messaging. While there is value in reading it to discover and explore other points of view, one must be aware that this is a battle for perception. Recognising it as an emotive not an academic work will allow one to determine how supportable and solid the arguments presented are. Understanding how the authors structured the appeal of their book, of course, will help readers decide the value of its message.

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