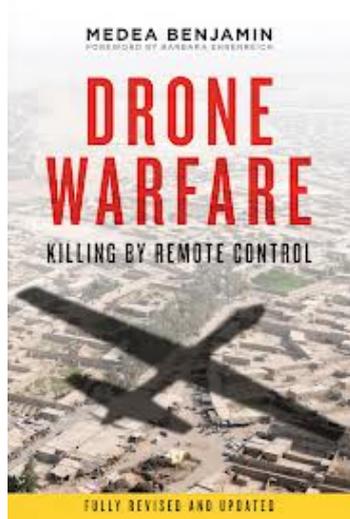


# Review: Medea Benjamin, *Drone Warfare - Killing by Remote Control*

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Medea Benjamin, *Drone Warfare - Killing by Remote Control* Verso, 2013 £11

Medea Benjamin, a well-known anti-war activist in the US and a leading member of Code Pink of which she was the co-founder, wrote this carefully researched book in 2012. The current edition, published by Verso in 2013, is a revised and updated version of the earlier script. The German translation of the book was launched in Berlin last November. The launch coincided with a statement produced by seven EU member States (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain) - all members of the European Defence Agency (EDA), the EU's Defence think tank - stating that they had decided to draw up 'a study on joint production of *Medium Altitude Long Endurance Craft* (MALE), which can be used to strike military targets etc'.

These developments add another dimension to the fastest growing - and most secretive - front in global conflict. And it is the development of this drone industry that is cogently researched and analysed by Medea Benjamin in this 250-page book.

I am reminded here of Homer's Iliad that

I studied for my High School Certificate exam a long long time ago, where the Greek chieftains, Agamemnon, Achilles et al, deride and berate the Trojans and particularly Paris the Trojan leader, for his reliance on bow and arrow. Real warriors, real men, they say, do not rely on action-at-distance weapons. I wonder what Homer would have said about the drones that allow warriors, hidden in offices in Nevada and elsewhere, to kill hundreds and thousands with a minimal risk to themselves. As Benjamin documents, the Pentagon and the CIA 'currently recruit and train twice as many drone operatives as fighter jet pilots. young men and women who kill with complete immunity individuals who live in an area where the US is using drones'. She concludes, on p8 of her Introduction, that a principle of innocent until proven guilty has morphed into a policy of guilty, and dead, until proven innocent!

Some say the name drone comes from the constant buzzing noise that some of these machines make in flight. According to other military lore, the name derives from the use of robotic aircraft as training targets for World War II gun crews. Ms Benjamin on p. 13 mentions that the United States manufactured 15,000 such small drones for anti aircraft practice during the war. This experience led General Arnold in August 1945 to state:

We have just won a war with a lot of heroes flying in planes..The next war will be fought by airplanes with no men in them at all

In her Chapter II entitled 'It's a Growth Market' (pp.31-54), Benjamin outlines in sharp detail the huge development of this killer market. One thing that surprised me in an earlier section was when the author tells us that '..anyone who wants to build an unmanned aircraft can order the parts online

and assemble them in their garage. Such people have organised themselves in a national group entitled DIY Drones - which at the end of last year had over 30,000 members!!' (pp.13-14)

While it is hard to estimate with accuracy the number of people assassinated by drones over the last few years, according to reliable reports, the CIA killed over 4,000 people in Pakistan alone in the five years between 2005 and 2010. Further killings in Pakistan after 2010 have strained the relations between the US and the Pakistani Government, while drone assassinations in Yemen, including the killing of two US citizens, have also made headlines all over the world.

In her conclusion, Benjamin quotes CIA's John Rizzo, who in a discussion with a Newsweek journalist, reiterated a number of times that he liked observing drone executions on live footage in the CIA HQ. They are, he said 'very business like they're done in the cleanest possible way'.

Clean is defined as minimal collateral damage. Drone executions, however, are clean because they are not meant to detain or disarm or capture. They are meant to kill, to extinguish life - and potential PR problems on the spot.

Medea Benjamin dedicates this excellent publication to all the innocent victims of drone warfare.