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One Nation, under Drones. Legality, Morality, and Utility of Unmanned Combat Systems, edited by Capt. John Jackson (US Navy, retd)

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One nation, under Drones presents an overview and the state of art of unmanned systems and their military and civilian applications, including the ethical and legal debates surrounding these applications. The book consists of 13 chapters by various authors, addressing some of the most important questions in this discussion.

The first chapter by the editor of the book deals with the history and the present of the development of unmanned systems. The second chapter, by P.W. Singer and Konstantin Kakaes, raises major questions for policy-makers regarding these systems, clustering them into three broad areas: military tactics, privacy laws and airspace deconfliction. The chapter is tellingly subtitled 'The Science Fiction Technology of Tomorrow Is Already Here Today' (p.24), suggesting the urgency of such debates. The third chapter takes on the topic of the past, present and future of drone development, with particular emphasis on their employment in asymmetric conflicts by both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. The next chapter (Chapter 4) looks at the development of unmanned systems from the maritime perspective, clearly showing their utility in the waters.

In Chapter 5, Robert Sparrow and George R. Lucas Jr. take the debate on maritime drones to the legal and ethical sphere, discussing in depth the implication of the use of unmanned technology in the unique maritime environment. As the war at sea is very different from that on land and has very special legal and ethical rules, use of unmanned systems in such environment has also unique legal and ethical challenges. Interview-based Chapter 6 discusses the use of unmanned systems in the U.S. Marine Corps, while Chapter 7 takes the readers back to the air and discusses the ways of dealing with small unmanned aerial systems.

Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the legal issues related to the development and deployment of drones. It is suggested that the legal debate on drones has matured to include significant points of agreement between the different parties, even if some disagreements are bound to persist, given that drone deployment is regulated by at least three different international law regimes: sovereignty, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Chapter 9 places particular emphasis on the legal aspects of the development of unmanned systems, especially on the necessity of thorough weapon reviews. While it is highly unlikely that the states would agree to ban outright this type of technology, one way forward would be to insist on such strong weapon controls.

Chapters 10 and 11 lead to the ethical issues of drone use, with Ronald Arkin focussing on the 'plight of the non-combatant' and arguing that use of robots in the battlefield has the potential to reduce the numbers of atrocities committed in the heat of the moment and to save civilians caught up in the line of fire. At the same time, Arkin, himself a prominent developer of the unmanned technology, supports the moratorium on the deployment of unmanned systems until it can be asserted with confidence that it ameliorates, rather than aggravates, the plight of the non-combatants caught in the fray. For his part, Joe Chapa argues that many of the supposed problems with the unmanned technology are red herrings rather than real issues. Many issues raised about the drones, e.g. linked to the remoteness of its operator, or the question of precision, are not anyhow unique to the drones; they are the same for other types of weaponry (and their operators). What he suggests is unique in the current use of drones is the conflation of tactical and

strategic levels, where it is not clear whether there exists a 'strategic framework that can tie death at the tactical level to the better peace at the strategic level' (p.189).

Chapter 12 departs from these deep ethical questions back to reality on the ground, where civilian uses of unmanned technology are proliferating. Finally, Chapter 13 shortly wraps up the discussion.

For a lay reader, unfamiliar with this still rather novel technology and its uses, the book can serve as a good introduction into the military and civilian employment of unmanned systems and into the questions that surround such use. Those more familiar with the debates on drones will also find much to appreciate in this book. It presents chapters by such grandees of the debate on the unmanned technology as P.W. Singer, Robert Sparrow, George R. Lucas Jr. and Ronald Arkin. The chapters on development of naval drones should be of particular relevance for those with deep interest in the ethics and legality of drone use. These particularities of the unmanned systems at sea are rarely discussed among the public, or even in scholarly takes on the subject; therefore, the book presents a very useful addition to this important debate. Maj. Joe Chapa's chapter on the ethics of drones also presents an interesting take on the issue, emphasising that the major dilemma in the ethics of drone use may be the overreliance on drones, which may result in the conflating of tactical and strategic spheres, thus being incapable of telling how the tactical decisions – drone strikes – should achieve the strategic objectives, because in the current wars on terror, the strategic objectives are not even very clear.

As a slight downside, some chapters are rather repetitive, with at least two discussing mainly the same history. Other chapters are reprints that are available from other publications, thus having less of a unique value. Finally, given that the book is published by the Naval Institute Press, it is a pity that the most distinctive discussion of the legal and ethical aspects of employment of maritime drones is confined to a single chapter. Hopefully, this will be a starting point for a new book.