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We have entered the ‘Age of Drones’ not just in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars but increasingly in film, fiction, commercial activities, and leisure activities. Amazon, for example, has been doing research on using drones as a new delivery system called “Prime Air” that is projected to be operational by 2015. Watch how our books, videos, etc. may be delivered in thirty minutes after being ordered at http://www.amazon.com/b?node=8037720011. The Federal Aviation Administration is reviewing the process for granting approvals for commercial drone flights as businesses reportedly are already “using drones to film sporting events, promote real estate, and map land.”

Lloyd Gardner’s focus, however, is on President Barack Obama and his use of drones as an increasingly important instrument of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan as well other countries such as Yemen and Somalia. Gardner’s Killing Machines is the latest in a series of his studies that evaluate U.S. involvement in the Middle and Near East from the beginning of the Cold War, through the two wars with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and Egypt and the ‘Arab Spring’ uprising. In these studies Gardner emphasizes the strategic, economic, and ideological underpinnings of U.S. policy flowing from the consequences of World War II and the Truman Doctrine of 1947 with its double-sided preoccupation with containment of the Soviet Union and advancement of U.S. strategic and economic interests around the globe.

In Killing Drones Gardner has narrowed his focus somewhat to President Barack Obama and his decisions on strategy with respect to Afghanistan, most specifically Obama’s initial approval of a ‘surge’ in Afghanistan as part of a counterinsurgency strategy (COIN) focused on the Taliban homeland in southern Afghanistan, and what Gardner suggests as a significant shift to putting emphasis on using drones, officially Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), to attack al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Gardner points out in his introduction, “I did not intend to write a book about drones. I planned to write a chapter on counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of another work. But then counterinsurgency doctrine disappeared in the Hindu Kush, and drones soared upward out of the confusion, becoming the weapons of choice against would-be evildoers everywhere” (vii).

The reviewers welcome Gardner’s approach even if they express some disagreement with aspects of his interpretation of the relationship between COIN in Afghanistan and drones and would welcome more development of his arguments on various issues related to the

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use of drones, their impact, and alternatives to their use in addressing the conflicts related to Afghanistan. John Kuehn, for example, applauds *Killing Machine* as a “devastating critique of a policy that Gardner clearly finds reprehensible and unconstitutional; as well as of a President whom it is clear Gardner still admires.” By depicting Obama as “The Dream Candidate” in his opening chapter with his expressed desire to end both the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts as well as the ‘mindset’ that shaped U.S. entry into the conflicts, Gardner persuasively demonstrates, according to Kuehn, how Obama, regardless of the political pressures and U.S. military maneuvering with the new President, would not have relied only on diplomacy but also wanted “a strike force that can take out potential terrorist bases” (x). Kuehn, however, would have welcomed more discussion of the origins of drones which Gardner mentions (127-131) in his discussion of President William Clinton’s use of tomahawk land attack cruise missiles (TLAM) in 1998 to attack al-Qaeda sites in Afghanistan. Robert Tomlinson also suggests that “a more extensive explanation of … [drone] technology is required” since the term drone “conflates a number of unmanned aerial systems and capabilities used by America’s military.” As Tomlinson points out, the drone on the cover of *Killing Machine* is a “Global Hawk, a surveillance and intelligence platform incapable of taking lethal action.” The enduring impact of drone technology on warfare is another topic that Tomlinson raises since every new war technology “attempted to minimize harm to those who used them and maximize the damage to their adversary. Eventually adversaries were able to counter the technology or find other methods to mitigate the exclusive use of these technology.”

The relationship between what the Obama administration attempted with COIN in southern Afghanistan and Gardner’s emphasis on the increasing reliance on drones is questioned the most by the reviewers. In March 2009 President Obama approved a limited ‘surge’ of 17,000 U.S. forces in southern Afghanistan to disrupt the al Qaeda leadership and to prevent the Taliban from taking over in Kabul and allowing al Qaeda to restore its base in Afghanistan. Faced with conflicting recommendations from his chief political and military advisers, Obama, after months of deliberation, decided to attempt a COIN operation in the tribal homeland of the Taliban with strong support from Commander of the United States Central Command, General David Petraeus, who had led an apparently successful surge in Iraq to reduce the violence by turning Sunni tribal forces in Anbar province against al Qaeda insurgents rather than U.S. forces and Shiites. Although Douglas Porch notes that Obama “inherited a mess” in Afghanistan, he concludes that Obama lacked a “coherent and achievable policy vision.” According to Porch, after the failure in Iraq by 2004 of the ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’, “a technology-inspired formula for rapid victory by deploying speed and smart, computer-guided firepower,” counterinsurgency became the new strategy in Afghanistan despite reservations as to whether the Kabul government under President Hamid Karzai was prepared to move out of Kabul with a ‘civilian surge’ to provide the necessary civilian leadership and services to build on U.S. forces clearing the Taliban out and holding territory. The challenges to COIN theories that were advanced by the military leaders and civilian advocates mentioned by Porch soon became evident, and Gardner suggests that this result prompted Obama to give increasing emphasis to drone
attacks on Taliban and al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a more productive tactic to contribute to conditions that would enable the U.S. to withdraw from Afghanistan.3

Paul MacDonald raises the most questions concerning Gardner’s analysis, specifically asking for more development of the author’s arguments. MacDonald, for example, questions Gardner’s emphasis on Obama shifting to drones after the offensives around Marja in Helmand province in spring 2010. (65) MacDonald points out that COIN was never an option in Yemen as opposed to drones and that Obama approved more drone strikes in Pakistan than President George W. Bush in 2009, fifty-two versus Bush’s sixteen in 2008, and authorized expanded drone attacks in December 2009 in Pakistan before the halting of ground operations in Helmand province. “This evidence suggests that the drone campaign developed independently of the Afghan surge,” concludes MacDonald, “and in certain respects was designed to strengthen and reinforce it.” MacDonald also notes that drone strikes declined after the end of the Afghan surge, suggesting that “strategic calculations, not a general sense of desperation or the allure of technological quick fixes, are driving his decisions.” A second issue raised by MacDonald focuses on Gardner’s criticisms of drone strikes, most notably whether the drone strikes intensify opposition to the U.S., the amount of civilian casualties from the drones, and the degree to which the drone attacks are carried out against the wishes of national leaders. MacDonald and the other reviewers do agree with Gardner that Washington officials have failed “to clarify critical elements of ... [their] justification” on the use of drones “and to subject their reasoning to a thorough and transparent review” especially with respect to the drone strikes that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the American citizen who was active with al Qaeda in Yemen.

Gardner’s central conclusion in the Killing Machine is that the “United States has already flown drones across constitutional boundaries and has them headed dead on for the foundations of the Republic.” (xii) The reviewers share Gardner’s concern to some degree. Kuehn concludes that Gardner presents a critique of a “lethal foreign policy run primarily from the executive branch ...[that] almost certainly does the United States and the institution of the Presidency more harm than good, both in the near term and in long term.” Although Porch lists a number of short-range benefits of the drones to Obama and his advisers, he is more persuaded by the costs: “a state of permanent war across a boundless battlefield where national sovereignty is a legal fiction and everyone becomes a potential enemy combatant. Drone intervention entangles Washington in other people’s civil wars, has destabilized the governments of Pakistan and Yemen, undermined the rule of law, made allies uneasy ... and invite[s] retaliation.” Tomlinson agrees that the “issue of conducting lethal drone strikes ... requires such illumination so that Americans, as a free society, can examine and debate the legality and the efficacy of such actions” although he is more optimistic that the U.S. “will find a method to bring such technology under the purview of their nation’s mores and laws.” MacDonald does challenge Gardner’s conclusion

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3 For Porch’s most recent study on COIN, see Jacqueline L. Hazelton’s review essay on Douglas Porch, Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) on H-Diplo/ISSF at http://issforum.org/essays/22-new-way-of-war
that drone strikes are a “threat to the moral or legal foundations of the Republic” and issues the question of what is the alternative to using drones to go after “militant leaders hiding in sanctuaries away from recognized battlefields.” MacDonald views drones as a “calculated risk” in a counterterrorism role “to protect American national security in challenging circumstances where there are few good options.”

MacDonald’s conclusion on “few good options” to drones is taken up by Gardner in his response to the reviews. Noting the mixed impact of drones, Gardner suggests that they may produce more enemies than they remove. What is needed, the author suggests, is “serious discussion of what exactly do we mean by national security and national interest before assuming that drones have answered the question.” Gardner affirms his conclusion that to the “extent that drones encourage the permanent state of warfare called the Great War on Terror, they do, indeed, threaten the Constitution.” He hopes that his book will “prompt discussion about the implications and consequences” of an “imperial president” using the “CIA as a private army and air force” with ‘Killer Drones.”

Participants:

Lloyd C. Gardner is Professor Emeritus of History at Rutgers University. A Wisconsin Ph.D., he is the author or editor of more than fifteen books on American foreign policy, including "Safe For Democracy," "Approaching Vietnam," and "Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam." He has been president of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Affairs, and at present he is working on a book on leakers from Daniel Ellsberg to Edward Snowden. He lives in Newtown, Pa, with his wife Nancy.

John T. Kuehn, Commander, USN (retired) first published a criticism of the U.S. drone policy in an editorial in the Naval Institute Proceedings in June 2009 and again in a lengthier article in Proceedings in July 2012:5 “Pakistan: The Real Central Front in the War on Terrorism,” Proceedings (June 2008): 8; and “Punch them in the Nose... and then Leave,” Proceedings (July 20112): 24-28. He is the Major General William Stofft Chair of Historical Research at the US Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Paul K. MacDonald is an assistant professor of political science at Wellesley College. He has held research positions at Williams College, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Center for International Security and Cooperation. He has published articles in International Security, Review of International Studies, Security Studies, International Organization, and the American Political Science Review. His first

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4 Some of the concerns raised by Gardner and seconded by the reviewers were included in the report by a bipartisan panel in June 2014 which asked for a thorough analysis on the costs and benefits of using armed drones, greater transparency on the legality of targeted killing, data on the militants and civilians killed by drones, and questioned whether the use of drones has advanced U.S. security interests. See the New York Times, June 26, 2014.
book *Networks of Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics* will be published this year by Oxford University Press.


**Robert W. Tomlinson** is the Director of the Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program, at the School of Advanced Military Studies at Ft. Leavenworth College. He is a Graduate of Claremont Graduate University, in Claremont California with a degree in History. Dr. Tomlinson has previously published in H-Diplo with a critique in winter 2006. Dr. Tomlinson is Vice President of the Special Operation Research Association. He is currently involved in research on American foreign policy in Lebanon between 1975-1985.
Lloyd Gardner’s *Killing Machine* has a simple thesis. Using armed drones in an extra-judicial manner to provide security for the United States of America is not only illegal, it undermines the political and ideological fabric of the nation as it was intended by the founders and the Constitution. Gardner does this best when quoting others, for example the columnist Richard Cohen:

“We live in a soft police state. ...one created in response to terrorism and crime. Cameras follow us. Our travels, our purchases, are recorded. Our computers and cellphones snitch on us. There’s no Orwellian Big Brother, just countless little ones, all of them righteously on the lookout for the bad guys. It’s necessary, I suppose. It will be abused, I don’t suppose.” (xi)

This last line is Gardner’s main point about the killing machines we call drones—they might be seen as necessary, but their use will result in abuse. He revisits and emphasizes this point near the end of his book in an epigram, again with someone else’s voice, this time South African Bishop Desmond Tutu: “Do the United States and its people really want to tell those of us who live in the rest of the world that our lives are not of the same value as yours? That President Barack Obama can sign off on a decision to kill us with less worry about judicial scrutiny than if the target is an American?”(212) Or, later, Georgetown law professor Rosa Brooks, “...the United States was actually handing a playbook for murder over to less scrupulous states instead of providing moral leadership in this ‘new normal’ world.”(245) One wonders why he even bothered to add the interrogative to the afterword’s subtitle “The New Normal?”(235)

In arriving at these scathing denunciations, Gardner builds a narrative about, and a case against, how the leaders of the United States, especially President Obama, came to institutionalize a policy of continual warfare using means that look an awful lot like extrajudicial murder, and from which no one, not even an American citizen, is exempt. He does this by following a narrative that often refers to specters and ‘legends’ of Vietnam, and how they seem to have channeled the President toward what would become his “favorite weapons” from a “21st Century toolbox to minimize actual terrorist threats” (84). In other words Gardner interweaves two narratives, one about fighting two counterinsurgencies with another emerging narrative about the trip down the river to the heart of darkness that has become drone warfare. In doing so he covers a lot of older ground, including the many questionable decisions after 9/11 that led to the United States’ involvement in its longest sustained wars in its history, and not just in one place, but in two non-contiguous theaters at once--Afghanistan and Iraq.

Gardner is a master at taking the words of those who made the decisions and turning them around against their speakers or writers. His opening chapter juxtaposes the promise of Candidate Obama, “The Dream Candidate,” with the actions and words of the man who became President. Most telling is Gardner’s focus on what ‘Candidate Obama’ said during a
January 31, 2008 debate with Hillary Clinton: “I don’t want to just end the war, but I want to end the mind-set that got us into war in the first place”. (18, emphasis added) This seems to be Gardner’s main point about Obama and about the cultural and political contexts that led him to expand an extra-judicial and unconstitutional type of war machine as the current defense-foreign policy norm. *Killing Machine* often reads like Andrew Bacevich’s searing systemic critiques of the federal government and its caretakers in books like *Washington Rules* (2010) or the earlier *The New American Militarism* (2005), although with less of Bacevich’s tone of betrayal and more a tone of ‘we should have seen this coming.’¹ He zeroes in especially on the dissonance between Obama’s words and his actions in putting together his national security team that included people whose mindset was definitely not new: the Washington think tank Center for A New American Security (CNAS), Hillary Clinton, and, perhaps most of all, Robert Gates. (25-28) In Gardner’s words, the “dream candidate” had “become the counterinsurgent president who depended more on Bob Gates than any other foreign policy advisor” (30). One is tempted to add ‘until Libya,’ when Gates’ counterinsurgent realism started to look more like neo-isolationism, or in the vernacular of Washington, DC today, ‘offshore balancing.’

Gardner gets a bit carried away in his narrative about how Gates represents older, more traditional American ways of thinking of the type that have gotten us into the fixes such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the illegal use of drones. As he recounts Gates’s well-documented vitae as a Cold War hawk and conservative, he fails to mention how the failure of Congress to confirm Gates as CIA director in the closing days of the Reagan Administration derailed policies that Gates supported vis-à-vis the Mujahedin in Afghanistan as the Soviets were withdrawing that might have contributed toward a less extreme Afghanistan by 1996. Nonetheless, the main point is well made; Obama’s ‘new’ team was really more of the same ‘mindset’ and leadership that had gotten the United States into places like Afghanistan and Iraq and did not include anybody fundamentally new (other than the President himself).

One of the most effective devices that Gardner uses—focusing on the hyperbole of principals’ foreign policy pronouncements and speeches in order to undercut their arguments—occasionally undermines own his arguments. He used this effective device in his book *Architects of Illusion* (1970), perhaps the most intelligent of a generation of books criticizing U.S. Cold War policy, and he does so here as an equal-opportunity critic of the American political class.² Both Republicans and Democrats, including the central figure of Barak Obama, are targets for this form of criticism, but it occasionally backfires. One example is his criticism of President George W. Bush’s infamous staged ‘mission accomplishment’ landing in a navy aircraft aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*.

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So far so good, except that Gardner accepts the ‘fighter jet’ characterization of the somewhat pedestrian S-3A Viking anti-submarine warfare aircraft that delivered the President. As a naval flight officer who flew in these aircraft in the last half of his Navy career, this reviewer found it comforting to see his lowly airframe, the S-3, which refueled other fighter jets but was not one, characterized this way. This author was no fighter jockey—and neither was President George W. Bush, Air Guard service during Vietnam inclusive.

One area that Gardner wades into with great effect is the counterinsurgency or COIN narrative, one of the two narratives mentioned earlier. This triumphalist narrative, born out of the ‘success’ of the surge in Iraq, posits correct doctrinal application of COIN as the salvation of the United States’ campaigns and strategy in both Iraq and Afghanistan. It also presumably applies anywhere else overseas the President decides to commit U.S. ground forces to support the globalist ideology of free-market, democratic, consumerist capitalism or battle terrorism, whichever comes first. Gardner does an effective job of showing how rapidly the sheen of the COIN approach, which requires immense amounts of time, patience, and money, faded against the realities in Afghanistan in the first year of Obama’s presidency. In turn he links this to the cheaper, presumably more sustainable approach using drones that could be employed in places that Americans could not find on a map, much less spell, such as Yemen or the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan. Gardner shows how the dominant COIN narrative is slowly, subtly, undermined by the emerging reliance on institutionalized drone attacks.

Another minor weakness of the book is an error similar to one Gardner attributes to President Obama—thinking that this history mostly began on 9/11. The ubiquitous strategic commentator Colin Gray writes, “...[the American Way of War] is made manifest in such anti-strategic sins against sound statecraft as with the ‘drive by’ cruise missile attacks of the 1990s.”3 What is a tomahawk land attack cruise missile (TLAM), after all, but a one-way, armed drone—a robotic kamikaze? So the entire debate here on ‘killing machines’ must go back to an earlier day, when United States policymakers first began to tear down the walls of the sovereignty and rights of other nations and peoples in its quest to punish ‘evil-doers’ and enemies without having to declare war and get involved in messy operations with ground troops. To his credit, in the chapter entitled “The War of the Drones,” Gardner does broach the cruise missile topic and the blowback from the attacks in 1998 (127-131), but all too briefly. I am hoping for a second edition that develops this topic a bit more, and the decision-making that led to the first use of one-way drones, as well as giving an update, as did Bacevich in his updated edition The New American Militarism by asking the question of “how are we [the United States] doing?”4

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Minor errors and occasional hyperbole notwithstanding, the book is a devastating critique of a policy that Gardner clearly finds reprehensible and unconstitutional; as well as of a President whom it is clear Gardner still admires. For this reason Gardner’s work brings an honesty to this debate that is all too often lacking. It is less a history than a contemporary and scathing critique of a lethal foreign policy run primarily from the executive branch that almost certainly does the United States, and the institution of the Presidency, more harm than good, both in the near term and in the long term. Recently, the United States Naval Institute hosted a contest sponsored, to no one’s surprise, by the defense companies Textron and Bell Helicopter that asked entrants, “How will our maritime culture be affected when machines perform more of the Observe-Orient- Decide-Act-Access cycle?” DOD-speak aside, the contest, perhaps unintentionally, solicited thoughts for the cultural implications of using Gardner’s ‘killing machines.’ A line from one of the winning entries could have come from this book, “Unmanned systems may be the magic bullet...but here are a few points to ponder to keep...from making some costly mistakes.” Gardner’s book is essential reading for those national leaders who may wish to avoid “making some costly mistakes.”


In his new book *Killing Machine: The American Presidency in the Age of Drone Warfare*, Lloyd Gardner sets out to provide a succinct overview of the evolution of counterterrorism policies during the first term of Barack Obama’s presidency. As a distinguished historian of American foreign policy and longtime observer of U.S. policy in the Middle East, Gardner is perfectly positioned to write a book of this kind. Drawing primarily on press accounts, speeches, books by journalists, and the occasional WikiLeaks cable, he traces how Obama has evolved from anti-war candidate, to advocate of the surge in Afghanistan, to defender of drone strikes targeting terrorist networks around the world. Along the way, Gardner expresses deep skepticism of the current foundations of American foreign policy. He describes how the Obama administration, unable to secure a rapid victory in Afghanistan using counterinsurgency best practices, embraced drones as a cheap and easy technological solution to what are deep and difficult policy problems. Moreover, the administration has justified the killing of suspected terrorists, including those who are American citizens, with obfuscatory rhetoric and contradictory legal standards. It is for this reason that Gardner concludes, quite dramatically, that the Obama administration has “already flown drones across constitutional boundaries and has them headed dead on for the foundations of the Republic” (xxi).

It is important to note that Gardner does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the entirety of Obama’s foreign policy. Aside from a brief discussion about whether the President is realist or liberal in his foreign policy preferences (84-85), he does not describe Obama’s grand strategy in any great detail. Nor does this book attempt to provide a broad survey of American policy in the Middle East. Important events such as the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program, and the confused U.S. response to the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ are not discussed in depth. Even in the realm of counterterrorism policy, some significant developments receive less attention. Gardner does not discuss the important changes in policies related to extraordinary rendition and enhanced interrogations. Even the operation that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, perhaps the single most important foreign policy achievement of the President’s first term, is discussed only in passing. Gardner describes the implications of the raid in Abbottabad for the drone war in Pakistan (145-146), but does not assess its planning or execution.

In the end, Gardner is most interested in one issue: the use of armed strikes by remotely piloted vehicles—known colloquially as drones—against terrorist groups in places such as Pakistan and Yemen. The thesis he develops here is intriguing. Gardner claims that the President was not initially in favor of drone strikes, but embraced them when operations in Afghanistan failed to secure the promised victory. The inconclusive spring 2010 offensives around Marja in Helmand province are particularly critical here, because they revealed fundamental flaws in the logic of counterinsurgency warfare. After these setbacks, “the tortured process that had produced the Afghan surge became a desperate embrace of drone warfare” (65). Drones were all the more attractive because they conformed to the traditional American way of war, which “preferred using machines to avoid losing men” (214). Gardner concludes that the long-term costs of drone warfare, however, outweigh
their superficial attractions. Drone strikes fail to disrupt terrorist networks, cause significant civilian casualties, inflame local populations in fragile states, and most importantly, require dubious legal frameworks to justify their use. In perhaps his most vigorous passage, Gardner argues: "Not only do drones threaten the nation’s future by creating and sustaining an endless, seemingly mystical war against terrorism, but defending drones requires the abandonment of the Constitution" (233).

Gardner advances his core argument clearly and forcefully, but there are places where he could have marshaled more persuasive evidence. First, his claim that “the drone had replaced counterinsurgency” (179) requires more elaboration. In general terms, this argument is plausible for Afghanistan, where both the surge and drone strikes in Pakistan were nominally directed against the same militant networks. But it is harder case to make when it comes to cases such as Yemen, where counterinsurgency operations involving U.S. troops were never a realistic option, and drones would have been an attractive option regardless of what transpired in Helmand. Even in the case of Pakistan, the timing of both the escalation (and de-escalation) of drone strikes suggests a more complicated relationship to the surge in Afghanistan. According to data collected by the New American Foundation, Obama authorized fifty-two drone strikes in Pakistan in 2009, sixteen more than President George Bush the previous year.1 This suggests that the new President was drawn to drone strikes before counterinsurgency doctrine received its test in southern Afghanistan. In addition, as Gardner notes, the White House reportedly authorized expanded drone strikes in Pakistan as early as December 2009, months before operations had ground to a halt in Helmand (134). Taken together, this evidence suggests that the drone campaign developed independently of the Afghan surge, and in certain respects, was designed to strengthen and reinforce it.

If drone strikes were a replacement for counterinsurgency operations, then they should have accelerated as the surge drew to a close. Instead, the opposite occurred: drone strikes in Pakistan declined from a 2010 high of 122 to 73 in 2011, 48 in 2012, and 27 in 2013.2 It is simply not the case, as Gardner contends, that “instead of clearing the air, bin Laden’s death had filled the skies with UAVs in search of targets to vaporize” (159-160). Of course, until we have access to the primary documents, we can only speculate about the motives of senior officials. But the circumstantial evidence suggests that the drone campaign in Pakistan was designed to support—not to substitute for—operations in Afghanistan. The fact that Obama has curtailed drone strikes in Pakistan in recent years likewise suggests that strategic calculations, not a general sense of desperation or the allure of technological quick fixes, are driving his decisions.

Second, Gardner could provide stronger evidence to support his specific misgivings about the use of drone strikes. Because his narrative progresses chronologically, Gardner never

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2 Ibid.
lays out his main critiques in a systematic fashion, but they more or less center around four distinct concerns. One is the potential for blowback: “In the long run,” Gardner argues, “the strikes create new enemies and force the construction of new kill lists” (232). The evidence for this claim, however, is ambiguous. Gardner notes that Obama remains unpopular in Pakistan (239), but U.S. favorability has always been consistently low in Pakistan, and it is unclear to what extent drone strikes drive these perceptions. Moreover, as the International Crisis Group points out, “the main causes for the spread of militancy in [Pakistan’s tribal areas] are not drone strikes but domestic factors.” Gardner also does not assess the potential advantages of drone strikes: the elimination of veteran leaders, the disruption of militant networks, the creation of mistrust among fighters, and so forth. Without a more in-depth discussion of both sides of the ledger, it is hard to assess the validity of this claim.

A related concern is the accuracy of drone strikes. Gardner rightly critiques administration officials for dodging important questions related to civilian casualties, especially when it comes to so-called “signature strikes” (151-152). Yet assessments of the civilian impact of drone strikes vary widely, and Gardner does not mention that the percentage of civilians killed in drone strikes has decreased in recent years. Just 3 percent of the deaths attributed to drone strikes in Pakistan in 2013, by one count, were civilians. It is worth pointing out that alternative efforts to combat extremist groups, such as conventional operations conducted by the Pakistani military, have resulted in the significant loss of innocent life.

Gardner also expresses concern about drone strikes and the violation of national sovereignty. Because of drone strikes, he argues, “Americans now lived in a world where...national borders existed only in atlases” (223). But the extent to which drone

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3 According to a 2010 poll by the Pew Research Center, only 35 percent of Pakistanis had even heard about drone attacks. Similar polling by the same organization has shown a dramatic consistency in Pakistani attitudes about the United States: in a 2009 poll, just 16 percent of respondents had a favorable view of the United States, compared to 12 percent in 2011 and 2012 polls. See Pew Research Center “Little Knowledge of Drone Strikes in Pakistan,” (12 August 2010); and Pew Research Center, “Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of the U.S.” (27 June 2012). For a fascinating discussion of public opinion in Pakistan, see C. Christine Fair, Karl Kaltenthaler, and William Miller, “The Drone War: Public Opposition to American Drone Strikes in Pakistan,” Political Science Quarterly, 129, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 1-33.


6 See “Drone Wars Pakistan.”
strikes have been conducted against the will of local governments is a matter of some debate. There is credible evidence that Pakistani officials, including President Pervez Musharraf, approved of American drone strikes in the tribal areas. In the case of Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh also reportedly gave his consent to drone operations. Because leaders often insist that their consent to drone operations remain secret, it is difficult to confirm these accounts. But the assertion that the United States tramples the sovereignty of myriad countries around the globe remains, at best, unproven.

In the end, the issue that draws most of Gardner’s ire is not the practical impact of drone strikes, but their legal status. The basic legal argument advanced by the Obama administration is that the right to self-defense permits it to conduct drone strikes against groups affiliated with Al Qaeda, which pose an imminent threat, in countries that have either given their consent or are unwilling or unable to take action. Gardner appropriately condemns administration officials, including Attorney General Eric Holder and CIA Director John Brennan, for failing to clarify critical elements of this justification, and to subject their reasoning to a thorough and transparent review. The fact that the United States has conducted drone strikes against American citizens such as Anwar al-Awlaki, the New Mexico-born imam who played an active role in the Al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen, makes greater transparency all the more urgent.

It is hard to argue with calls for more judicial and Congressional oversight, but one wonders to what extent this would fundamentally change U.S. policy. Prior to the 2012 election, the administration reportedly developed a detailed set of rules designed to ensure that drone strikes respected international legal principles, including proportionality and discrimination. Gardner asserts that the administration has refused to release these rules because it “would cause the whole rationale to collapse in a heap of legal jargon that would convince no one” (210). But there may also be practical concerns at work: releasing previous legal justifications, especially if they expose the extent to which local governments have consented to past strikes, has the potential to cause serious embarrassment to officials in places such as Pakistan and Yemen.

Finally, although this is not a work of policy advocacy, one wonders what Gardner would recommend when it comes to the use of drones. The vast majority of unmanned systems operated by the U.S. government are used to support regular military operations, as was

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7 See “Drones: Myths and Reality in Pakistan,” 3-5.

8 Ibid., 13-19.

Moreover, I suspect that many of the practical and legal concerns that Gardner has with drone strikes in places such as Pakistan would be the same if manned aircraft or cruise missiles conducted them. The alarm is less about ‘drones’ per se, than it is about the specific counterterrorism approach of killing militant leaders hiding in sanctuaries away from recognized battlefields. But what is the alternative? Should the United States pressure local governments to crack down on militant groups, even if this results in greater harm to civilians? Should the United States just accept the existence of sanctuaries where terrorist groups can operate unmolested, even if this raises the possibility of future attacks?

Drone strikes are certainly not a panacea, but it would be hyperbole to view them as a genuine threat to the moral or legal foundations of the Republic. The use of drones in a counterterrorism role is not a desperate gamble, but a calculated risk. Drone strikes have been employed in limited numbers in some of the most difficult cases. The Obama administration should be criticized for failing to defend its policies in a straightforward and transparent manner, but it cannot be faulted for striving to protect American national security in challenging circumstances where there are few good options.

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When President George W. Bush declared the ‘War on Terror’ on 20 September 2001, no one seemed quite sure how or even where to fight it. But the consensus was that action was required -- the attacks of 9/11 demonstrated America’s vulnerability and silenced voices that had cautioned against ‘clash of civilization’ adventurism into global minefields of murky conflicts. This unipolar moment gave voice to neo-imperialist cheerleaders like historians and political commentators Max Boot, Robert Kaplan, and Niall Ferguson who proffered a twenty-first century mockup of the ‘White Man’s Burden,’ predicting that the universal appeal of Western values and the attraction of democratic institutions exported at the muzzle of an M16 would transform the Muslim world.² And to be fair, at first things appeared to follow the neo-conservative script. In late 2001, the Taliban and al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden fled Afghanistan before a clutch of mounted U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were armed with hot-shot technology like Global Positioning devices and backed by seemingly irresistible airpower and armed local resistance in the Northern Alliance.

Iraq offered a more convoluted story, one of intrigue and deliberate deception by a coterie of Washington insiders led by the usual suspects of Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith and others. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that their collective knowledge of the Middle East was implausible and limited to clichés and group think, they steamrolled expert opinion in the CIA and elsewhere to sell a policy of ‘regime change’ in Bagdad.³ While realists might argue that Saddam Hussein was an unattractive but necessary feature of Middle Eastern regional stability and that the charges that he harbored nuclear ambitions appeared fanciful to informed critics of U.S. policy and strategy in 2002, the case for intervention was hard to resist on a moral level. This was especially so as the wizards of the Revolution in Military Affairs in think tanks and the E ring of the Pentagon promised a quick and painless ‘shock and awe’ with a joyful and cheap conclusion on the model of the half-forgotten invasion of Panama in 1989. It quickly became apparent, however, that the neo-conservative lightning war of liberation of Iraq simply opened the sluicegates of sectarian rancor amidst an inevitable collapse of public order which the advocates of shock and awe combat inexplicably and unforgivably had neglected to factor in. Fortunately – or at least so the neo-conservative narrative would have us believe -- the situation was rescued in the eleventh hour by a ‘surge’ of maverick U.S. soldiers led by General David Petraeus who

¹ The views expressed in this review reflect the personal opinions of the author and not those of the Naval Postgraduate School, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.


latterly had rediscovered the timeless verities of small wars theory and practice which travelled under the acronym of COIN (Counterinsurgency).

In this important and disturbing book, Lloyd C. Gardner, Professor Emeritus of History at Rutgers University, takes up this distressing story around 2009. And if you thought the Bush years witnessed the mismanagement of Middle East policy on a quasi-criminal scale, the Obama sequel is far from reassuring. Throughout *Killing Machines*, one searches in vain for a coherent and achievable policy vision, only to be presented with a succession of failed tactical options hidden beneath a cloak of subterfuge, opacity, and technological dazzle. A diplomatic historian who is expert at tracking the subtle swings of policy through a careful reading of diplomatic documents, Gardner meticulously and convincingly reconstructs the evolution of Barack Obama’s counter-terrorism response in similar fashion using open sources.

To be fair, President Obama inherited a mess. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), a technology-inspired formula for rapid victory by deploying speed and smart, computer-guided firepower promoted in the Pentagon in the 1990s by the mentor to a generation of neo-conservative policy strategists Andrew Marshall’s Office of Net Assessment, had shot its bolt as a formula for stability in Iraq by 2004. The operational and tactical vacuum had been filled by a counterinsurgency doctrine that was consecrated in Field Manual 3-24, written at Fort Leavenworth by a Petraeus-directed editorial team in 2006. FM 3-24 was a blatantly political document, meant to promote Petraeus’s vision for a winning strategy in Iraq as well as an attempt to save the professional soldier from the quicksand of generalized violence. The Anbar ‘surge’ of 2007 was predicated on winning ‘hearts and minds’ by disbursing cash prizes to Sunni sheiks in return for their cooperation against al Qaeda and arming their militias in the spirit of the ill-fated Harkis of Algerian War fame of the 1950s. Although Petraeus was hailed as a savior by the right, to the point that the *Wall Street Journal* proclaimed him worthy of five-star rank held heretofore only by the World War II command troika of Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower and Chester Nimitz, by 2009 the cost/benefit of ‘clear-hold-build’ COIN was being questioned in high circles, not the least by President Obama. Obama’s problem, Gardner reminds us, was that his room to maneuver was limited, not the least by decisions of his own making.

Gardner notes that by 2009, the young Senator who seven years earlier had voted against the ‘rash war’ in Iraq, as President had embraced, at least rhetorically, the success of the Anbar ‘surge’ and the requirement to stabilize Afghanistan as critical to U.S. security. His national security team included Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, both of whom were, at that moment, COIN hawks dedicated to continued U.S. presence in the Middle East. Presidential counter-terrorism advisor Bruce Riedel, whose ambition was to become “the voice of Vietnam past” in the White house (37-38), advocated a nation-building program in Afghanistan of Marshall Plan dimensions, at a stroke

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demonstrating that his grasp of the role the Marshall Plan in the post-1945 European recovery or why it was only applicable in mature democracies with the infrastructure, financial institutions, managerial talents and skilled work force to profit from such a cash influx, was desperately inadequate. Unfortunately, Riedel’s feeble command of economics was matched only by his shaky grasp of history. Afghanistan’s reputation as ‘the graveyard of empires’ was so much nonsense – the British, according to Riedel, had managed Afghanistan quite nicely in the nineteenth century. This fact caused even General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2009-2010, to sputter that ‘butcher and bolt’ as practiced by the British Empire hardly offered a solid basis for American regional engagement. Unfortunately, ‘butcher and bolt’ was looking increasingly attractive to the White House as COIN crumbled in Afghanistan.

The weaknesses of Obama’s civilian command team were replicated in the military, where David Petraeus and the designated commander in Afghanistan Stanley McChrystal publically politicked for a ‘surge’ re-do in Afghanistan. In what many saw as a blatant attempt to ‘box in’ the President, McChrystal ‘leaked’ his recommendation calling for more troops in Afghanistan to the Washington Post in September 2009, and on 1 October promoted a nation-building approach at London’s Institute of Strategic Studies, a stunt that won him a Presidential dress down on the tarmac of the Copenhagen airport. If this were not bad enough, the COIN start-up launched by Petraeus around 2006 had assembled a team of academics, journalists, self-styled COIN ‘experts’ and theorists like David Kilcullen, Andrew Exum, John Nagl, and the ubiquitous Kagan family, collectively dubbed ‘COIN-dinistas’ by their detractors. Like true believers, these COIN walk-ons seemed oblivious to either the fallibility of their doctrine or the limits of military power. These groupies kept up a steady chant of COIN advocacy with claims that an Afghan ‘surge’ would produce the decisive battle in the Hindu Kush in the manner of the Battle of Algiers. Petraeus disingenuously argued that, because the Taliban only occupied ten per cent of the country, a dispatch of reinforcements to Kandahar and Helmand would break the back of the insurgency and force the mercurial Afghan President Hamid Karzai to comply with U.S. direction.

One view is that McChrystal’s trespass over the civil-military boundary was an attempt to force Obama to nail down policy goals for Afghanistan policy. But the President needed flexibility at the very moment that McChrystal was attempting to pin him down. In Hew Strachan’s view, McChrystal’s gambit also replicated a bottom-up strategy formulation process in which operational requirements drive policy and strategy, a situation that is all too common in small wars. As Gardner notes, McChrystal, a ‘black ops’ guy whose specialty since 2002 was “manhunting” – e.g. slaying terrorists -- was a late convert to COIN. By 2009, he seems to have concluded that decapitation of the Taliban leadership was doing little to reduce an insurgency rooted in the Pashtun people, and which also enjoyed a safe haven in Pakistan. His victory formula hinged on the promise to bring “government in a box” to Kandahar and Helmand in order to win over the population.

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The problem, as some in the administration led by Vice President Joseph Biden, Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, and Richard Holbrooke, Obama’s special representative on Afghanistan, noted, was that the Karzai government with its rigged elections and extended networks of shady supporters was utterly corrupt. Attempts to build up the Afghan National Army and police were stymied by salaries inferior to those paid by the Taliban, private military companies who lured the best trained into the private sector, and desertion. Mistrust was reciprocated by the Afghan President, who blamed the United States for having created the Taliban, and which he suspected was plotting to oust him from office in the manner similar to that of Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam in 1963. As a consequence, he banished those whom he considered too close to Washington from his government.

Obama’s problems did not stop at Kabul, however. On the contrary, the American people and major U.S. allies had wearied of an open ended ‘global war on terror, (GWOT)’ a fatigue that rechristening the GWOT as the Overseas Contingency Operation did nothing to dissipate. Indeed, Gardner makes clear that the ghost of Vietnam hovered over Washington’s deliberations and calculations. Much like Lyndon Baines Johnson in those ill-fated years, Obama feared that Afghanistan would become the albatross that would undermine his domestic agenda and stain his legacy. For their part, the COIN-dinistas resurrected their tendentious mantra that Vietnam had been lost for lack of a general with COIN savvy.

Unfortunately, Operation Moshtarak, the surge launched early in 2010, failed to live up to its press billing. Many residents of Helmand province fled before trigger-happy coalition troops and their contractor support teams which were infamous for taking pot shots at the locals from passing convoys. As the Taliban fought back with snipers and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), the population lost faith in U.S. promises to protect it. Karzai complained that coalition-led ‘liberation’ translated into destroyed bridges and irrigation canals, and random death at checkpoints, from Taliban explosives, air strikes, or night raids. As McChrystal began to realize that the population was not as ‘biddable’ as COIN theory imagined, that contractors were bribing the Taliban to allow their convoys to pass unmolested, and that the ‘cash surge’ deemed essential to success in Anbar served only to fuel both inflation and corruption, he shifted back to more ‘kinetic’ methods. Unfortunately, this only succeeded in further alienating the population without significantly disrupting the Taliban.

At this critical stage in June 2010, Rolling Stone reporter Michael Hastings, embedded with McChrystal’s command staff, published “The Runaway General.” Gardner reports that Hastings saw his outing of McChrystal’s entourage for their disrespectful comments on the civilian leadership as gifting Obama with an exit from the box in which the generals had unceremoniously placed him. But Gardner argues convincingly that Obama is no naive liberal in the mold of Jimmy Carter who had been out-maneuvered by his military. Rather, eager to appear to be a stalwart of counter-terrorism, the President had boxed himself in by endorsing COIN during the 2007 campaign, acknowledging the success of the Anbar surge when other, contingent, factors appear to explain its ephemeral success, and surrounded himself with strong COIN advocates like Clinton, Gates and Riedel.
But by 2010, COIN had ceased to convince. The firing of McChrystal, over the protests of Gates and Clinton, and the abandonment of COIN, not the killing of Osama Bin Laden, was the real “game changer” according to Gardner: “No one was ready to say quite yet that COIN had become a strategy without a mission, but that was becoming more obvious every day” (135). It was not that drones were a new concept – indeed, death by missiles had been in play since the Clinton administration and in some sense revived the ultimate weapon promise of air power that had been promoted since the time of airpower pioneers Giulio Douhet and Billy Mitchell. But COIN, built on the ashes of the RMA, had actually run concurrently with drone attacks, as Gardner notes, often over the protests of the COIN-dinistas like Kilcullen and Exum who complained -- correctly for once -- that drone strikes caused immense collateral damage that created a ‘siege mentality’ among local populations. One suspects, however, that with or without drones, the true COIN-dinista angst sprang from the realization that the decade-long foray into Afghanistan and Iraq had exposed ‘hearts and minds’ as a doctrinal fantasy. In fact, Gardner may underestimate the symbiosis between ‘population centric’ and ‘enemy centric’ COIN. But he is certainly correct that from mid-2010, stand-off decapitation became irresistible to Obama. David Ignatius noted in 2012 that drone attacks had become “an almost addictive covert tool of policy” for the President, while Rahm Emanuel liked drones because they insulated Obama against charges that he “soft on terror.” (132) Drones offered a high tech, bargain basement method to extend U.S. dominance, especially compared to the $10 billion-per-month price tag for nation building in Afghanistan, much of which disappeared into the bank accounts of Karzai’s cronies. Drones gave the White House the means to run multiple Counter Terror campaigns by slamming terrorist hide outs in multiple countries simultaneously from a network of 60 satellite drone bases mainly in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, all linked to video higher headquarters at Creech Air Force Base outside Las Vegas. Drones, it seemed, like airpower before it, furnished the perfect technological fix for long, inconclusive wars. The British had reached similar conclusions regarding the Middle East in the wake of World War I: that the area could be managed by a heady albeit low-cost mix of machine gunning and bombing the natives from the air and SOF. Unfortunately, an absence of historical mindedness in the White House precluded anyone from asking how well that had worked.

The shortcomings of drone warfare as a strategy to achieve U.S. goals in the Middle East were one thing. But the legal and moral implications of drones quickly became apparent when on 30 September 2011, a drone strike in Yemen killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen. Two weeks later, al-Awlaki’s sixteen-year old son was also droned long with other teenage boys at a barbecue. As Gardner tells the story, there was no evidence that al-Awlaki, and certainly not his son, had actually committed any crime, although U.S. Major Nidal Hasan, who had killed thirteen soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas in November 2009, claimed to have been inspired by al-Awlaki’s on-line sermons.

Al-Awlaki’s death troubled legal experts, who feared that it violated the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee of due process. Hit lists are developed during ‘Terror Tuesday’ meetings between Obama and his ‘drone czar,’ CIA director John Brennan. Brennan, who was famously linked with the ‘enhanced interrogation’ program under George W. Bush, insists
that extrajudicial killings have been judged perfectly legal by the Office of Legal Council (OLC). This, of course, is the very body that issued Deputy U.S. Assistant Attorney General John Yoo’s infamous declaration that waterboarding is not torture. The caveat is that the OLC report that allegedly permits such murders remains classified. This, according to Gardner, is so as not to expose the doubtful logic of its conclusions. Department of Justice chief Eric Holder drew a distinction between ‘due process’ and ‘judicial process,’ which according to him is not required when national security is at stake. Holder got a blank check from Congress in the Authorization to Use Military Force Act of 14 September 2001. With the President allowed to use any means to protect the United States, the definition of ‘enemy belligerent’ and ‘imminent threat’ have become elastic ones. In Gardner’s telling, Obama seems to have no essential beliefs, even in the area of international jurisprudence, which should play to his core competency. Nor does he appear to be a good judge of character. All of this has troubled commentators from Bishop Desmond Tutu, who asserts that drones are a white man’s weapon deployed against places the West has declared to be “failed states,” (212) to the Heritage Foundation. Even conservative Republicans find Obama’s insistence that he has “a license to kill Americans,” or anyone else for that matter, is an indication that his administration has crossed a legal boundary. Some fear that we are back to Richard Nixon’s claim that, if the President does it, it’s legal.

The troubling legal implications of drones are matched only by their policy drawbacks. Although drone apologists like professor, author and political pundit Peter Beinart brand drone strikes in analgesic political-science speak as “offshore balancing,” (194) more numerous are those who argue that drones have created a state of permanent war across a boundless battlefield where national sovereignty is a legal fiction and everyone becomes a potential enemy combatant. Drone intervention entangles Washington in other people’s civil wars, has destabilized the governments of Pakistan and Yemen, undermined the U.S. commitment to the rule of law, made allies uneasy, turned John Brenan and his CIA into an operational and at times policy-making arm of the White House, and invites retaliation. “Not only do drones threaten the nation’s future by creating and sustaining an endless, seemingly mystical war against terrorism,” Gardner forcefully concludes, “but defending drones requires the abandonment of the Constitution” (233).

If Obama’s major legacy in the international area is to be that of drones with all of their drawbacks, he will probably be treated no more kindly by history than will be his immediate predecessor.
It is easy to be drawn into Lloyd Gardner’s latest work, *Killing Machine: The American Presidency in the Age of Drone Warfare*. The title, along with Gardner’s impeccable credentials as a diplomatic historian beckons like the mythical Sirens of the ancient Greek Isles. Although no shipwreck awaits the reader, a cautionary note is required for one who accepts the entire premise of the author’s argument. In his introduction, the author states that he did not intend to write a book about drones. Rather, he intended to write about counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet “drones soared upward out of the confusion becoming the weapons of choice against would-be evil doers everywhere” (vii). With this beginning Gardner states his thesis that ‘drone warfare’ has given the American Presidency an unprecedented tool to conduct endless war with virtually no constitutional, and few judicial, impediments. As Gardner states, “the United States has already flown drones across constitutional boundaries and has them headed dead on for the foundations of the Republic” (xii). This is heady material for any diplomatic and political historian, so the enticement for the reader to continue is great.

Gardner begins his argument with a chapter on Barack Obama during his time as presidential candidate. He exposes the reader to President Obama’s early debates and rhetoric about war during his first years in office. Candidate Obama did not eschew war; he opposed ‘dumb wars,’ which he believed the George W. Bush administration perpetrated in Iraq. However, as Gardner notes, when Obama became President in January 2009, he had difficulty finding a smart strategy through which to conduct the two wars America was already fighting. Counter Insurgency (COIN) was the coin of the realm as General David Petraeus of United States Central Command attempted to extricate American troops from Iraq. Yet, whether this counter-insurgency strategy was the proper one for what the President called ‘the right war in Afghanistan’ became the subject of enormous tension in the administration.

Here is where Gardner spends a great deal of time and effort discussing the administration’s political fight between those who supported counter-insurgency and those supporting a counter terror strategy for Afghanistan. Surge, or no surge, how many troops would the President authorize to fight in Afghanistan? The chapter reads like Bob Woodward’s *Obama’s War* with more details and better footnotes. In the end, when the champion of the Counter Insurgency strategy, General Stanley McChrystal was removed from command because of his inappropriate comments, Gardner argues, “the Afghan surge became an embrace of drone warfare with its unresolved implications” (65).

From his discussion of the political wrangling on the Afghanistan surge, to his declarative statement of the President’s embrace of drone warfare, the author spends the majority of the book linking major American decisions to fight the war on terrorism to this new drone

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technology. That drones that provide invulnerability for those who would deploy them, and the absence of any due process for the victims of drone warfare are the most imperative issues in this discussion. Gardner highlights the linkage of this new drone technology with due process. He writes, “when the full history of the drone is written, [President William Clinton’s memorandum of notification amending the Reagan ban on assassinations will be one starting point” (129). Clinton’s memo that authorized the killing of terrorist suspects “if capture was not deemed feasible” provided the starting point for the unrestricted use of these vehicles. (129) This was the case of the jihadist and American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, whose designation by the U.S. government as a global terrorist provided the impetus for a Predator strike while he was in Yemen. Again, Gardner spends considerable effort analyzing the legal dangers of the killing of an American citizen abroad, and what such a move portends for the rule of law and constitutional adherence. In the end, Gardner concludes that drones threaten the future by sustaining endless war against terrorists and the abandonment of the constitution.

It certainly is appropriate to discuss the dilemmas posed by new technology in warfare for the Commander-in-Chief and for the constitutional system of the United States, but other considerations also demand attention.

The first applies to the sequencing of Gardner’s argument. As a diplomatic historian, Gardner is a master of political debate. In terms of the new technology that is the object of the book (drones), and with which readers may not be familiar with, a more extensive explanation of this technology is required.

Although the term drone is widely used in the media and by academics, it conflates a number of unmanned aerial systems and capabilities used by America’s military. For example, the aircraft pictured on the cover of Gardner’s book is a Global Hawk, a surveillance and intelligence platform incapable of taking lethal action. The airborne systems that struck the targets referenced in _Killing Machines_ were the MQ-1 Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper. The distinctions are important. Is Gardner opposed to all drones or just those capable delivering a lethal blow?

Time spent with several individuals who pilot the Predator and the Reaper quickly reveals that “drone” is probably one of their most abhorred terms for their aircraft. This is because the pilots believe that drone connotes, in a majority of the public, “a red button of death that allows national leaders to kill capriciously.” Gardner’s description of “drone pilots dressed in flight suits [as] the top guns in robot warfare” also plays into that image. Yet, there is no capricious killing in the minds of the operators, and to those who fly the drones it is not robot warfare, it real war. Research suggests that “the human operators who control America’s killer drones are susceptible to the same psychological stress that

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infantrymen sometimes experience after combat.”

The important point is that human beings are directly taking lethal action with an associated psychological and emotional price to pay. The notion of “perpetual warfare” with drone systems without consideration of the effect on individuals and the society at large is problematic to Gardner’s argument (249). In fact, *Killing Machine* is prominent in the initial societal discourse to prevent such an outcome.

The second critique of Gardner’s book is his failure to address the enduring impact of this drone technology on war. Longbows, cannons, machine guns, airplanes and cruise missiles were all new war technologies that attempted to minimize harm to those who used them and maximize the damage to their adversaries. Eventually adversaries were able to counter the technology or find other methods to mitigate the exclusive use of these technologies. In *Killing Machine* Gardner offers a brief description of the downing of the American RQ-170 surveillance drone over Iran in 2012, supporting the notion that adversaries can counter the actions of drone technology. Once drone strikes can be countered by the enemies of the United States is perpetual war still possible with these systems? Irrespective of these critiques, Gardner’s book does force reader to think about America’s continual involvement in war against violent extremists around the world. The issue of conducting lethal drone strikes against these individuals requires such illumination so that Americans, as a free society, can examine and debate the legality and the efficacy of such actions.

In conclusion, Gardner’s book is well written and well researched. It poses some important issues for the American public to contemplate. Yet, I am a little more optimistic than Gardner that Americans will find a method to bring such technology under the purview of their nation’s mores and laws.

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It is a pleasure for me to have such thoughtful reviews to discuss in this Roundtable. Each one of them spurs me to think harder about what I am trying to do in this book, and I get the feeling we are all trying to understand better what is going on. Certainly, I am. In no way do I consider my book anything close to an answer. Perhaps the best way to describe it is: deliberately provocative. Another thing to say would be to paraphrase Winston Churchill, who, at one point in the war, said something like this. “Now is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Well, maybe not even that!

Historians have to begin somewhere with their books. I chose 2009 because of an interest in how President Barack Obama dealt with the Counterinsurgency (COIN) enthusiasts. I was surprised to find that as early as 2007 in his first big speech on foreign policy at the Wilson Center he had been briefed on the new Field Manual 3-24. Even more, he had endorsed critical parts of it, especially the idea that America’s future wars would likely be fought in very un-European areas of the world, and not at all like Gulf War I either, where mass tank formations and heavy bombardments were the tools of a deceptively easy victory. He suggested that the outcomes would be decided by whether the United States found ways to deal with a threat emanating from borderlands, mountains, etc., where there was no effective governance. It was an interesting exposition of the challenge, because it lent itself both to the endorsement of COIN or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV’s) – or both at once.

That suggests the point I am trying to make at the outset. The historian writing about such very recent events is bound to have a host of questions put to him under the general category of “What would you do?” Fair enough. Obama first faced the question and tried to deal with it in his speech at the Wilson Center. Years and years ago I was watching a film of Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy (McGeorge Bundy’s older brother) talk to a group of military officers enrolled in one of the advanced courses at the Army War College or the Naval War College. I don’t remember which. And inevitably a question came up about the United States’ support of Vietnam’s Ngo Dinh-Diem. The questioner wanted to know if that was wise policy. Bundy’s answer was, “What would you do?” Policymakers are wont to throw back questions about predicaments in this manner, then and now. They are also adept at dodging questions by saying, ‘If you knew what I know. . . .’ Obama’s spokespersons have talked this way, and are given to appeals along the line of ‘You know you can trust the president because he is not George Bush.’

As one of the reviewers suggests, however, the book is not a policy advocacy sort of book. I could simply brush aside questions about what should be done, by repeating, the book is not a policy advocacy sort of book. When political scientists review my recent books they often look for signs that I am advocating something besides, ‘Stop doing what the U.S. is doing!’ Well, of course, policymakers seldom do any such thing, either because of fears of public opinion, or because they are so invested in the success of a policy. Right now I am engaged in writing a book on famous ‘leakers’ from Daniel Ellsberg to Edward Snowden. I came across in my research an article explaining why Obama has carried out so many
prosecutions – more than any other President in history – using the 1917 Espionage Act as the basis for the Department of Justice (DOJ) actions. The article said that the Department of Justice in the Obama administration did not set out to pursue so many prosecutions, and Attorney General Eric Holder did not wish to have that as his legacy, but so many of these had been begun by President Bush’s DOJ and stopping them would have a bad morale effect. 1 If that is so, then it would seem to follow: no President can resist inertial forces. And the further implication is that little effort is made to examine what one was really doing to see if the greater danger might be to accept what was done in the past. One should pause here to note that, of course, ever since the end of World War II, the argument has been made (if not always honored) that national security policy is a bi-partisan endeavor.

Having made these preliminary observations, I think the best way is not to deal with the individual reviews, but, as suggested above, to talk about the issues they raise. They are mostly connected to the ‘What would you do’ question. But, again, I am grateful for each of them in raising important issues.

First, is it really so that drones replaced COIN? Not exactly; my argument is that the emphasis changed. One can see this in the way General David Petraeus addressed the troops in Afghanistan after he took over. He claimed there would be no change in policy, but there was. And one can note that when President Obama first talked about a ‘mini-surge’ in Afghanistan there was a seeming commitment to making sure the Taliban did not turn back history concerning women’s education and rights. That began to change as it became clear the goal was no longer to eradicate all Taliban areas of control.

One certainly cannot say that drones replaced COIN in Pakistan or Yemen. True enough, COIN was never a realistic option either place. And is it not true that ‘drones’ operate with the blessing of leaders in those countries? Well, yes again, and that is part of the problem -- drones involve the United States in civil wars. It is certainly true that Pakistan has constantly grumbled about America’s favoritism, as it sees it, towards India. So how many more enemies have the United States actually made there with drone warfare? I am not sure anyone could quantify that, and I will not try. But the number of new enemies in Pakistan aside, the question turns more on the general proposition, and there I think the United States has added a great many enemies. I might note, as did one of the reviewers, that at the outset of the drone campaigns, COIN theorists protested publicly in the New York Times that the United States was making far more, and far more permanent, enemies with this type of warfare. As for Yemen itself, one only has to look at the care to keep the drone base in Saudi Arabia used for launching attacks within Yemen a secret as long as possible, and at President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s talks with American diplomatic and military representatives about how he would continue to say the attacks were carried out by his forces, not American drones. 170-1 Finally, at one point John Brennan, Director of the CIA and Obama’s apparent guru on ‘just war’ questions, suggested it would be better if Saleh did not stay in the presidency. The United States has just decided that Prime Minister Nouri al-Malaki should not remain...

Iraq’s leader. Will it now use lethal drones in that civil war – perhaps to defend a new government under Ahmed Chalabi, the P.T. Barnum of Gulf War II?

All this leads to the next issue. Can one come up with a better policy to protect national security or national interests? The problem here is the extension of national security into national interests, without ever really defining either one. President Obama is guilty of conflating the two almost continually in his public statements. To begin with, what is meant by national security? Do U.S. leaders mean protecting against another attack on the scale of 9/11? That attack was carried out by a small number of men, armed with paper cutters, who had slipped through intelligence nets. It is now argued that better cooperation between the government agencies would have (or perhaps could have, for nothing is sure) prevented the attack. These men did not carry out their pilot training in areas where drones fly. Their master eluded American efforts to find him for years. Saying that drones (or for that matter National Security Agency intercepts), can protect the United States against another 9/11, or for that matter National Security Agency intercepts, requires much more faith in technology than is warranted by the history of America’s wars in the Middle East. What they can do is radicalize future generations.

Is national security, then, wrapped up in the attack on individual American diplomats in Benghazi? It was a terrible tragedy, but arguing that drones can protect Americans abroad in such circumstances requires us to believe that it is possible beforehand to identify targets that may not have previously shown any disposition to engage in such acts. As in this case, we will always be acting after the fact. Note here that the lists of targets on the ‘kill list’ has reached down lower and lower into the Al Qaeda leadership ranks, to those who have absolutely no ability to attack the United States or its citizens in this country. In Pakistan, drones can kill people planning attacks on American soldiers in Afghanistan, but the issue there is clouded by Islamabad’s ambiguous relationship to the enemies of the United States.

What national interest is served by supporting the regimes in Yemen or Bahrain, except for the United States’ alliance with Saudi Arabia? The use of the term national security, as a synonym for national interests, thus confuses protection of the lives of Americans with a broad category of questions under the rubric ‘national interest.’ Decisions about national interest are much more debatable than we have acknowledged so far, and the debate has been going on at least since Charles Beard and Hans Morgenthau raised the issue in their books.2 Perhaps the best course is to engage in serious discussion of what exactly we mean by national security and national interest before assuming that drones have answered the question. It is, alas, hard to imagine how such a process could even begin, but it is as serious as finding ways to deal with climate change.

Has the evolution of warfare not demonstrated that step by step, new inventions have a self-limiting aspect as more and more nations have the ability to apply ‘deterrence theory,’ the Cold War being a perfect example? It is true that Iranian drones are now in the air over Iraq.

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But does that prove the point? Actually, humans are scared to death of proliferation, whether of atomic weapons or drones. But that misses the point. The West, collectively, since the beginning of the colonial age, has used superior technology to conquer the world. Whether one thinks of Agent Orange or other defoliants in Vietnam, or depleted uranium in artillery shells in Iraq, there are no breaks in the chain of high-tech weapons deployed against perceived enemies in what used to be called the Third World. Drone warriors readily acknowledge that a major purpose of the weapon is intimidation, or control of the future.

Is it not hyperbole, finally, to argue that drones threaten the foundations of American constitutional government? Perhaps as such, yes, but considered alongside the potential damage of Department of Justice rulings by the Office of Legal Counsel about killing American citizens abroad that establish ‘imminence,’ instead of courtroom procedures to determine guilt, one cannot be too sure about the future.

Perhaps it is also true that the nation will be able to come up with a set of rules that regulate drone warfare and bring it into conformity with the evolution of the rules of warfare recognized by nations today. In this regard, however, one must recognize that there are many very smart people arguing that the United States must protect itself against those who wish to impose restrictions on American ‘sovereignty’ through international laws, like the ties that bound Gulliver to the ground.

Drones may be just another advance in warfare, one admirably suited to the threats that face the United States in the present and the future. They actually cut down on civilian casualties compared to other forms of aerial warfare, as well as that on the ground. But the question might easily be posed, "Would these casualties – and the aftermath -- be incurred if the United States did not have drones, and are they necessary to the nation to protect national security?"

To the extent that drones encourage the permanent state of warfare called the Great War on Terror, they do, indeed, threaten the Constitution. Obama himself argued before the 2012 election that drone warfare opens up a whole new set of questions, not unlike the dawn of the atomic age with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Garry Wills has suggested that the atomic age quickly became the age of the imperial presidency because it required the nation to grant the President exceptional powers in a crisis – and was symbolized by the military person who always accompanied the president with one wrist chained to the ‘football’ with the day’s launch codes. With drones that has gone another step with the president able to use the CIA as a private army and air force. My book is intended to prompt discussion about the implications and consequences of this development.

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