OMNI
DRONE/ASSASSINATION NEWSLETTER # 15.
February 20, 2015.

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/02/droneassassin
ationair-war-newsletter-15.html

Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.


What’s at stake:  OMNI and most peace, justice, ecology organizations preoccupy themselves with local and state matters, with what is at hand and familiar, and many people justify that approach, particularly with Congress and the President now war-maker extensions of the Pentagon. But while cities fret over finding money for infrastructures, the US continues to squander its treasure with unnecessary, illegal, and immoral wars. Every local or regional group therefore must also be part of the global movement. Militarism, empire, wars are not inevitable.

Blog:  War Department/Peace Department

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters:

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
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PBS NOVA “Rise of the Drones”

Rise of the Drones
Meet a new breed of flying robots, from tiny swarming vehicles to giant unmanned planes. Aired January 23, 2013 on PBS

Program Description
Drones. These unmanned flying robots—some as large as jumbo jets, others as small as birds—do things straight out of science fiction. Much of what it takes to get these robotic airplanes to fly, sense, and kill has remained secret. But now, with rare access to drone engineers and those who fly them for the U.S. military, NOVA reveals the amazing technologies that make drones so powerful as we see how a remotely-piloted drone strike looks and feels from inside the command center. From cameras that can capture every detail of an entire city at a glance to swarming robots that can make decisions on their own to giant air frames that can stay aloft for days on end, drones are changing our relationship to war, surveillance, and each other. And it’s just the beginning. Discover the cutting edge technologies that are propelling us toward a new chapter in aviation history as NOVA gets ready for "Rise of the Drones."

More

"Rise of the Drones" is produced by WGBH, which maintains complete editorial control over all episodes of NOVA. Lockheed Martin was a minor funder of the NOVA series at the time this program was originally broadcast. Lockheed Martin produces the RQ-170 Sentinel drone technology mentioned in the program.

Transcript

2. **The Bureau of Investigative Journalism**
   
   www.thebureauinvestigates.com/

   Bureau of Investigative Journalism

   Covert Drone War. Tracking CIA drone strikes and other US covert actions in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Get the data here.

   Covert Drone War - About Us - Current Investigations - Contact

   Covert Drone War | The Bureau of Investigative Journalism

   www.thebureauinvestigates.com/.../dr...

   Bureau of Investigative Journalism

   See Get the data: Drone wars for up to date figures on drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. For information on how we compiled the data, see the ...

   Drone strikes in Pakistan | The Bureau of Investigative ...

   www.thebureauinvestigates.com/.../dr...

   Bureau of Investigative Journalism

   The Bureau of Investigative Journalism ... Latest from this investigation ... Protect journalists' sources: The Bureau is challenging the UK government in a ...

   Get the data: Drone wars | The Bureau of Investigative ...

   www.thebureauinvestigates.com/.../dr...

   Bureau of Investigative Journalism

   The Bureau of Investigative Journalism ... The Bureau's complete data sets on drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Latest from this investigation.

   Bureau of Investigative Journalism - Wikipedia, the free ...

   en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureau_of_Investigative_Journalism

   Wikipedia
The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) is a London-based not-for-profit news organisation composed of journalists who "produce investigations for press"

The Bureau (@TBIJ) | Twitter

https://twitter.com/tbij

The latest Tweets from The Bureau (@TBIJ). The Bureau of Investigative Journalism is an independent, not-for-profit research unit which carries out investigative ...

Bureau of Investigative Journalism | Freedom of the Press ...

https://freedom.press/organization/bureau-investigative-journalism

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism is an independent not-for-profit organization established in April 2010. The Bureau, which is philanthropically funded, ...

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism - London, United ...

https://www.facebook.com/thebureauinvestigates

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, London, United Kingdom. 32865 likes · 226 talking about this. The Bureau bolsters original journalism by...

Where the Drones Strike

wherethedronesstrike.com/

The platform is based on data gathered from the database of drone strikes compiled by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ). BIJ's archives of news

Bureau of Investigative Journalism - Informed Comment

www.juancole.com/2013/02/announces-drones-project.html

Juan Cole

Feb 8, 2013 - The Drones Team at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism writes: The Bureau is launching an ambitious new investigation, which will seek to ...

Searches related to Bureau of Investigative Journalism

The United States has carried out a new military operation in Somalia. The Pentagon says it was targeting leaders of the militant group al-Shabab, but released no further details. Local reports say U.S. drones launched attacks Monday near the port city of Barawe, an al-Shabab stronghold. The strike comes as *The Washington Post* reports the United States has reached an agreement to open a second drone base in Niger.

**SHORTAGE OF “PILOTS” STRESSING DRONE USE**

“Breaking point” — The Air Force says that the US drone fleet is being stressed by steadily increasing demand for strikes by the unmanned aircraft. *The Daily Beast*’s Dave Majumdar reports that they have enough equipment, but are so strapped for manpower that they’re raiding their training schools and canceling leave for overworked operators.
KATHY KELLY: Drones and Discrimination: Kick the Habit

VFP International Advisory Board member, Kathy Kelly writes about her recent three month prison sentence for having crossed the line at Whiteman Air Force Base.

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, federal Magistrate Matt Whitworth sentenced me to three months in prison for having crossed the line at a military base that wages drone warfare. The punishment for our attempt to speak on behalf of trapped and desperate people, abroad, will be an opportunity to speak with people trapped by prisons and impoverishment here in the U.S. <More>

KATHY KELLY AGAINST DRONES, Google Search Sept. 26, 2014, page one.

[The essay I read was published in The Catholic Worker (Aug.-Sept. 2014). –Dick]

- Kathy Kelly - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathy_Kelly

Wikipedia

Kathy Kelly (born 1952) is an American peace activist, pacifist and author, one ... team members now living in and around her and her father’s shared Uptown apartment. .... by the Upstate NY Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars.

- Kathy Kelly on Afghan Humanitarian Crisis, Civilian ...

www.democracynow.org/.../kathy_kelly_on_afghan_h...

Democracy Now!

Mar 12, 2012 - We speak with Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative
Nonviolence, ...

- Kathy Kelly | Voices for Creative Nonviolence
vcnv.org/speaker-bio/kathy-kelly

Kathy Kelly co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence, (www.vcnv.org) a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare. During each of nine recent ...

- Kathy Kelly: Drones and 21st Century Warfare: Afghanistan ...

► 86:12► 86:12

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gt_0e2mRUsc

Apr 3, 2014 - Uploaded by BNPPeace

March 6, 2014, Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Non-Violence, brought her first hand witness ...

- Nobel Peace Prize Nominee Kathy Kelly | KBOO

www.kboo.fm/kathykelly

KBOO

Kathy Kelly, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee for her work to challenge US sanctions on ... the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers in search of non-military solutions to end the war. ... Voices visited Pakistan, aiming to learn more about the effects of U.S. drone warfare. ..... Join now · Be a KBOO Member · Donate your car · Wish List.

- War Protests: >From Afghanistan to Hancock Air Base — to ...

www.accuracy.org/.../war-protests-from-afghanistan-to-hancock-air-base...

Feb 29, 2012 - KATHY KELLY, kathy.vcnv at gmail.com. Kelly is ... The Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars released a statement today: ...

- Peaceful protester sentenced to prison for "harassing the ...

forusa.org/.../kathy-kelly/...drones/12992

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Jul 23, 2014 - End Drone Warfare ... Frustrated by the tenacity of war resisters willing to risk
arrest, the ... whom I'm now living here in Kabul, are threatened by the drones. ... Here in Afghanistan, the U.S uses drones to kill children, moms, and ordinary people. ... Kathy Kelly co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence.

- Kathy Kelly - Huffington Post

www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-kelly/

The Huffington Post

Kathy Kelly is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence and a ... Kelly has been involved in numerous nonviolent campaigns to end war, some of ... Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out .... Drones and Democracy · Pressured from All Sides in Pakistan's Swat Valley ...

- Peace Activist Kathy Kelly at CIA Drone Protest | Rise Up ...

riseuptimes.org/2013/12/.../ -peace-activist-kathy-kelly-at-cia-drone-protest...

Dec 17, 2013 - Kathy Kelly speaks about the drone attacks in Yemen and Afghanistan and ... Drone Warfare Protest at CIA Follows Strike on Civilians in Yemen ... IN YEMENTODAY Calls on President Obama to apologize and pledge to end ...

- The Grassroots Battle to End the Drone War ... - CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org/.../the-grassroots-battle-to-end-the..

CounterPunch

Jun 27, 2013 - Long time peace activist, Kathy Kelly, is co-coordinator of the Chicago-based Voices for Creative Nonviolence. Kelly just returned from her ...

“An Opportunity to Rejoice” by Erica Brock, Catholic Worker Mark Colville’s Arrest, Trial, and Sentencing for Protesting at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base

PROTEST AT CREECH AFB MARCH 3-6, 2015
Veterans For Peace is co-sponsoring a national mobilization from March 3rd-6th, 2015 to Shut Down Creech Air Force Base in Indian Springs, Nevada. Since 2009 dozens of activists have been arrested for allegedly trespassing at Creech, in attempts to stop the indiscriminate killing and burning of innocent people by drones. This year will be the largest turnout yet, and we want you to sign on!

Please fill out this short questionnaire get on the VFP mailing list for the event

National office will send out more details in the upcoming weeks about the mobilization, including the registration form, lodging options, the event agenda, and how to get involved with the direct action.
For more details about the event:

- Shut Down Creech Website
- Facebook
- VFP Video for CREECH

Abel Noah Tomlinson 6:53am Feb 11

'In their eyes, we don’t deserve to live like people in the rest of the world,' said the victim ahead of his ultimate death, 'and we don’t have feelings or emotions or cry or feel pain like all the other humans around the world.'

13-Year-Old Boy Who Lived In Fear of US Drones, Killed by CIA Strike in Yemen

www.commondreams.org

Just weeks after speaking with western journalists about his pervasive fear of the U.S. drones...

Grim Reapers
Drones have taken on a life of their own in popular culture.

Jenna Krajeski. Review of 5 books.

November 11, 2014 | This article appeared in the December 1-8, 2014 edition of The Nation.

- Share

An MQ-9 Reaper drone

Sting of the Drone
By Richard A. Clarke.

Buy this book
Erik Parsons, a colonel in the US Air Force, and his wife, Jennifer, like to talk about Erik’s work command­ ing drones almost as much as they like to rendezvous in their backyard hot tub with a couple of Heine­ kens. They talk about little else in the new thriller by Richard Clarke. The former counter­ terrorism czar under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush has strong opinions about US drone policy and only a few hundred hyperactively paced pages in which to air them. The result is a self­ confident pot­ port of PG-13 action. “I’ll bring the brewskies, Flyboy,” Jennifer says, stripping naked for the hot tub, where Erik calmly assures her that his pilots are tracking down terrorists. “We’re finding them, Jen,” Erik says, pretending to be a monster. “We’re win­ ning.”

But even thousands of miles from the action, it’s a tough fight. While he’s sampling a six­ course tasting menu about work. A Reaper drone collided recently with a passenger plane over Somalia and then crashed into a re­ gion pilots, accidentally “fried” a civilian, although he also eliminated “four bad guys.” Another of Bruce’s drones simply disappeared from the radar; Erik is still trying to figure that one out, “whether he clipped a mountain or what happened.”

Erik’s men are driving their cars drunk, asking for early transfers, divorcing their wives. Washington might send some therapists. Jennifer is a psychiatrist, and as she sips the restaurant’s best California chardonnay, she offers her professional opinion about their job:

“There is a lot of stress in the program. Let’s face it, they kill people fairly often and then they walk out of their dark game-boy room into the blazing Las Vegas sun, where it’s perfectly safe, fun is all around. It’s hard to live in those two worlds simultaneously. You want them to know there are real people at the other end. But then you realize that those real people are killed like fish in a barrel, they can’t fight back. It’s not really a fair fight, so your guys….”

Erik supports the use of armed drones by the United States, which has resulted in the deaths of approximately and civilians alike—in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. As a proponent, he eagerly participated.
the United States and abroad about the ethics and efficacy of twenty-first-century warfare. At dinner, in response to some popular arguments in favor of drones, otherwise known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs):

“It’s not supposed to be a fair fight,” Erik shot back. “That’s the whole point. We have found a way of eliminating our enemies that does not put our people at risk. Military leaders have wanted that forever. That’s why they put men inside big metal tanks or had them fly overhead in bombers, but then those things got vulnerable, too. I don’t want it to be fair and to have one out of ten of my guys killed. I want none out of ten killed. And that’s what I got with the drones.”

The conversation continues, steered by rhetorical phrases like “trouble is” and “truth is,” and if the talk sounds familiar, that’s the point. Clarke may insist to his readers that Sting of the Drone is a work of fiction, but he offers that statement up as more of a wink than a disclaimer. Since unsuccessfully arguing for the use of military drones to kill Osama bin Laden, Clarke has been an outspoken critic of the “war on terror,” objecting more or less from the sidelines. Because it is fiction, Sting of the Drone gives Clarke the chance to bolster his theories with imagination, while insinuating throughout that his imagination could double as insight. In the author’s note that concludes the book, he even hints that he could have prevented 9/11.

Clarke, whose nonfiction book Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror was a national bestseller, has also struck a chord with the Drone. Since 2002, when the first targeted drone strike against Al Qaeda was ordered in Afghanistan, drones have been at the center of America’s national-security policy, operating in countries where we have been at war, like Iraq and Afghanistan, and officially not, like Yemen and Pakistan. In spite of growing questions about the ethics of drone strikes, and an initial optimism about the foreign policy of President Barack Obama, the drone program has been greatly expanded since 2004; in 2012, there were as many drone strikes in Yemen as during the previous ten years combined. Recently, Obama referred to the strikes in Yemen and Somalia as models for the use of force against militants with the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. Drones are a military mainstay and a national obsession.

To their proponents, UAVs are an exciting—and inevitable—technology. They enhance the US military’s ability to target foreign combatants while minimizing American and, ideally, civilian casualties. Their development has applications in nonmilitary fields such as retail (Amazon and Google tout the potential use of drones for same-day delivery service). And they are economical: an armed Predator drone costs a fraction of what it takes to manufacture and maintain a fighter jet.

Critics say the drone program violates the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties that the United States has signed. Critics agree that the drone program may increase the likelihood of war, in part because they reduce combat risk for American pilots; the perceived low cost and US dominance in the field make the use of UAVs all too tempting. Furthermore, critics say, the very presence of drones—the buzz of their engines and the violence it portends—traumatizes whole communities. In Khashamir, in east Yemen, villagers attribute sudden deaths and miscarriages to trauma from the ever-present drones. Human-rights groups have published book-length collections of such testimonies. Drones, these statements seem to confirm, recruit more terrorists than they kill.

But for opposition policy-makers, journalists and activists, and even some supporters of drones, the most alarming aspect of the program is its secrecy, which not only obscures facts but also stokes paranoia—or complacency. It was only in 2012 that Obama publicly admitted the existence of the drone program while continuing to escalate the strikes, and Americans today are expected to reconcile the documented existence of drones with the official silence or denials on the subject. As a result, the debate on drones verges on the surreal, testing the limits of the American public’s
connection to its own government as well as its influence over the waging of foreign wars. Emerging from this fog are fantastical political thrillers like *Sting of the Drone*.

* * *

In recent years, not just in novels but in movies, television, poetry, video games and the visual arts, drones have taken on a life of their own. As a character, they are menacing, melancholy or gallant; beastly, blind, snub-nosed, noisy and fast—Predators and Reapers in real life, “Helicarriers” in Hollywood. They are the oversize hook at the end of a joystick, a militarized, antiseptic video game characterized by precision; or a weapon system proliferating at a breathtaking rate, and leaving a trail of destruction behind. They show off the military talent of their users, or they are an expression of unbridled hubris. They represent protection or extermination—and they carry out both things at once.

In America, on whose behalf the vast majority of drones are deployed but where none of their missiles have been used offensively, the UAV is more a symbol than a weapon. Drones represent the thrills and pitfalls of ingenuity, as well as the tangled threat of terrorism. They embody our own vulnerabilities as a nation, and the complexities—or impossibility—of waging ethical warfare. What we don’t know (which is by design a lot), we can imagine, and our fantasies are usually dark. “Well, look, they aren’t really just airplanes,” a member of Clarke’s fictionalized ‘Kill Committee’ says. “People see them as Flying Killer Robots. And people have a deep fear of armed robots.”

“What’s most interesting to me about drones is not that they are changing the world, but that they are changing us,” Mike Maden, who has a doctorate in political science, told me. “They are very ironic machines.” Maden’s debut work of fiction, *Drone*, takes place in a lightly fictionalized near-future in which drones are used for good—such as monitoring the migratory habits of endangered humpback whales—and evil. Maden’s biggest apparent leap is the core plot, in which the US president argues that Mexican drug cartels are a threat akin to foreign terrorists and deploys drones across the border to hunt them down. In a series of blasts, drug kingpins are killed with ease and precision. When old-school efforts—boots on the ground—are used to combat the Mexican traffickers, they fail spectacularly, and within the gore is a message: “Human snipers contended with other variables, too,” Maden writes. “Stinging sweat, the need to breathe, beating hearts, nagging doubts, sick kids back home, lack of sleep, fears.”

Then the weapons turn on their maker: snatched by Iranian forces and emblazoned with American flags, the drones target an oil rig, an airport and a church. Some are meant to kill Americans, and others to ruin the reputation of the United States abroad. Amid the gore, one worry about drones, one rooted in a strain of technophobia that appears in much of science fiction, from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to Cameron’s *The Terminator*. Humans, by virtue of our boundless curiosity and intelligence, will eventually create a machine we cannot control. In Maden’s book, and in Clarke’s, that machine is the UAV, and it’s only a matter of time—and political miscalculation—before our drones attack us.

Maden takes pains to highlight nonmilitary uses of the technology, and he wants his arguments to be taken seriously. He assures readers that all the machines he describes in the book either already exist or are in development, and that the novel’s world is only vaguely futuristic. The president, elected after Obama’s second term, is a woman. “I joke that science fiction is dead,” Maden said. “You really can’t make this stuff up anymore.”

In these novels, the actual fiction is like lingerie—minimal, alluring. The same is true in *Bloodmoney* (2011), a novel by David Ignatius, which also presents itself as being based in reality. The doctor Omar al-Wazir becomes a would-be terrorist to avenge his family’s death by US drone. Like Colonel Parsons fretting over losing control of his drones in Clarke’s novel, the doctor…
reader. In one of the book’s early scenes, a Pakistani general ponders the situation: “The Americans were changing the rules of the game. They must think they were being clever in Washington, but they were walking into terrain where nobody could help them—not their clandestine contacts…. They were the mischief-makers. They would get caught, and it would be their fault.”

Like Clarke, Ignatius has toured the news shows promoting his book, sometimes coyly, as an insider’s view on drones and governmental policy. With so little genuine information coming from the White House and the Pentagon, these books—and even television shows like America: The Winter Soldier, which have both featured drone-heavy plots—do sometimes provide insight or spark debate. Discussing his novel on NPR’s The Diane Rehm Show, Ignatius broached ethical issues that policy-makers seem reluctant to touch. Drones “allow you to kill people from 10,000 feet,” Ignatius said, “which seems, to our public—I think wrongly—less bloody than if we did it right up next to someone with a gun.”

And yet all these fictions, while diligently researched, are mostly far-fetched. It’s not necessarily the fault of their authors. Drones take on the gloss of fantasy too well. Genuine expertise—a background in the military, government, political science or journalism—warnings or political critiques do little to differentiate these drone entertainments from other, less topical science fiction or technological thrillers. The genre conventions overwhelm the message.

In Sting of the Drone, Erik grows increasingly anxious about losing control of the weapons. “It’s like something’s shifted. Like the bad guys are figuring us out, like we’re not quite invulnerable anymore,” he tells Jennifer. This may be true to life. But in the end, his cautionary words are less a comment on American hubris than a familiar literary convention: the rote speech delivered by a fictional hero in order to disguise the inevitability of his victory, purely for thrills.

* * *

“Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist’s.” Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole’s popular “Small Fates” series on Twitter compiles poetic, often darkly humorous, 140-character-or-less versions of Lagos’s more violent headlines. In January 2013, Cole turned his attention to drones. “Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable,” he writes in one. The last of the seven tweets, which invokes the first sentence of Camus’s The Stranger, says: “The program saves American lives.”

The tweets received a lot of attention. Fans saw them as a fierce critique of US drone policy, much needed at a time when secrecy—and fading optimism about Obama—appeared to limit anti-drone activism. By embedding drones in the opening sentences of classic novels, Cole seemed to comment on the national mindset about them, one characterized more by distance and irony than by genuine fear or culpability. Months before, he had offered what appeared to be a thesis: “Each age has its presiding metaphor. Ours is aerial bombing.”

Adam Rothstein, author of the forthcoming book Drone, responded to Cole’s tweets on the United Arab Emirates–based website the State, calling fictional work like it of the “utmost importance.” Such writing, compared to the whirlwind of thrillers—which suffer, anyway, from a dearth of information—could have a profound reach, Rothstein thinks. Curating and writing about work that incorporates the connection between drones and people beyond the offerings of science fiction or political thrillers, became his focus.

“Drones are very much a character, which we compile from the sources we choose, and those which we choose
me in an e-mail. “Look at the number of times people rely upon stock tropes to describe drones. ‘Killer robots,’ ‘flocking birds,’ ‘vampire bats’…. We really personify drones in ways that we don’t with cellphones or computers.” Rothstein added that “the problem with science fiction is that the drones are an aspect of speculation. Anything they do in the context of the work is immediately perceived as speculation, and not to be taken seriously.”

In the summer of 2013, Rothstein and Olivia Rosane launched “Murmuration: A Festival of Drone Culture.” The project, for one month, would post “art, film, music, and writing inspired by the idea of the drone.” The result, a compilation of work, explored the drone as an object and as an object of obsession. There are posters, videos, short stories, essays and comics. Some of these projects command the kind of audience of a David Ignatius novel, but taken together, they better represent the impact that drone warfare, and speculation about that warfare, have had on the public imagination. “Drones are a complicated topic,” Rothstein told me. “Speaking louder is not necessarily better.”

On the “Murmuration” site, one can watch Heems, formerly of the rap trio Das Racist, perform a song about drones and dating. Photoshopped images depict Predator drones flying over present-day Dubai. A fluorescent poster advertises a horse-drone hybrid called “My Little Droney: Surveillance Is Magic.”

“Dronestagram,” one of the most compelling projects compiled on “Murmuration,” is a visual and cultural link between the Instagramming public and the areas targeted by drones, as well as a method of compiling a death toll—a daunting task given the clandestine nature of most of these attacks. Beneath an aerial photograph showing the patchwork of flat roofs in a small Pakistani village, a caption provides the tally of targets and civilians, killed or injured in the drone attack. In Tappi village, according to one “Dronestagram,” three to five people, including one civilian, in a drone attack on October 24, 2012. “Three cows intended to be sacrificed for Eid were killed as well.”

When a drone comes alive, in the world of “Murmuration,” it reminds us of the danger of taking refuge in fiction and pretending people are responsible for what they do. In the first panel of a short comic, the black silhouette of a drone flies against a light sky, and the text wonders if the all-seeing flying weapon would, if it could, think about what was happening on the ground below. If the drone truly had a mind or a conscience; if it could control its own movements and make its own plans; if it could take responsibility—would it consider what it was doing? “But it thinks nothing,” the artist decides finally. “After all, it is a drone.”

* * *

On April 17, 2013, two US drones killed a suspected Al Qaeda member, his driver and two of his bodyguards in the mountains of Yemen. A description of the carnage from the drone attack, as told to Human Rights Watch, reads:

“The fire was high; no one dared get close and the planes were hovering above,” said Ahmad Hamoud Qaed Daer, the driver’s father. “I couldn’t do anything…. It was dark and there was a lot of smoke. There was no moon and I didn’t even have a flashlight. I saw my son charred, in the front seat.”

People began to panic. Nowhere seemed safe—not in their homes, not on their roofs. “The planes [drones] were there until we buried them,” another villager said. “I swear by Allah, if we had had weapons, not a single plane would leave. We would take them down because they terrified the village.”
These testimonies are difficult to read. They are full of explosions, gore and personal, life-altering tragedies. Baraa Shiban, of the nongovernmental organization Reprieve, says that drones are indeed a Yemeni obsession; they are always overhead. Villagers fear them, knowing that their own government and the US government are prone to denying that the attacks ever took place, even in remote areas,” Shiban said. “If you talk to very uneducated people, very simple people living in villages, sometimes they say that America is sending planes to kill us.”

In 2013, Reprieve held a drone-themed poetry contest. Writers throughout Yemen participated, and the event even prompting a local pop singer to approach the NGO about turning the winning poem into a song. That poem, by Ayman Shahari, described the grim struggle of living with drones and the complicit Yemeni government:

Below us:
A furnace for tyrants
Above us, drones?

The friendly drones, the enemy
Which makes death fall
Overhead
As though we are fields
And death our downpour.

“They were angry about the constant presence of drones over their heads,” Shiban told me. “A lot of them were addressing the fact that we have no other way to fight these drones. But we have our words, and expressing ourselves.” The prize for the winning poem pointed out, a mere 1 percent of the cost of a Hellfire missile.

In Yemen, poetry is a written and oral tradition that knits together a society otherwise composed of many disparate communities spread over a large and geographically diverse terrain. In recent years, drones have made their appearance in poems as well as in street art. In Sanaa, a well-known piece of graffiti depicts a child asking a drone, “Why did you kill my family?” The same artist also plastered images of drone victims around the city.

But it’s in rural Yemen, beneath the drones, where the poetry has been sharpened into knives. Life for many villagers is now unbearable, and poetry is a way to convey that reality to a skeptical audience. The attacks have penetrated many layers of society in a reasonably short period of time.

“Drones are, in many countries, the face of the United States,” Micah Zenko, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and an expert on national security and counterterrorism, told me. “Drones are such a small part of the American government’s engagement with the world, but they are given such tremendous weight because of the infrastructure around their use. It’s the myth of covert action.”

Zenko is aware of the swirl of science fiction and techno-thrillers about drones: “Look at how the CIA plays a role,” he advised. “They have an entertainment-industry liaison.” But he’s more focused on drones outside of fiction and metaphor; the reality is always get into at this point in the conversation is autonomous killer robots,” Zenko said. “I’m more interested in...
There are no civilians being killed by autonomous killer robots.”

Reprieve’s Shiban watched Captain America: The Winter Soldier, he told me with a little laugh, although he didn’t think that many other Yemenis had. Even Dirty Wars, the 2013 Jeremy Scahill documentary about the “war on terror,” has yet to be officially screened in Yemen, where much of it was filmed. Shiban sighed; as a Yemeni, he seemed accustomed to being the subject of discussion, whether in a documentary or a Hollywood movie, rather than a participant. “I think it’s interesting that drones are starting to impact even the American movies and American directors,” he said. “But there are limits. There is much more needed to be done to really address what is happening to the people here.”

This poem is by an unnamed Afghan woman:

May God destroy your tank and your drone,
you who’ve destroyed my village, my home.

The poem is a landay, folk poetry sung among Pashtun women along the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such poems were performed over drumbeats at weddings and other gatherings, but decades of violence, and the Taliban’s oppressive rule, have made such performances rare. Today, landays are still collected and shared, but more privately.

Their content, too, has changed, “remixed like rap, with old words swapped for newer, more relevant ones,” writes poet and journalist Eliza Griswold, in the introduction to I Am the Beggar of the World, a collection of landays she has translated. This extraordinary drone program. Much as they’ve entered the skies above scattered villages, drones have entered the landays as an exasperation with foreign occupation and a deepening terror of living under the threat of drone strikes.”

Over two years, Griswold and the photographer Seamus Murphy traveled through Afghanistan in search of landays, the trust of women who value the poems, which deal frankly with sex and relationships, as their sole means of rebellion, but who also fear the repercussions of being named as their authors. What Griswold found was, in part, the scar tissue of permanent change that the nationality of the occupiers and the types of weapons they use. Today, those weapons are drones. Afghanistan is a way for disenfranchised, mostly rural populations to describe their real lives, and violence has seeped into the work. A 2014 report called “Impacts of the War on Terror on Pashto Literature and Art,” by the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) Research Centre, a Pakistan-based NGO, determined that “Pashto literature is divided into two sections; one post-9/11 and the other…pre-9/11.”

I Am the Beggar of the World is a universe away from Sting of the Drone, despite the fact that both have armed drones at their core. It’s not just that Clarke is vastly different from the female singers of landays, which belong to a distinctly foreign literary tradition, or that he has very different goals (one of which, presumably, is to sell books). Drones are two separate objects in the American and Afghan imaginations. In the United States, drones are all too often a metaphor, the indirectness made more profound by the literal distance between a vehicle and its pilot. Drones symbolize a lot but seem to do very little. However, the same drone in Afghanistan exists as a fact of life, one that embodies real tragedy. There, a drone is a drone.

“Mostly, when people sing these poems, they’re not looking to make a statement as much as they are talking about their lived experience,” Griswold says. "I'm not talking about them as instigators of political change. But they are speaking out, in effect, by saying: ‘The drone has killed my brother. The drone has killed my family.’ The drone is a reality for them, and they're singing about it. In that sense, the poems are about the political reality of what is happening in Afghanistan.”
told me. “Certainly, [drones] are a symbol of menacing power. But it’s much more literal. When a drone appears over the author’s son.”

Griswold first listened to one of the landays in the book on the cellphone of a businesswoman in Jalalabad, far from the wedding where a woman named Chadana had originally sung it. Chadana’s son Nabi, a Taliban fighter, was reportedly killed in a US drone strike in 2011. Chadana uses the poem to mourn her son, and in two short lines manages to convey the impact that US drone strikes have on her life:

My Nabi was shot down by a drone.
May God destroy your sons, America, you murdered my own.

Jenna Krajekian

November 11, 2014 | This article appeared in the December 1-8, 2014 edition of The Nation.

http://www.thenation.com/article/190329/grim-reapers

RECENT 2015 OMNI NEWSLETTER CONTEXTS FOR US DRONE WARFARE

Vietnam War #6 (major example of US imperial air wars)

US Westward Empire #15 (from Jamestown to Jeju, now adding drones)

Money, Citizens United, and Campaign Finance # 7 (It’s the Complex)

Presidents’ DAY (Presidential Power) #3 (Pres. Obama selects drone targets)

Iraq Wars #19 (permanent war)

Vegetarian Action #16, 2-11 (mercy, protect animals, don’t kill/ahimsa)

World Poverty #3, 2-4 (US air and economic wars against the defenseless)

Violence USA #9, 1-29 (US the greatest purveyor of violence in world)

Torture #10, 1-26 (torture and air war against law and innocents)

Anti-War #4, 1-25 (all OMNI newsletters advocate nonviolence)

Martin Luther King Jr. BirthDAY 1-19, #3 (against discrimination, poverty, war, US wars)
CONTACT PRESIDENT OBAMA TO CEASE ASSASSINATING SUSPECTED "TERRORISTS" AND KILLING INNOCENT CIVILIANS

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DRONE NEWSLETTER #14
Stop Drones

FCNL, Telephone Briefing

David Cole, How Many People Have We Killed? Demand Transparency, Record the Killed

Gagnon, Spring Campaign Against Drones and Global Militarization

Rabbi Lerner, Heather Linebaugh, Stop Drone War Campaign

Know Drones: Spring Days of Action

Progressive Secretary, Stop Double Tap

Richard Clarke, Obama’s Excesses

Drone Complex and Contexts

Drones in Yemen EDIT

Conn Hallinan, Drone Pandora’s Box

Engelhardt, Murdock Paper’s Crass Headline

Akbar Akmed, From War on Terror to War on Tribal Islam

Greenwald’s New Film, Unmanned

Lawyer Who Justified Murder Nominated to Be Judge

Al Jazeera, Israel's Drone Industry (via HAW)

Make Punishment Fit the Crime

Recent Related Newsletters

Contact President Obama
OMNI

DRONE/ASSASSINATION NEWSLETTER # 15.
February 20, 2015.

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/02/droneassassination-war-newsletter-15.html

Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.


What’s at stake: OMNI and most peace, justice, ecology organizations preoccupy themselves with local and state matters, with what is at hand and familiar, and many people justify that approach, particularly with Congress and the President now war-maker extensions of the Pentagon. But while cities fret over finding money for infrastructures, the US continues
to squander its treasure with unnecessary, illegal, and immoral wars. Every local or regional group therefore must also be part of the global movement. Militarism, empire, wars are not inevitable.

Blog: War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters:
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Democracy Now!, US Drone Warfare Expanding to Niger

Can’t Find Enough “Pilots”

Campaign to End Drone Warfare

Kathy Kelly,

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Google Search: Only a Part of Kelly’s International Presence for Mercy and
Peace

Erica Brock, “An Opportunity to Rejoice,” Story of Mark Colville’s Protests and Arrest at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base

VFP Protest at Creech AFB

Compassion for Child Drone Victim in Yemen

Jenna Krajeski’s Review of 5 Books

Recent 2015 OMNI Newsletter Contexts for US Drone Warfare: It’s the War Department

Contact President Obama

PBS NOVA “Rise of the Drones”

Meet a new breed of flying robots, from tiny swarming vehicles to giant unmanned planes. Aired January 23, 2013 on PBS

Program Description

Drones. These unmanned flying robots—some as large as jumbo jets, others as small as birds—do things straight out of science fiction. Much of what it takes to get these robotic airplanes to fly, sense, and kill has remained secret. But now, with rare access to drone engineers and those who fly them for the U.S. military, NOVA reveals the amazing technologies that make drones so powerful as we see how a remotely-piloted drone strike looks and feels from inside the command center. From cameras that can capture every detail of an entire city at a glance to swarming robots that can make decisions on their own to giant air frames
that can stay aloft for days on end, drones are changing our relationship to war, surveillance, and each other. And it's just the beginning. Discover the cutting edge technologies that are propelling us toward a new chapter in aviation history as NOVA gets ready for "Rise of the Drones."

More

"Rise of the Drones" is produced by WGBH, which maintains complete editorial control over all episodes of NOVA. Lockheed Martin was a minor funder of the NOVA series at the time this program was originally broadcast. Lockheed Martin produces the RQ-170 Sentinel drone technology mentioned in the program.

Transcript


2. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
   www.thebureauinvestigates.com/

Bureau of Investigative Journalism

Covert Drone War. Tracking CIA drone strikes and other US covert actions in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Get the data here.

Covert Drone War - About Us - Current Investigations - Contact

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www.thebureauinvestigates.com/.../dr...

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The Bureau of Investigative Journalism ... The Bureau's complete data sets on drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Latest from this investigation.

Bureau of Investigative Journalism - Wikipedia, the free ...

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureau_of_Investigative_Journalism

Wikipedia

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) is a London-based not-for-profit news organisation composed of journalists who "produce investigations for press

History - Investigations - Praise - Awards

The Bureau (@TBIJ) | Twitter

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Where the Drones Strike

wherethedronesstrike.com/

The platform is based on data gathered from the database of drone strikes compiled by the

The United States has carried out a new military operation in Somalia. The Pentagon says it was targeting leaders of the militant group al-Shabab, but released no further details. Local reports say U.S. drones launched attacks Monday near the port city of Barawe, an al-Shabab
stronghold. The strike comes as *The Washington Post* reports the United States has reached an agreement to open a second drone base in Niger.

**SHORTAGE OF “PILOTS” STRESSING DRONE USE**

“*Breaking point*” – The Air Force says that the US drone fleet is being stressed by steadily increasing demand for strikes by the unmanned aircraft. *The Daily Beast*’s Dave Majumdar reports that they have enough equipment, but are so strapped for manpower that they’re raiding their training schools and canceling leave for overworked operators.

**PROTESTS AGAINST DRONES**

Support Kelly, Colville, Veterans for Peace,

VETERANS FOR PEACE, KATHY KELLY [To all Support Kathy Kelly. –Dick]

**KATHY KELLY: Drones and Discrimination: Kick the Habit**

VFP International Advisory Board member, Kathy Kelly writes about her recent three month prison sentence for having crossed the line at Whiteman Air Force Base.

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, federal Magistrate Matt Whitworth sentenced me to three months in prison for having crossed the line at a military base that wages drone warfare. The punishment for our attempt to speak on behalf of trapped and desperate people, abroad, will be an opportunity to speak with people trapped by prisons and impoverishment here in the U.S.  <More>

**KATHY KELLY AGAINST DRONES, Google Search Sept. 26, 2014, page one.**

[The essay I read was published in *The Catholic Worker* (Aug.-Sept. 2014). –Dick]

- Kathy Kelly - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Kathy Kelly (born 1952) is an American peace activist, pacifist and author, one ... team members now living in and around her and her father's shared Uptown apartment. .... by the Upstate NY Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars.

- **Kathy Kelly on Afghan Humanitarian Crisis, Civilian ...**
  
  www.democracynow.org/.../kathy_kelly_on_afghan_h...

Democracy Now!

Mar 12, 2012 - We speak with Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, ...

- **Kathy Kelly | Voices for Creative Nonviolence**
  
  vcnv.org/speaker-bio/kathy-kelly

Kathy Kelly co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence, (www.vcnv.org) a campaign to end U.S. military and economic warfare. During each of nine recent ...

- **Kathy Kelly: Drones and 21st Century Warfare: Afghanistan ...**
  
  ► 86:12 ► 86:12
  
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gt_0e2mRUsc

Apr 3, 2014 - Uploaded by BNPPPeace

March 6, 2014, Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Non- Violence, brought her first hand witness ...

- **Nobel Peace Prize Nominee Kathy Kelly | KBOO**
  
  www.kboo.fm/kathykelly

KBOO

Kathy Kelly, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee for her work to challenge US sanctions on ... the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers in search of non-military solutions to end the war. ... Voices visited Pakistan, aiming to learn more about the effects of U.S. drone warfare. .... Join now · Be a KBOO Member · Donate your car · Wish List.
• War Protests: >From Afghanistan to Hancock Air Base — to ...  
www.accuracy.org/.../war-protests-from-afghanistan-to-hancock-air-base...

Feb 29, 2012 - KATHY KELLY, kathy.vcnv at gmail.com. Kelly is ... The Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars released a statement today: ...

• Peaceful protester sentenced to prison for "harassing the ...  
forusa.org/.../kathy-kelly/...drones/12992

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Jul 23, 2014 - End Drone Warfare ... Frustrated by the tenacity of war resisters willing to risk arrest, the ... whom I'm now living here in Kabul, are threatened by the drones. ... Here in Afghanistan, the U.S uses drones to kill children, moms, and ordinary people. ...Kathy Kelly co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence.

• Kathy Kelly - Huffington Post  
www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-kelly/

The Huffington Post

Kathy Kelly is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence and a ... Kelly has been involved in numerous nonviolent campaigns to end war, some of ... Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out .... Drones and Democracy · Pressured from All Sides in Pakistan's Swat Valley ...

• Peace Activist Kathy Kelly at CIA Drone Protest | Rise Up ...  
riseuptimes.org/2013/12/.../ -peace-activist-kathy-kelly-at-cia-drone-protes...

Dec 17, 2013 - Kathy Kelly speaks about the drone attacks in Yemen and Afghanistan and ... Drone Warfare Protest at CIA Follows Strike on Civilians in Yemen ... IN YEMENTODAY Calls on President Obama to apologize and pledge to end ...

• The Grassroots Battle to End the Drone War .... - CounterPunch  
www.counterpunch.org/.../the-grassroots-battle-to-end-the...

CounterPunch

Jun 27, 2013 - Long time peace activist, Kathy Kelly, is co-coordinator of the Chicago-based
Voices for Creative Nonviolence. Kelly just returned from her ...

“An Opportunity to Rejoice” by Erica Brock, Catholic Worker Mark Colville’s Arrest, Trial, and Sentencing for Protesting at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base

PROTEST AT CREECH AFB MARCH 3-6, 2015

Will You Come To Creech Air Force Base?

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Veterans For Peace is co-sponsoring a national mobilization from March 3rd-6th, 2015 to Shut Down Creech Air Force
Base in Indian Springs, Nevada. Since 2009, dozens of activists have been arrested for allegedly trespassing at Creech, in attempts to stop the indiscriminate killing and burning of innocent people by drones. This year will be the largest turnout yet, and we want you to sign on!

Please fill out this short questionnaire to get on the VFP mailing list for the event.

National office will send out more details in the upcoming weeks about the mobilization, including the registration form, lodging options, the event agenda, and how to get involved with the direct action.

For more details about the event:

- Shut Down Creech Website
- Facebook
- VFP Video for CREECH

Abel Noah Tomlinson
6:53am Feb 11

'In their eyes, we don’t deserve to live like people in the rest of the world,' said the victim ahead of his ultimate death, 'and we don’t have feelings or emotions or cry or feel pain like all the other humans around the world.'

13-Year-Old Boy Who Lived In Fear of US Drones, Killed by CIA Strike in Yemen

www.commondreams.org

Just weeks after speaking with western journalists about his pervasive fear of the U.S. drones...

Grim Reapers
Drones have taken on a life of their own in popular culture.

Jenna Krajeski. Review of 5 books.
An MQ-9 Reaper drone

Sting of the Drone
By Richard A. Clarke.
Buy this book

Drone
By Mike Maden.
Putnam. 419 pp. $26.95. Buy this book

Bloodmoney
A Novel of Espionage.
By David Ignatius.
Buy this book

Murmuration
A Festival of Drone Culture.
murmurationfestival.tumblr.com

I Am the Beggar of the World
Landays From Contemporary Afghanistan.
Translated by Eliza Griswold.
Photographs by Seamus Murphy.
Buy this book

Erik Parsons, a colonel in the US Air Force, and his wife, Jennifer, like to talk about Erik’s work commanding drones out of a Nevada Air Force base almost as much as they like to rendezvous in their backyard hot tub with a couple of Heinekens. They talk about little else in the new thriller by Richard Clarke. The former counterterrorism czar under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush has strong opinions about US drone policy and only a few hundred hyperactively paced pages in which to air them. The result is a self-confident polemic of PG-13 action. “I’ll bring the brewskies, Flyboy,” Jennifer says, stripping naked for the hot tub, where Erik calmly assures her that his pilots are tracking down terrorists. “We’re finding them, Jen,” Erik says, pretending to be a monster. “We’re winning.”

But even thousands of miles from the action, it’s a tough fight. While he’s sampling a six-course tasting menu without thinking about work. A Reaper drone collided recently with a passenger plane over Somalia and then crashed into a refugee camp. Bruce, one of Erik’s ace pilots, accidentally “fried” a civilian, although he also eliminated “four bad guys.” Another of Bruce’s drones simply disappeared from the radar; Erik is
still trying to figure that one out, “whether he clipped a mountain or what happened.”

Erik’s men are driving their cars drunk, asking for early transfers, divorcing their wives. Washington might send some therapists. Jennifer is a psychiatrist, and as she sips the restaurant’s best California chardonnay, she offers her professional opinion about her husband’s drone wing:

“There is a lot of stress in the program. Let’s face it, they kill people fairly often and then they walk out of their dark game-boy room and they’re in the blazing Las Vegas sun, where it’s perfectly safe, fun is all around. It’s hard to live in those two worlds simultaneously of their job as just a computer game. You want them to know there are real people at the other end. But then you think that those real people are killed like fish in a barrel, they can’t fight back. It’s not really a fair fight, so your guys…

Erik supports the use of armed drones by the United States, which has resulted in the deaths of approximately 4,000 people—suspected terrorists and civilians alike—in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. As a proponent, he eagerly participates in the heated debate taking place in the United States and abroad about the ethics and efficacy of twenty-first-century warfare. At dinner, in response to some popular arguments in favor of drones, otherwise known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs):

“It’s not supposed to be a fair fight,” Erik shot back. “That’s the whole point. We have found a way of eliminating people at risk. Military leaders have wanted that forever. That’s why they put men inside big metal tanks or had them fly overhead in bombers, but then those things got vulnerable, too. I don’t want it to be fair and to have one out of ten of my guys killed. I want none out of ten killed. And that’s what I got with the drones.”

The conversation continues, steered by rhetorical phrases like “trouble is” and “truth is,” and if the talk sounds familiar, that’s the point. Clarke may insist to his readers that Sting of the Drone is a work of fiction, but he offers that statement up as more of a wink than a disclaimer. Since unsuccessfully arguing for the use of military drones to kill Osama bin Laden, Clarke has been an outspoken critic of the “war on terror,” objecting more or less from the sidelines. Because it is fiction, Sting of the Drone gives Clarke the chance to bolster his theories with imagination, while insinuating throughout that his imagination could double as insight. In the author’s note that concludes the book, he even hints that he could have prevented 9/11.

Clarke, whose nonfiction book Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror was a national bestseller, has also struck a chord with the Drone. Since 2002, when the first targeted drone strike against Al Qaeda was ordered in Afghanistan, drones have been at the center of America’s national-security policy, operating in countries where we have been at war, like Iraq and Afghanistan, and where we have not been officially at war, like Yemen and Pakistan. In spite of growing questions about the ethics of drone strikes, and an initial optimism about the foreign policy of President Barack Obama, the drone program has been greatly expanded since 2004; in 2012, there were as many drone strikes in Yemen as during the previous ten years combined. Recently, Obama referred to the strikes in Yemen and Somalia as models for the use of force against militants with the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. Drones are a military mainstay and a national obsession.

To their proponents, UAVs are an exciting—and inevitable—technology. They enhance the US military’s ability to minimize American and, ideally, civilian casualties. Their development has applications in nonmilitary fields such as science, medicine and retail (Amazon and Google tout the potential use of drones for same-day delivery service). And they are economical: a fraction of what it takes to manufacture and maintain a fighter jet.
Critics say the drone program violates the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties that the United States has pledged to uphold. Drones may increase the likelihood of war, in part because they reduce combat risk for American pilots; the perceived low threat, their comparatively small cost and US dominance in the field make the use of UAVs all too tempting. Furthermore, critics say, the very presence of drones—the buzz of their engines and the violence it portends—traumatizes whole communities. In Khashamir, in east Yemen, villagers attribute sudden deaths and miscarriages to trauma from the ever-present drones. Human-rights groups have published book-length collections of such testimonies. Drones, these statements seem to confirm, recruit more terrorists than they kill.

But for opposition policy-makers, journalists and activists, and even some supporters of drones, the most alarming aspect of the program is its secrecy, which not only obscures facts but also stokes paranoia—or complacency. It was only in 2012 that Obama publicly admitted the existence of the drone program while continuing to escalate the strikes, and Americans today are expected to reconcile the documented existence of drones with the official silence or denials on the subject. As a result, the debate on drones verges on the surreal, testing the limits of the American public’s connection to its own government as well as its influence over the waging of foreign wars. Emerging from this fog are fantastical political thrillers like *Sting of the Drone*.

* * *

In recent years, not just in novels but in movies, television, poetry, video games and the visual arts, drones have taken on a life of their own. As a character, they are menacing, melancholy or gallant; beastly, blind, snub-nosed, noisy and fast—Predators and Reapers in real life, “Helicarriers” in Hollywood. They are the oversize hook at the end of a joystick, a militarized, antiseptic video game characterized by precision; or they are a weapon system proliferating at a breathtaking rate, and leaving a trail of destruction behind. They show off the military talent of their users, or they are an expression of unbridled hubris. They represent protection or extermination—and they carry out both things at once.

In America, on whose behalf the vast majority of drones are deployed but where none of their missiles have been used offensively, the UAV is more a symbol than a weapon. Drones represent the thrills and pitfalls of ingenuity, as well as the tangled threat of the vulnerabilities as a nation, and the complexities—or impossibility—of waging ethical warfare. What we don’t know (which is by design a lot), we can imagine, and our fantasies are usually dark. “Well, look, they aren’t really just airplanes,” a member of Clarke’s fictionalized “Kill Committee” says. “People see them as Flying Killer Robots. And people have a deep fear of armed robots.”

“What’s most interesting to me about drones is not that they are changing the world, but that they are changing us,” Mike Maden, who has a doctorate in political science, told me. “They are very ironic machines.” Maden’s debut work of fiction, *Drone*, takes place in a lightly fictionalized near-future in which drones are used for good—such as monitoring the migratory habits of endangered humpback whales—and evil. Maden’s biggest apparent leap is the core plot, in which the US president argues that Mexican drug cartels are a threat akin to foreign terrorists and deploys drones across the border to hunt them down. In a series of blasts, drug kingpins are killed with ease and precision on the ground—are used to combat the Mexican traffickers, they fail spectacularly, and within the gore is a message: “Human snipers contended with other variables, too,” Maden writes. “Stinging sweat, the need to breathe, beating hearts, nagging doubts, fears.”

Then the weapons turn on their maker: snatched by Iranian forces and emblazoned with American flags, the drones target an oil rig, an airport and a church. Some are meant to kill Americans, and others to ruin the reputation of the United States abroad. Amid
United States; in one pivotal scene, a Mexican ice-cream vendor unwittingly blows up Grauman’s Chinese Theatre. Maden exploits a fundamental worry about drones, one rooted in a strain of technophobia that appears in much of science fiction, from Mary Shelley’s Cameron’s The Terminator. Humans, by virtue of our boundless curiosity and intelligence, will eventually create a machine we cannot control. In Maden’s book, and in Clarke’s, that machine is the UAV, and it’s only a matter of time—and political miscalculation.

Maden takes pains to highlight nonmilitary uses of the technology, and he wants his arguments to be taken seriously. He assures readers that all the machines he describes in the book either already exist or are in development, and that the novel’s world is only vaguely futuristic. The president, elected after Obama’s second term, is a woman. “I joke that science fiction is dead,” Maden said. “You really can’t make this stuff up anymore.”

In these novels, the actual fiction is like lingerie—minimal, alluring. The same is true in Bloodmoney (2011), a novel by David Ignatius, which also presents itself as being based in reality. The doctor Omar al-Wazir becomes a would-be terrorist to avenge his family’s death by US drone. Like Colonel Parsons fretting over losing control of his drones in Clarke’s novel, the doctor’s transformation is a lesson for the reader. In one of the book’s early scenes, a Pakistani general muses about the situation: “The Americans were changing the rules of the game. They must think they were being clever in Washington, but they were walking into terrain where nobody could help them—not the general, not his agents, not their clandestine contacts…. They were the mischief-makers. They would get caught, and it would be their fault.”

Like Clarke, Ignatius has toured the news shows promoting his book, sometimes coyly, as an insider’s view on so little genuine information coming from the White House and the Pentagon, these books—and even television shows like America: The Winter Soldier, which have both featured drone-heavy plots—do sometimes provide insight or spark debate. Discussing his novel on NPR’s The Diane Rehm Show, Ignatius broached ethical issues that policy-makers seem reluctant to touch. Drones “allow you to kill people from 10,000 feet,” Ignatius said, “which seems, to our public—I think wrongly—less bloody than if we did it right up with a gun.”

And yet all these fictions, while diligently researched, are mostly far-fetched. It’s not necessarily the fault of the fantasy too well. Genuine expertise—a background in the military, government, political science or journalism—doesn’t always warn or political critiques do little to differentiate these drone entertainments from other, less topical science-fiction or technological thrillers. The genre conventions overwhelm the message.

In Sting of the Drone, Erik grows increasingly anxious about losing control of the weapons. “It’s like something figuring us out, like we’re not quite invulnerable anymore,” he tells Jennifer. This may be true to life. But in the end, comment on American hubris than a familiar literary convention: the rote speech delivered by a fictional hero in order to disguise the inevitability of his victory, purely for thrills.

* * *

“Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist’s.” Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole’s popular “Small Fates” series on Twitter compiles poetic, often darkly humorous, 140-character-or-less versions of Lagos’s more violent headlines. In January 2013, Cole turned his attention to drones. “Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable,” he writes in one. The last of the seven tweets, which invokes the first sentence of Camus’s The Stranger...
The program saves American lives.”

The tweets received a lot of attention. Fans saw them as a fierce critique of US drone policy, much needed at a time when secrecy—and fading optimism about Obama—appeared to limit anti-drone activism. By embedding drones in the opening sentences of classic novels, Cole seemed to comment on the national mindset about them, one characterized more by distance and irony than by genuine fear or culpability. Months before, he had offered what appeared to be a thesis: “Each age has its presiding metaphor. Ours is aerial bombing.”

Adam Rothstein, author of the forthcoming book Drone, responded to Cole’s tweets on the United Arab Emirates–based website the State, calling fictional work like it of the “utmost importance.” Such writing, compared to the whirlwind of thrillers—which suffer, anyway, from a dearth of information—could have a profound reach, Rothstein thinks. Curating and writing about work that incorporates the connection between drones and people beyond the offerings of science fiction or political thrillers, became his focus.

“Drones are very much a character, which we compile from the sources we choose, and those which we choose to believe,” Rothstein explained to me in an e-mail. “Look at the number of times people rely upon stock tropes to describe drones. ‘Killer robots,’ ‘flocking birds,’ ‘vampire bats’. . . . We really personify drones in ways that we don’t with cellphones or computers.” The problem with science fiction is that the drones are an aspect of speculation. Anything they do in the context of the work is immediately perceived as speculation, and not to be taken seriously.

In the summer of 2013, Rothstein and Olivia Rosane launched “Murmuration: A Festival of Drone Culture.” The project, which would post “art, film, music, and writing inspired by the idea of the drone.” The result, a compilation of work with the drone as an object and as an object of obsession. There are posters, videos, short stories, essays and Chirp articles. Projects, none of these projects command the kind of audience of a David Ignatius novel, but taken together, they better represent the impact that drone warfare, and speculation about that warfare, have had on the public imagination. “Drones are a complicated topic,” Rothstein told me. “Speaking louder is not necessarily better.”

On the “Murmuration” site, one can watch Heems, formerly of the rap trio Das Racist, perform a song about drones and dating. Photoshopped images depict Predator drones flying over present-day Dubai. A fluorescent poster advertises a horse-drone hybrid called “My Little Droney: Surveillance Is Magic.”

“Dronestagram,” one of the most compelling projects compiled on “Murmuration,” is a visual and cultural link between the Instagramming American public and the areas targeted by drones, as well as a method of compiling a death toll—a daunting task given the clandestine nature of most of these attacks. Beneath an aerial photograph showing the patchwork of flat roofs in a small Pakistani village, a caption provides the tally of people, both targets and civilians, killed or injured in the drone attack. In Tappi village, according to one “Dronestagram,” three to five people were reported killed, including one civilian, in a drone attack on October 24, 2012. “Three cows intended to be sacrificed for Eid were also killed,” it notes.

When a drone comes alive, in the world of “Murmuration,” it reminds us of the danger of taking refuge in fictions. Drones are not sentient; people are responsible for what they do. In the first panel of a short comic, the black silhouette of a drone flies against a light sky, and the text wonders if the all-seeing flying weapon would, if it could, think about what was happening on the ground below. If the drone truly had a mind or a conscience; if it could control its own movements and make its own plans; if it could take responsibility—would it consider what it was doing? “But it thinks nothing,” the
artist decides finally. “After all, it is a drone.”

***

On April 17, 2013, two US drones killed a suspected Al Qaeda member, his driver and two of his bodyguards in the mountains of Yemen. A description of the carnage from the drone attack, as told to Human Rights Watch, reads:

“The fire was high; no one dared get close and the planes were hovering above,” said Ahmad Hamoud Qaed Daer, the driver’s father. “I couldn’t do anything…. It was dark and there was a lot of smoke. There was no moon and I didn’t even have a flashlight. I was in the front seat.”

People began to panic. Nowhere seemed safe—not in their homes, not on their roofs. “The planes [drones] were there until we buried them,” another villager said. “I swear by Allah, if we had had weapons, not a single plane would leave. We would take them down because they terrified the village.”

These testimonies are difficult to read. They are full of explosions, gore and personal, life-altering tragedies. Baraa Shiban, of the nongovernmental organization Reprieve, says that drones are indeed a Yemeni obsession; they are always overhead. Villagers fear them, knowing that their own government and the US government are prone to denying that the attacks ever took place, even in remote areas,” Shiban said. “If you talk to very uneducated people, very simple people living in villages, they realize that it’s an American drone program. Sometimes they say that America is sending planes to kill us.”

In 2013, Reprieve held a drone-themed poetry contest. Writers throughout Yemen participated, and the event even prompted a local pop singer to approach the NGO about turning the winning poem into a song. That poem, by Ayman Shahari, described the grim struggle of living with drones and the complicit Yemeni government:

Below us:
A furnace for tyrants
Above us, drones?
The friendly drones, the enemy
Which makes death fall
Overhead
As though we are fields
And death our downpour.

“They were angry about the constant presence of drones over their heads,” Shiban told me. “A lot of them were looking for another way to fight these drones. But we have our words, and expressing ourselves.” The prize for the winning poem pointed out, a mere 1 percent of the cost of a Hellfire missile.

In Yemen, poetry is a written and oral tradition that knits together a society otherwise composed of many disparate and geographically diverse terrain. In recent years, drones have made their appearance in poems as well as in street art. In Sanaa, a well-known piece of graffiti depicts a child asking a drone, “Why did you kill my family?” The same artist also plastered images...
But it’s in rural Yemen, beneath the drones, where the poetry has been sharpened into knives. Life for many villagers is now unbearable, and poetry is a way to convey that reality to a skeptical audience. The attacks have penetrated many layers of society in a reasonably short period of time. “Drones are, in many countries, the face of the United States,” Micah Zenko, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and an expert on national security and counterterrorism, told me. “Drones are such a small part of the American government’s engagement with the world, but they are given such tremendous weight because of the infrastructure around their use. It’s the myth of covert action.”

Zenko is aware of the swirl of science fiction and techno-thrillers about drones: “Look at how the CIA plays a role,” he advised. But he’s more focused on drones outside of fiction and metaphor; the reality is alarming enough. “What people always get into at this point in the conversation is autonomous killer robots,” Zenko said. “I’m more interested in what’s happening on earth today. There are no civilians being killed by autonomous killer robots.”

Reprieve’s Shiban watched Captain America: The Winter Soldier, he told me with a little laugh, although he didn’t think that many other Yemenis had. Even Dirty Wars, the 2013 Jeremy Scahill documentary about the “war on terror,” has yet to be officially screened in Yemen, where much of it was filmed. Shiban sighed; as a Yemeni, he seemed accustomed to being the subject of discussion, whether in a documentary or a Hollywood movie, rather than a participant. “I think it’s interesting that drones are starting to impact even the American movies and American directors, but there are limits. There is much more needed to be done to really address what is happening to the people here.”

* * *

This poem is by an unnamed Afghan woman:

May God destroy your tank and your drone,
you who’ve destroyed my village, my home.

The poem is a landay, folk poetry sung among Pashtun women along the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Traditionally, the twenty-two-syllable poems were performed over drumbeats at weddings and other gatherings, but decades of violence, and the Taliban’s oppressive rule, have made such performances rare. Today, landays are still collected and shared, but more privately.

Their content, too, has changed, “remixed like rap, with old words swapped for newer, more relevant ones,” wrote poet and journalist Eliza Griswold in the introduction to I Am the Beggar of the World, a collection of landays she has translated. This extraordinary book cuts to the heart of the US drone program. Much as they’ve entered the skies above scattered villages, drones have entered the landays, an exasperation with foreign occupation and a deepening terror of living under the threat of drone strikes.

Over two years, Griswold and the photographer Seamus Murphy traveled through Afghanistan in search of landays, the trust of women who value the poems, which deal frankly with sex and relationships, as their sole means of rebellion, but who also fear the repercussions of being named as their authors. What Griswold found was, in part, the scar tissue of permanent war—a war where the only things that change are the nationality of the occupiers and the types of weapons they use. Today, those weapons are
Afghanistan is a way for disenfranchised, mostly rural populations to describe their real lives, and violence has seeped into the work. A 2014 report called “Impacts of the War on Terror on Pashto Literature and Art,” by the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) Research Centre, a Pakistan-based NGO, determined that “Pashto literature is divided into two sections; one post-9/11 and the other…pre-9/11.”

*I Am the Beggar of the World* is a universe away from *Sting of the Drone*, despite the fact that both have armed drones and the “war on terror” at their core. It’s not just that Clarke is vastly different from the female singers of *landays*, which belong to a distinctly foreign literary tradition, or that he has very different goals (one of which, presumably, is to sell books). Drones are two separate objects in the American versus the Afghan imagination.

In the United States, drones are all too often a metaphor, the indirectness made more profound by the literal distance between a vehicle and its pilot. Drones symbolize a lot but seem to do very little. However, the same drone in Afghanistan exists as a fact of life, one that embodies real tragedy. There, a drone is a drone.

“Mostly, when people sing these poems, they’re not looking to make a statement as much as they are talking about their lived experience,” Griswold told me. “Certainly, [drones] are a symbol of menacing power. But it’s much more literal. When a drone appears, it’s a physical presence, not just an author’s son.”

Griswold first listened to one of the *landays* in the book on the cellphone of a businesswoman in Jalalabad, far removed from the wedding where a woman named Chadana had originally sung it. Chadana’s son Nabi, a Taliban fighter, was reportedly killed in a US drone strike in 2011. Chadana uses the poem to mourn her son, and in two short lines manages to convey the impact that US drone strikes have had on her life with a force that evokes the attack itself:

*My Nabi was shot down by a drone.*
*May God destroy your sons, America, you murdered my own.*

*Jenna Krajeski*

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http://www.thenation.com/article/190329/grim-reapers

RECENT 2015 OMNI NEWSLETTER CONTEXTS FOR US DRONE WARFARE

Vietnam War #6 (major example of US imperial air wars)

US Westward Empire #15 (from Jamestown to Jeju, now adding drones)

Money, Citizens United, and Campaign Finance # 7 (It’s the Complex)

Presidents’ DAY (Presidential Power) #3 (Pres. Obama selects drone targets)
Iraq Wars #19 (permanent war)

Vegetarian Action #16, 2-11 (mercy, protect animals, don’t kill/ahimsa)

World Poverty #3, 2-4 (US air and economic wars against the defenseless)

Violence USA #9, 1-29 (US the greatest purveyor of violence in world)

Torture #10, 1-26 (torture and air war against law and innocents)

Anti-War #4, 1-25 (all OMNI newsletters advocate nonviolence)

Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday 1-19, #3 (against discrimination, poverty, war, US wars)

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Call the President

PHONE NUMBERS
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Write a letter to the President

Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure your message gets to the White House as quickly as possible.

1. If possible, email us! This is the fastest way to get your message to President Obama.

2. If you write a letter, please consider typing it on an 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of paper. If you hand-write your letter, please consider writing as neatly as possible.
3. Please include your return address on your letter as well as your envelope. If you have an email address, please consider including that as well.

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DRONE NEWSLETTER #14

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FCNL, Telephone Briefing

David Cole, How Many People Have We Killed? Demand Transparency, Record the Killed

Gagnon, Spring Campaign Against Drones and Global Militarization

Rabbi Lerner, Heather Linebaugh, Stop Drone War Campaign

Know Drones: Spring Days of Action

Progressive Secretary, Stop Double Tap

Richard Clarke, Obama’s Excesses

Drone Complex and Contexts

Drones in Yemen

Conn Hallinan, Drone Pandora’s Box

Engelhardt, Murdock Paper’s Crass Headline

Akbar Akmed, From War on Terror to War on Tribal Islam

Greeenwald’s New Film, Unmanned
Lawyer Who Justified Murder Nominated to Be Judge

Al Jazeera, Israel's Drone Industry (via HAW)

Make Punishment Fit the Crime

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END DRONE NEWSLETTER #15, Feb. 20, 2015

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