What’s at Stake: Fred Cook opens his 1962 *The Warfare State* with President Eisenhower’s Farewell Address (January 17, 1961) in which Ike warns the nation against the military-industrial Complex. (In his original draft he wrote military-industrial-congressional.) “Warfare State” is Cook’s label for the president’s “Complex,” and his eleven chapters explain what Ike only suggested, including The Growth of Militarism, Madison Avenue in Uniform, and How the Warfare State Runs. Jump ahead to 2008, post-9-11 and the continuing frenzy of the war on/of terror. Nick Turse in *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* shows how militarism has so grown into every niche of US economic and social life that it is “hidden in plain sight. The Complex thrives on the very obliviousness of the civilian population to its existence in the world” (271). And Sheldon Wolin in *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* hones in on the difference between the totalitarianism of Hitler and Mussolini, in which the dictator controlled the big economic institutions, and the inverted totalitarianism characterizing the US, in which the corporations lead the government. Alas, 2008 offered no relief of culmination, for soon afterward further revelations of the warfare state appeared; for example, the series of articles published in *The Washington Post* (later a book) by Dana Priest and William Arkin about the top-secret, $trillion world that the Complex created in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks so enormous and
so secretive that accounting is impossible (also the Pentagon’s condition of long standing).  But as the writings and filmmaking in these newsletters show, resistance continues undaunted. In the Foreword to Fred Cook’s book, Bertrand Russell spoke of the “ferocious prejudices” of the military-industrial Complex, and urged citizens to “make the truth known” against its “intolerant hatred” and incessant pressure for “preemptive war.” Drones, a tiny part of the Complex, are being exposed and protested throughout the country by the peace and justice movement. In Arkansas we have barely commenced. Push your peace and justice organizations to speak out and to fund the resistance to drones, and to the C-130s, and to corporations profiting from them. Because the Complex possesses the major media, you and I and our organizations must raise our voices.

Preceding Newsletters on Drones packed with material for protest


#18  http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2016/06/drone-watch-newsletter-18.html

#17  http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2016/05/drone-newsletter-17.html

#16  http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/03/drones-newsletter-16.html

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

CONTENTS: DRONE NEWSLETTER #20

SPOTLIGHT ON ARKANSAS

Nick Mottern, Know Drones, Veterans for Peace against the Drones and Arkansas TV Spots against the Drone base at Ebbing ANG AFB and the C-130s at Little Rock AFB
HISTORY AND CONTEXTS OF DRONES

Terminator Planet  *The First History of Drone Warfare, 2001-2050* by Nick Turse and Tom Engelhardt

*The Changing Face of Empire: Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy Fighters, Secret Bases, and Cyberwarfare* by Nick Turse

Tomorrow’s Battlefield:  *U.S. Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa* by Nick Turse “Transferring CIA Drone Strikes to the Pentagon” by Micah Zenko

“Murky Special Ops Have Become Corporate Bonanza” by Ryan Gallagher

Killing Civilians:  “The Obama Administration's Drone-Strike Dissembling” by Conor Friedersdorf

US Drone War Killing, Google Search

Ban Armed Drones from Roots Action

A PLAY AND THREE FILMS

A Play and a Film about Women Drone Pilots:

May 14, 2017, at 21C Museum Hotel in Bentonville the a Performance of  *Grounded*

   Letter from the Play’s Director Laura Shatkus

   Review of Play by Nick Brothers

   Letter from Nick Mottern, Veterans for Peace

*Eye in the Sky* Film

   *NYT* Review, “Helen Mirren, in one of her fiercest screen performances”

Two films showing additional realities of drone warfare:

*The Good Kill* Film, insider’s view of 21st-century warfare, psychological toll drone pilots endure.  Andrew Niccol (Gattaca, Lord of War) director.

*National Bird* Documentary, “three whistleblowers determined to break the silence” by Sonia Kennebeck
ARKANSAS

Nick Mottern, Coordinator of Veterans for Peace Drone Committee and I have been corresponding perhaps ever since OMNI began its newsletters on drones, of which this is the 20th. Recently we discussed how best to awaken the citizens of Arkansas 1) to the drone assassination arm of the military involving direct presidential participation, in Arkansas based at Ebbing NAGAFB at Ft. Smith and 2) to the C-130 base at Little Rock AFB in Jacksonville, near Little Rock, where the huge C-130Js (quick takeoffs, short landings) supply the Empire. He acted quickly, organizing TV spots for the Ft. Smith area critical of the drones and for the C-130s in the central Arkansas area. Did you see them? Nick is fundraising to continue these spots. After all, we are up against the world’s most powerful propaganda machine. And we might add Camden to the spots, Arkansas’ main city for the military-industrial Complex. Get in touch: <nickmottern@gmail.com>. Here is Mottern’s web site.

–Dick

KnowDrones Google Search, April 18, 2017

https://www.knowdrones.com/
You may be coming to this website not knowing much about drone war. Or you may be a drone operator and know a great deal. Whatever your knowledge or ...

Who We Are
Who We Are. ... Your Future, Are You Supporting Drone Attacks ...

Archives
In the face of the blackout in the Presidential campaigns of any ...

What We Do
About; Our Mission · What We Do · Who We Are. KnowDrones ...

Our Mission
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Current Campaign: Please ...
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What You Can Do
WHAT YOU CAN DO. ... is speaking so that you can raise ...

Past Campaigns
Our Ad Campaigns; Current Campaign: Please Donate to ...

Imperial/Natural Resource Goals
... profit goals of U.S. corporations and ... penetration of resource ...

HISTORY AND CONTEXTS OF DRONES
Terminator Planet: The First History of Drone Warfare, 2001-2050
(A TomDispatch Book)

at 12:00am, May 30, 2012.
Follow TomDispatch on Twitter @TomDispatch.

Available as an e-book, or a print-on-demand.

The first history of drone warfare, written as it happened.

From the opening missile salvo in the skies over Afghanistan in 2001 to a secret strike in the Philippines early this year, or a future in which drones dogfight off the coast of Africa, Terminator Planet takes you to the front lines of combat, Washington war rooms, and beyond. Drawing on several years of research -- including official documents, open-source intelligence, and interviews with military officers -- two of the foremost analysts specializing in drone war offer a sobering, factual account of robot warfare combined with critical analyses found nowhere else.

Packed with rarely seen Pentagon photos, Terminator Planet provides a rich history of the last decade of drone warfare, a clear-eyed look at its present, and a far-reaching guide to its future. You used to have to watch science fiction movies to imagine where that future was headed, now you can read Terminator Planet -- and know.

The Changing Face of Empire: Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy ... [Link]
The Changing Face of Empire: Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy Fighters, Secret Bases, and Cyberwarfare [Nick Turse]

The Changing Face of Empire
Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy Fighters, Secret Bases, and Cyberwarfare
by Nick Turse. 2012.
The Changing Face of Empire is a devastating anatomy of the U.S. military’s new six-point program for twenty-first-century war.

Following the failures of the Iraq and Afghan wars, as well as “military lite” methods and counterinsurgency, the Pentagon is pioneering a new brand of global warfare predicated on special ops, drones, spy games, civilian soldiers, and cyberwarfare. It may sound like a safer, saner war-fighting. In reality, it will prove anything but, as Turse’s pathbreaking reportage makes clear.

- Part of the Dispatch Books series


"Tomorrow's Battlefield": As U.S. Special Ops Enter Syria, Growing ...
https://www.democracynow.org/2015/11/.../tomorrows_battlefield_as_us_special_ops
Nov 13, 2015 - fellow at The Nation Institute and the managing editor of TomDispatch.com.
His most recent book is *Tomorrow’s Battlefield: U.S. Proxy Wars ...

OVERSIGHT OF DRONES: PENTAGON OR CIA?

*Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 31*

Print Cite

**Transferring CIA Drone Strikes to the Pentagon**

Author: Micah Zenko, Senior Fellow

Download Now

Publisher Council on Foreign Relations Press

Release Date April 2013

The main obstacle to acknowledging the scope, legality, and oversight of U.S. targeted killings beyond traditional or "hot" battlefields is the division of lead executive authority between the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)—a subunit of the Department of Defense (DOD) Special
Operations Command—and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In particular, the U.S. government cannot legally acknowledge covert actions undertaken by the CIA. The failure to answer the growing demands for transparency increases the risk that U.S. drone strikes will be curtailed or eliminated due to mounting domestic or international pressure. To take a meaningful first step toward greater transparency, President Barack Obama should sign a directive that consolidates lead executive authority for planning and conducting nonbattlefield targeted killings under DOD.

**One Mission, Two Programs**

U.S. targeted killings are needlessly made complex and opaque by their division between two separate entities: JSOC and the CIA. Although drone strikes carried out by the two organizations presumably target the same people, the organizations have different authorities, policies, accountability mechanisms, and oversight. Splitting the drone program between the JSOC and CIA is apparently intended to allow the plausible deniability of CIA strikes. Strikes by the CIA are classified as Title 50 covert actions, defined as "activities of the United States Government . . . where it is intended that the role . . . will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly, but does not include traditional . . . military activities." As covert operations, the government cannot legally provide any information about how the CIA conducts targeted killings, while JSOC operations are guided by Title 10 "armed forces" operations and a publicly available military doctrine. Joint Publication 3-60, Joint Targeting, details steps in the joint targeting cycle, including the processes, responsibilities, and collateral damage estimations intended to reduce the likelihood of civilian casualties. Unlike strikes carried out by the CIA, JSOC operations can be (and are) acknowledged by the U.S. government.

The different reporting requirements of JSOC and the CIA mean that congressional oversight of U.S. targeted killings is similarly murky. Sometimes oversight is duplicated among the committees; at other times, there is confusion over who is mandated to oversee which operations. CIA drone strikes are reported to the intelligence committees. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), has confirmed that the SSCI receives poststrike notifications, reviews video footage, and holds monthly meetings to "question every aspect of the program." Representative Mike Rogers (R-MI), chair of the House Permanent
Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), has said that he reviews both CIA and JSOC counterterrorism airstrikes. JSOC does not report to the HPSCI. As of March 2012, all JSOC counterterrorism operations are reported quarterly to the armed services committees. Meanwhile, the foreign relations committees—tasked with overseeing all U.S. foreign policy and counterterrorism strategies—have formally requested briefings on drone strikes that have been repeatedly denied by the White House. However, oversight should not be limited to ensuring compliance with the law and preventing abuses, but rather expanded to ensure that policies are consistent with strategic objectives and aligned with other ongoing military and diplomatic activities. This can only be accomplished by DOD operations because the foreign relations committees cannot hold hearings on covert CIA drone strikes. MORE

http://www.cfr.org/drones/transferring-cia-drone-strikes-pentagon/p30434


Under Pentagon Control, **Special Operations Command**

See Wolin, *Democracy Inc.* and books and articles on the military-industrial complex.

**MURKY SPECIAL OPS HAVE BECOME CORPORATE BONANZA**

*Ryan Gallagher*  
*The Intercept.* September 8 2014, 8:40 p.m.

The U.S. government is paying private contractors billions of dollars to support secretive military units with drones, surveillance technology, and “psychological operations,” according to new research.


USSOCOM encompasses four commands – from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps – and plays a key role in orchestrating clandestine U.S. military missions overseas. MORE  
KILLING CIVILIANS

Debunking John Brennan’s claim that “the president requires near-certainty of no collateral damage” to allow a drone killing to go forward.

The notion that the Obama Administration has carried out drone strikes only when there is “near-certainty of no collateral damage” is easily disproved propaganda. America hasn’t killed a handful of innocents or a few dozen in the last 8 years. Credible, independent attempts to determine how many civilians the Obama administration has killed arrived at numbers in the hundreds or low thousands. And there is good reason to believe that they undercount the civilians killed. To read the entire article go to: [https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-obama-administrations-drone-strike-dissembling/473541/](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-obama-administrations-drone-strike-dissembling/473541/)

I add multiple references since the precise number of drone killings is disputed. --D

US DRONE WAR KILLINGS Google Search, July 20, 2016

Get the data: Drone wars Archives - The Bureau of Investigative ...
[https://www.thebureauinvestigates.co...](https://www.thebureauinvestigates.co...)

Bureau of Investigative Journalism

The Bureau’s complete data sets on drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. ... Civilians killed: 424-966 ... Dataset: US strikes continue in Yemen despite catastrophic civil war and Saudi-led bombing campaign pushing country towards ...

How Many Civilians Have U.S. Drone Strikes Killed? - The Atlantic


Mar 14, 2016 - The Obama Administration's Drone-Strike Dissembling. Debunking .... observers characterize as war crimes, I might be less than forthright, too.

Civilian casualties from US drone strikes - Wikipedia, the free ...


Civilian casualties from US drone strikes consist of non-combatant civilians who have been killed by drone strikes by the United States government starting in the early 2000s. According to the Long War Journal, as of mid-2011, the drone strikes in ...

Drone strikes in Pakistan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to U.S. viewpoint - U.S. President George W. Bush vastly accelerated the drone... son Saad bin Laden was believed to have been killed in a drone attack ... Furthermore, with the drawdown of the war in Iraq, more drones, support ...

Nearly 90 Percent Of People Killed In Recent Drone Strikes Were Not ...
www.huffingtonpost.com/.../civilian-deaths-drone-st...
Oct 15, 2015 - U.S. drone strikes have killed scores of civilians in Afghanistan, ... 'Intercept' Report Uncovers Secrets Behind U.S.'s Drone Warfare Program.

'No doubt' US drone strikes killed civilians, Obama says — RT America
https://www.rt.com/usa/338132-obama-drones-civilian-casualties/
Apr 2, 2016 - 'No doubt' US drone strikes killed civilians, Obama says ... Drone warfare has become a symbol of post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya ...

Obama-led drone strikes kill innocents 90% of the time: report ...
www.washingtonpost.com/.../90-of-people-kille...
Oct 15, 2015 - An unmanned U.S. Predator drone flies over Kandahar Air Field, southern ... and are subsequently written off as adversaries killed during war, ...

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: A visualization of drone strikes in Pakistan ...
drones.pitchinteractive.com/
... Out of Mind. A visualization of all documented drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004. ... Since 2004, drone strikes have killed an estimated 0 people in Pakistan.

41 men targeted but 1,147 people killed: US drone strikes – the facts ...
www.theguardian.com/US News/Obama administrationThe Guardian
Nov 24, 2014 - The data cohort is only a fraction of those killed by US drones overall ..... It's as true today as if ever was that war really is the mother of invention ...

Drone Strikes Reveal Uncomfortable Truth: U.S. Is Often Unsure About ...
www.nytimes.com/.../drone-strikes-reveal-uncomfo...
Apr 23, 2015 - By most accounts, hundreds of militants have been killed by drones. But the ... Barack Obama inherited two ugly, intractable wars in Iraq and ...

Stop the spread of killer drones
RootsAction Team info@rootsaction.org via uark.onmicrosoft.com

U.S. military drones are now taking off and landing at a civilian commercial airport in New
York State near Syracuse, where drone pilots at Hancock Air Base learn to use flying robots to kill thousands of miles away.

Plans are in the works to employ drone pilots in more U.S. cities. And U.S. Customs and Border Protection has drones in the skies near, and not so near, U.S. borders, as well as loaned out to local police. Little by little, the wars come home.

Now more than ever, we need to build a movement to ban all weaponized drones. Click here to add your name.

Little by little, the wars expand. The number of countries (and armed groups) using drones continues to rise. And the early months of the Trump presidency have seen a dramatic increase in the use of drone strikes by the United States, and in the areas of the earth to be targeted.

Nonviolent protesters near Syracuse, N.Y., have for years now risked prison to educate and build pressure against the use of drones to kill in U.S. wars. In March a jury acquitted four of them, and a judge dismissed charges against others stemming from a separate action.

When people learn that there is passionate resistance to drones, they often stop and consider why.

One way that we can reach a lot more people is by delivering this massive petition. Please add your name.

After signing the petition, please use the tools on the next webpage to share it with your friends.

This work is only possible with your financial support. Please chip in $3 now.

-- The RootsAction.org Team

P.S. RootsAction is an independent online force endorsed by Jim Hightower, Barbara Ehrenreich, Cornel West, Daniel Ellsberg, Glenn Greenwald, Naomi Klein, Bill Fletcher Jr., Laura Flanders, former U.S. Senator James Abourezk, Frances Fox Piven, Lila Garrett, Phil Donahue, Sonali Kolhatkar, and many others.

Background:
> Norman Solomon: Killer Drones in the Empire State

www.RootsAction.org
Contents Drone Watch Newsletter #20, Plays, Readings, Films

The preceding studies of drones provide a factual foundation for the reading of the following play and three films:

GROUNDED ONE-WOMAN DRONE PILOT PLAY WAS PERFORMED MAY 14 at 21C Museum Hotel in Bentonville, AR.

INFORMATION ABOUT GROUNDING AND AWARDS

“Grounded” is a powerful one-woman show that follows a gutsy fighter pilot whose unexpected pregnancy puts her career on hold. When she gets back in the game, flying has a whole new meaning: operating remote-controlled drones in Afghanistan from an air-conditioned trailer near Las Vegas. Hunting "the enemy" by day and being a wife and mother by night, The Pilot's struggle to navigate her dual identities is her toughest mission yet.

“Grounded” is a riveting drama filled with powerful storytelling about the dualities of war and family. Both relevant and original, George Brant's award-winning script tackles issues of surveillance, drones, and the ambiguities of warfare in the twenty-first century.


Or call: 479.286.6500 code: ARSTAGED

“A scorching sharp-eyed, timely script...lets no one off easy...clap all you want at the end of the play—and you'll want to clap a lot—but the game stays with you” – Time Out New York

Directed by Laura Shatkus
The Pilot: Mischa Hutchings
Stage Manager: Celeste Richard
Assistant Director: Johnathan Benjamin Jewel Jarmon
Production Assistant: Katie ORear

Awards:
The Smith Prize for Political Theatre
Fringe First Award - Edinburg Fringe Festival
Off-West End Theatre Award for Best Production of 2013
Short-listed for the Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award
Named a Top 10 London Play of 2013 by both The Guardian and the London Evening Standard

ONE-WOMAN PLAY GROUNDING, LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE PERFORMANCE
Hi Dick, 5-13-17
A fellow artist and director made me aware of the play about a year ago, which was the first time I read it. I was totally compelled by the story of a female fighter pilot coming to terms with no longer being on leave from her family and how being a mother every night at home affected her ability to be a war machine during the day. This was my first time digging into any research about drones, to be honest. One of the wonderful things about being a theatre artist is all the worlds we get to play in. . . . It leads to a more universal understanding of human nature and human behavior.
Have you seen "National Bird" yet?
Our show is on Sunday so I'd love to have you write about the show for the newsletter but just want to make sure you know there's only the one!
Thanks so much!!
Laura Shatkus

Comment by Nick Brothers

In The Free Weekly (5-11-17, p. 10). Nick Brothers (editor), “ArkansasStaged to Present Mother Day’s Reading of ‘Grounded.’”

Comment on the Play by Nick Mottern

Mottern is the coordinator of Veterans for Peace Drones Watch.

Nick Mottern 12:43 PM (28 minutes ago)
5-13-17
Hi Dick:

I wish I could be there to see the play tomorrow.

Laura Shatkus seems to be a concerned person. She acknowledges that she is new to the issue of drone war. In her description of the play she says it is about a woman doing "isolated work defending the country." One can argue, as we have in the C-130 ad, that the woman pilot in "Grounded" is not, in fact, "defending the country" but, instead, advancing the interests of corporate investors, advancing the empire.

The story of "Grounded" is quite clearly about a person being driven over the edge by doing "work" that is soul-destroying. The work is the stalking and murder of people who may or may not have criminal intent, people who have never been to court and never will go to court, and those who are unfortunate enough to be with them at the moment of attack. This stalking and killing and the drone technology that enables it is the work of enforcement, and the very nature and purpose of the work is what is driving the woman "pilot" crazy.

It is quite encouraging that the art show "Seeing Now" at the 21c Museum Hotel, where "Grounded" is being performed, does address the issue of empire. Alice Gray Stites, the curator of the Museum has written a very interesting, insightful statement about "Seeing Now", and I would love to see this show too.

https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/museum/exhibit/seeing-now/

You've got some very thoughtful, courageous people in your neighborhood.
Thank you very much for keeping me in touch with what is happening.

**EYE IN THE SKY** film was shown Wednesday, July 20, 2016, 7pm, at OMNI. A commercial, feature film about drone warfare starring Helen Mirren as another woman pilot. Some evaluative questions leading to action after seeing the film: How accurate is the film? How does the film help to explain the general public acceptance of drone warfare and the “war on/of terror”? What should be our next possible action to tell people about drones?

**NEW YORK TIMES REVIEW**


Review: ‘Eye in the Sky,’ Drone Precision vs. Human Failings

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN** MARCH 10, 2016

**EYE IN THE SKY**

NYT Critic’s Pick Directed by Gavin Hood

1h 42m

Continue reading the main story

Helen Mirren in “Eye in the Sky.” Credit Keith Bernstein/Bleecker Street

An alternative title to “Eye in the Sky,” a riveting thriller about drone warfare and its perils, might be “Passing the Buck.” When urgent life-or-death decisions are required in a race against time to kill terrorists preparing a suicide attack, officials, wary of being held responsible for civilian casualties, repeatedly “refer up” to higher authorities for final approval.

That means securing an official go-ahead to deploy a Hellfire missile on a house in a crowded neighborhood in Nairobi, Kenya, where terrorists are meeting. But the British foreign secretary is at an arms trade fair in Singapore and the American secretary of state is attending a table tennis tournament in Beijing. How inconvenient! Meanwhile, the military, champing at the bit to unleash its firepower before the terrorists disperse, are increasingly frustrated.

“Eye in the Sky,” directed by **Gavin Hood** (“Tsotsi”) from a screenplay by Guy Hibbert (“Five Minutes of Heaven”), is a grim, suspenseful farce in which unpredictable human behavior repeatedly threatens an operation of astounding technological sophistication. Like many films of its type, it doesn’t dwell on geopolitical minutiae.
Helen Mirren, in one of her fiercest screen performances, plays Col. Katherine Powell, the chilly officer in charge of Egret, an operation to capture a radicalized English woman meeting with Shabab terrorists at the house in Nairobi. Colonel Powell has been pursuing her for years. But as the moment of capture arrives, Colonel Powell’s plans abruptly change when a cyborg beetle, a small whirring surveillance device, reveals two inhabitants strapping on explosives for a suicide mission.

The metallic spy, the movie’s creepiest element, reinforces the Orwellian notion that nowadays there are no hiding places if the powers-that-be are out to get you. The characters’ robotic techno argot, intended to convey military expertise while camouflaging human element, is equally Orwellian.

Colonel Powell quickly secures permission from her superior, Lt. Gen. Frank Benson (Alan Rickman), to upgrade the order from “capture” to “kill.” Those orders are relayed to Steve Watts (Aaron Paul), a drone pilot in Las Vegas poised to launch the air-to-surface missile. But unforeseen interruptions keep delaying the attack.

General Benson is Mr. Rickman’s final screen performance, and it is a great one, suffused with a dyspeptic world-weary understanding of war and human nature. Because his character is observed early in the movie buying a doll for a child, he is not unsympathetic so much as profoundly sad. Ms. Mirren has rarely been icier, and her powerful, scary performance doesn’t strive to make her character likable.

“Eye in the Sky” covers many of the same issues addressed in “Good Kill,” Andrew Niccol’s underrated critique of American drone strikes in Afghanistan, released last year. At what point does warfare by remote control become an
impersonal video game in which the human element is overlooked in the pursuit of a so-called “good kill”? In that movie, Ethan Hawke played a drone operator in Las Vegas increasingly sickened by having to deploy missiles that killed women and children. The movie reserved special contempt for the Central Intelligence Agency, whose attitude toward collateral damage was portrayed as one of indifference. Mr. Paul’s pilot, like Mr. Hawke’s in “Good Kill,” is the farthest thing from a blasé videogamer eager to set off an explosion. At moments, he seems near tears.

Sharper, better made and better acted, “Eye in the Sky,” doesn’t present as overtly critical a view of drone warfare. The military officers take their work seriously and fret over every detail as they try to estimate the number of casualties for various scenarios.

The movie still makes very clear the contrast between military personnel who want to discharge their duties as efficiently as possible, and their more cautious overseers who calculate the chances that the attacks could spur a diplomatic crisis, or worse.

As in “Good Kill,” civilians keep intruding into the line of sight at the last second. Moments before the Nairobi attack is to begin, a spunky little girl (Aisha Takow) selling bread posts herself opposite the terrorists’ house, and nothing can be done until she leaves. A Somali undercover agent (Barkhad Abdi, from “Captain Phillips”) is dispatched to buy up her loaves, but that assignment is interrupted.

An assistant of Colonel Powell is strongly pressured to estimate the chances of the girl’s being killed as less than 50 percent, in which case Colonel Powell can give the order to proceed. Another film might have found black comedy in the continuing “risk assessment” that accompanies each step of the operation. But “Eye in the Sky” allows the story’s absurdist elements to speak for themselves.
“Eye in the Sky” is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for violent images and strong language. Running time: 1 hour 42 minutes.

NYT Critic’s Pick

- **Director** Gavin Hood  **Writer** Guy Hibbert
- **Stars** Helen Mirren, Aaron Paul, Alan Rickman, Barkhad Abdi, Jeremy Northam

Rotten Tomatoes Critics Consensus: Thought-provoking, timely, and anchored by a strong performance from Ethan Hawke, *Good Kill* is a modern war movie with a troubled conscience.

**GOOD KILL VIDEOS**
Good Kill: Trailer 1

**GOOD KILL PHOTOS**

**MOVIE INFO**
In the shadowy world of drone warfare, combat unfolds like a video game-only with real lives at stake. After six tours of duty, Air Force pilot Tom Egan (Ethan Hawke) yearns to get back into the cockpit of a real plane, but he now fights the Taliban from an air-conditioned box in the Las Vegas desert. When he and his crew start taking orders directly from the CIA, and the stakes are raised, Egan's nerves-and his relationship with his wife (Mad Men's January Jones)-begin to unravel. Revealing the psychological toll drone pilots endure as they are forced to witness the aftermath of their fight against insurgents, Andrew Niccol (Gattaca, Lord of War) directs this riveting insider's view of 21st-century warfare, in which operatives target enemies from half a world away. (C) IFC Films.  **Rating:** R (for violent content including a rape, language, and some sexuality).  **Directed By:** Andrew Niccol.  **Written By:** Andrew Niccol.  2015.  103 min.

**INTERVIEW**

Andrew Niccol on his new drone-warfare drama *Good Kill*

By Sam Fragoso  @SamFragoso
Over the past two decades, Andrew Niccol has written and directed six feature films. None of them revolve around a superhero, and none is a sequel, spin-off, or reboot. For better or worse, the New Zealand-born writer-director has yet to make a movie he hasn’t wanted to make. From genetics (Gattaca) to immortality (In Time) to colonization (The Host), his work consistently roots heady topics in dystopian visions of the future. Perhaps it’s this tendency to look forward that makes Good Kill such a jarring transition back to reality.

The film focuses on Major Thomas Egan (Ethan Hawke), a celebrated Air Force pilot who’s been reassigned to drone duty. Now back home with a family eager to have him away from physical combat, Egan grows discontent and despondent. Aside from the precarious ethics of the position, the man doesn’t see drone piloting as a satisfying substitute for what he loved to do. His wings have been clipped.

We spoke with Niccol about the bizarre lives of drone operators, filmmaking as a drug, and why he’s never watched a single one of his own movies.

The A.V. Club: A line in your script reads, “War is not a first-person shooter.” Are you skeptical of what we’ve done, and continue to do, in the Middle East?

Andrew Niccol: That’s what Bruce Greenwood’s character says. I’m just really trying to tell it like it is, warts and all. And you know, it’s all factual—I didn’t make anything up. When Bruce Greenwood was ordering more drones and jets, that was a fact. That’s why I was drawn to the whole thing. Ethan Hawke’s character—there’s going to be more like him. I think we’re going to fight more remote wars.

AVC: He’s a character who has a certain nostalgia for a bygone era of warfare.
AN: When we were thinking about his backstory, we imagined that he saw *Top Gun* as a kid. And he wanted to become [a top gun], and he did, and now he’s ripped out of a cockpit. A lot of the movie from his point of view is about the death of flying. He’s grieving that loss. Even the drones depicted in the movie are antiquated now. They’ve got new drones that can take off and land from an aircraft carrier.

AVC: And did you ever want to be a top gun?

AN: My father was in the Air Force, so it sort of touched me.

AVC: What sources did you use for your research?

AN: Well, there’s no strike that takes place in the movie that’s not well documented, but Ethan’s character is a composite character, and I used two ex drone pilots quite heavily to authenticate what I was doing. So they were on the set the whole time, and they were teaching Ethan and Zoë [Kravitz] how to fly from 7,000 miles away, how to say and do the right things.

AVC: And these two ex-pilots, did they have fond memories? Or were they, as in the film, upset and bitter?

AN: They weren’t exactly bitter, but there’s a lot of burnouts in drone programs—not that they’re allowed to call it a drone program. They call it “UAVs” [unmanned aerial vehicle]. The problem is, we would ask them about, "Is it like playing a video game?" And they would be like, "Yeah, it would be like playing the most boring video game of all time." There’s a lot of monotony to it. The way it’s depicted in the movie, they would watch a compound for a month, waiting for a so-called bad guy to show up. It’s monotony punctuated by the most horrific action and then it’s back to the monotony.
**AVC:** “Monotony punctuated by the most horrific action” may not be a video game people would want to play.

**AN:** Yeah, well there’s something that I didn’t put in the movie because I thought it might be too outrageous: Some of the younger drone pilots would work a 12-hour shift with a joystick, fight the Taliban in Afghanistan, and they would go to their apartment after on the Vegas strip and play video games. I realized I couldn’t put that in the movie because they’d say that’s going too far. I did put a console in his son’s hands, but after they said that, I was like, “How do you possibly separate that and how does that not desensitize you to what you’re doing?”

**AVC:** Did you say this aloud?

**AN:** I said it silently to myself. I’m not here to pass any kind of judgment, I’m just trying to shed some light on it, because for me, making the movie, I was educating myself at the same time.

Mostly, I come at it from Ethan’s point of view, and all the characters have a slightly different take on what’s going on. But if I’m closest to anybody it would have to be Bruce Greenwood’s character, because he’s heavily conflicted. He says toward the end of the movie—and I have no answer for his question—“If we stopped killing them, do we think for a second they’d stop killing us?” And so can we declare victory and go home? Because if and when we ever pull the troops out of Afghanistan—which, by the way, is called America’s longest war, since you’ve been there for 14 years—I don’t imagine for a second that the drones are going home. So how are we going to police that part of the world?

**AVC:** It’s the longest war that very few people care about in this country.

**AN:** It’s been going since 9/11. I was on my way from L.A. to New York that day when my flight got canceled. I’m not a soldier or anything. I’m a filmmaker, not a policy maker, I’m not
running for anything. It was such a brutal attack. On the flip side, it’s been 14 years, when is it going to be overkill? It’s actually why I set the film in 2010, during the greatest escalation in drone strikes. We were coming up with all of these words like “proportionality” and “preemptive self-defense,” which basically means, “I think you’re gonna kill me so I’ll kill you.” We’ll say anything to avoid saying “killing people.” Orwell would be spinning in his grave the way we say we’re going to prosecute a target or neutralize a threat. And none of these words are words that I made up.

**AVC:** In a way, with *Lord Of War* and now *Good Kill*, you’ve been chronicling the longest war for over a decade.

**AN:** Yes, well, in *Lord Of War*, I would see a guy on the front page waving a Kalashnikov in the air, and I would think, “How did that get into his hands?” And when you start researching that, there’s such a fascinating underbelly to a war. And it was the same with *Good Kill* because it was a culmination of all these drone strikes, and I would wonder, “How the hell did that happen?” What are the mechanics of going about that? And when you find out that there is a base located outside of Vegas and you find out about these guys who are operating, you just think, “Whoa, it’s a new type of war, it’s a new generation of soldier.” How are they going to cope with going to war at home? A lot of people have said to me, “Andrew, why the hell did you set it outside of Vegas?” And, of course, I didn’t, the U.S. military did. And for very good reason, because the terrain around Las Vegas is very much like Afghanistan. And that’s where you train. And that’s where you basically practice flying around those mountains, and then you pick it up the next day and fly it over Afghanistan.

**AVC:** For Hawke’s character, who often exhibits addictive behavior, Vegas seems like an apt setting.

**AN:** Flying was his drug of choice. That’s why he got into it. And that’s what he says in that scene in the casino—he feels like a coward. And there was an interesting thing when they
were about to issue a medal for drone operators and they had to rescind it. They never awarded it in the end because there was such an outcry from other branches of the military, because they said, “Medals are for valor and acts of courage.” But then what kind of message did that send to the operators? It said to them, “Okay, you are making mortal decisions, life and death decisions, but it’s not worthy of recognition.”


NATIONAL BIRD DOCUMENTARY

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MAY 1, 10 PM NATIONAL BIRD

- BY SONIA KENNEBECK | IN WAR & MILITARY
Premiered May 1, 2017

FULL FILM

PREVIEW

CLIP
About the Film

*National Bird* follows the dramatic journey of **three whistleblowers** determined to break the silence around one of the most controversial issues of our time: the secret U.S. drone war, which has been waged globally for more than a decade. The film, executive produced by Errol Morris and Wim Wenders, gives rare insight into the program through the eyes of veterans and survivors, to explore the complexities of drone warfare from a human perspective.

**MORE**

Do you think the results/benefits of the US military’s secret drone program are worth the human costs both at home and abroad? Did learning about the human faces asked to pilot drones change your perspective on using drones in war?

**COMMENTS** 25
Sonia Kennebeck talks about the risks and challenges in making a film about the drone program and PTSD.

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Learn more about the different types of drones, from military UAVs to private camera quadcopters, and all the different issues inherent to each.

BLOG
A DRONE BY ANY OTHER NAME: THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DRONES

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Film, *National Bird* by Sonia Kennebeck on 3 Whistleblowers (coming this fall)

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Presidential Campaign

Support for Drones: Clinton Yes and Sanders Qualified Yes

END DRONE WAR/ASSASSINATION WATCH
NEWSLETTER #20, MAY 18, 2017

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