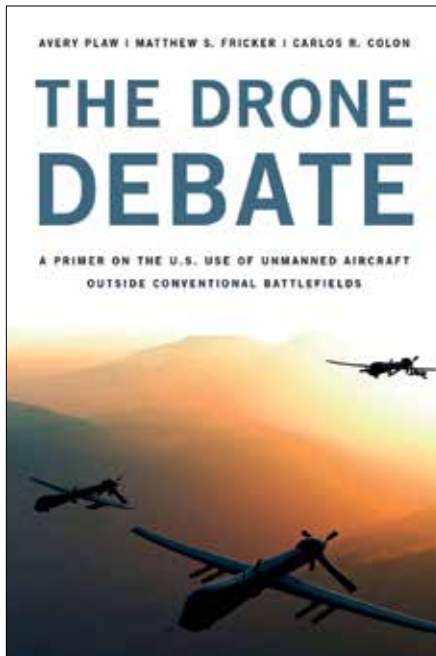


should elicit robust conversations, deeper analysis, and decisive actions. I recommend this book to foreign policy analysts, policy wonks, military personnel, and anyone interested in foreign affairs. Mara Karlin illuminates a problem that will no doubt bedevil the United States for decades—her insights are both enlightening and frightening. JFQ

John L. Hewitt III is the Command Executive Officer of the 86th Training Division, Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.



The Drone Debate: A Primer on the U.S. Use of Unmanned Aircraft Outside of Conventional Battlefields

By Avery Plaw, Matthew S. Fricker, and Carlos R. Colon
Rowman & Littlefield, 2015
\$38.00 354 pp.
ISBN: 978-1442230590

Reviewed by Matthew Mueller

Since the first use of a drone strike outside a conventional battlefield in November 2002, the United States is credibly reported to have carried out at least 500 covert strikes in

Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, killing around 3,500 people, including civilians. Indeed, drones became the poster child for U.S. counterterrorism operations under the administration of President Barack Obama and have generated growing attention and controversy. The authors of this book sought to develop a primer that summarized the debate on several key issues related to drones. It is important to note, as the authors do at the outset, that this book focuses only on the use of drones *outside* of conventional battlefields and for this reason excludes operations conducted by the United States in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. While *The Drone Debate* covers a wide range of material, it does so with exceptional clarity and objective analysis that allow readers to come to their own conclusions surrounding the important questions drones raise.

The book proceeds through the different dimensions of the debate, beginning with a concise overview of the history of drone operations. This sets up the rest of the book by providing readers with the historical development of drones since the end of World War II until today, as well as an understanding of the different open-source databases that catalog drone strike casualties. Regardless of which database is being considered, the evidence shows that as drone technology has evolved, civilian casualties have decreased, suggesting that their use is becoming more discriminating due to better technology and/or stricter targeting guidelines. The authors' careful attention given to explaining the differences among the four main open-source drone strike casualty databases (New America, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Long War Journal, and the Center for the Study of Targeted Killing) is commendable. While similar, each database uses its own coding that produces different results; the authors have provided readers an easily digestible explanation of the differences. Picking up from this, the authors conduct an exceptional tour de force through the strategic, legal, ethical, and political issues surrounding the use of drones in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

The authors also provide a good presentation of the debate surrounding the efficacy of drone strikes by looking at issues surrounding their precision and whether drone strikes are indeed an effective strategy for combating terrorism. Many critics have asserted that the use of drone strikes has had a paradoxical effect on al Qaeda; while these strikes have succeeded in removing mid- to senior-level leaders, they have also opened the opportunity for younger, more radical leaders to take their places. The occurrence of civilian casualties has only invigorated al Qaeda's recruitment efforts. In response, defenders of the drone program have argued that the number of civilian casualties is inflated and that the operational and psychological impact of drone strikes on al Qaeda leadership has had a significantly disruptive effect on the group's operations. The authors conclude that, while there are many forceful arguments on both sides, there is not a single knock-out argument for either.

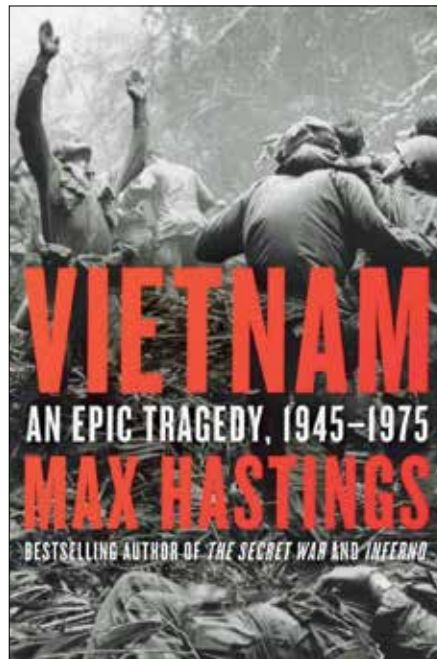
The legality and ethics of using drones outside of conventional battlefields are hotly debated. The authors sketch an overview of the legal issues present under both U.S. domestic law and international law. The third chapter is admittedly a slightly difficult chapter to read due to the debate surrounding the conflict classification between the United States and al Qaeda and affiliated forces. The authors do their best to walk through the application of the international law of self-defense and international humanitarian law, but the lurking issue of what type of conflict (international armed conflict, noninternational armed conflict, or—as some in the literature base on conflict classification have argued—transnational armed conflict) is at hand is evident in any discussion of the legality of drones strikes under international law. In contrast, the fourth chapter provides an excellent overview of the different ethical issues surrounding drones, including the application of Just War Theory, the effect on military virtues, the question of whether drones will increase the propensity for armed conflict, and the ethics of the use of fully autonomous weapon systems.

The discussion on political implications is thought to be self-explanatory: there is a fairly firm domestic political base in the United States for using drones to strike suspected terrorists abroad. While aggregate data generally show the majority of Americans support the use of drone strikes against suspected terrorists, the authors' presentation of opinion data for specific segments of the population presents a more nuanced picture. The poll data presented in the case study show that support in the United States is not as robust as advocates claim. The inclusion of case studies in each chapter that offer deeper dives into aspects of the debate surrounding drones is one of the book's fundamental strengths. The chapters themselves cover all of the key points, and the case studies allow the chapters to engage with the most important issues in greater depth.

The final chapter is the most interesting. Addressing the emerging issue of drone proliferation, the authors walk through the differing thoughts on the effects that diffusion of drone technology will have. They examine the unconfirmed use of a drone by Hizballah on September 21, 2014, to target al-Nusra Front fighters in Syria. This raises the question as to what happens when states lose the monopoly of this technology.

By highlighting the key arguments on both sides of the debate about drones, the authors present each side as equally as possible. The book touches on the right issues; however, those who are looking for fresh arguments regarding drones should look elsewhere. The authors' balance and breadth make this book ideal for classroom use. While the book does not offer anything original to the growing literature on drone use, it does serve as an effective teaching tool for those seeking to learn about the issues surrounding drone use outside conventional battlefields. JFQ

Matthew Mueller wrote this review as a graduate student in the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He now works at the Institute for the Study of War.



Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945–1975

By Max Hastings
Harper Collins, 2018
\$37.50 896 pp.
ISBN: 978-0062405661

Reviewed by Williamson Murray

Max Hastings has had a spectacular career as a historian, journalist, and newspaper editor. He has now turned his attention to writing a history of the Vietnam War, from its inception with French colonial rule to the final denouement in spring 1975. The word *tragic* is all too often overused, but in this case, Hastings is correct to term the tale that he covers a long and epic tragedy. As with so many of his other books, he discusses with penetrating insight the arrogance and abysmal political and military leadership of the war at the highest levels. But in the end, it was those soldiers and civilians at the lowest levels who suffered the most from the mistakes, faulty assumptions, and carelessness of their supposed betters.

What makes Hastings such an extraordinary historian is the fact that he brings his journalist sense to sniff out the stories

and performance of those who participated in discussions and decisionmaking at the highest levels. This quality also makes him a wonderful interviewer of the living, whether they are political leaders, military leaders, or common soldiers. It also provides him the ability to bring to life the dry political and military records of the past as well as the oral interviews that the American military conducted during and after the war. Moreover, Hastings, having covered political and military leaders over the past five decades, has a real sense of what drives them. For the most part, the leadership of the French, Americans, and Vietnamese—southern as well as northern—was worse than abysmal; they made a troubled and difficult situation much worse than it ought to have been.

On the French side, military leaders started the war with an unjustified contempt for the Vietnamese. The army they brought to Southeast Asia consisted of professional French soldiers, the hodgepodge of nationalities who make up the French Foreign Legion, and colonial troops drawn from Algeria, Morocco, and francophone Africa. None had the slightest interest in providing an alternative to the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh and his supposedly amateur general Vo Nguyen Giap, who appears as one of the few senior military leaders who possessed a realistic sense of the political and military equations in the war. The sorry French effort eventually collapsed at Dien Bien Phu in spring 1954, when French generals committed some of their best troops to a hopeless fight and then spent the months of March, April, and May quarreling among themselves and begging the Americans for aid as their troops died. On the other side, Giap provided generalship that was both sophisticated and ruthless.

As a result, the French abandoned their colonies in Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) in 1954, while the Americans thought they had saved at least a portion of Vietnam from communist evils with the Geneva Peace Accords. In fact, they had not saved anything—they only prolonged the agony for the Vietnamese and eventually a