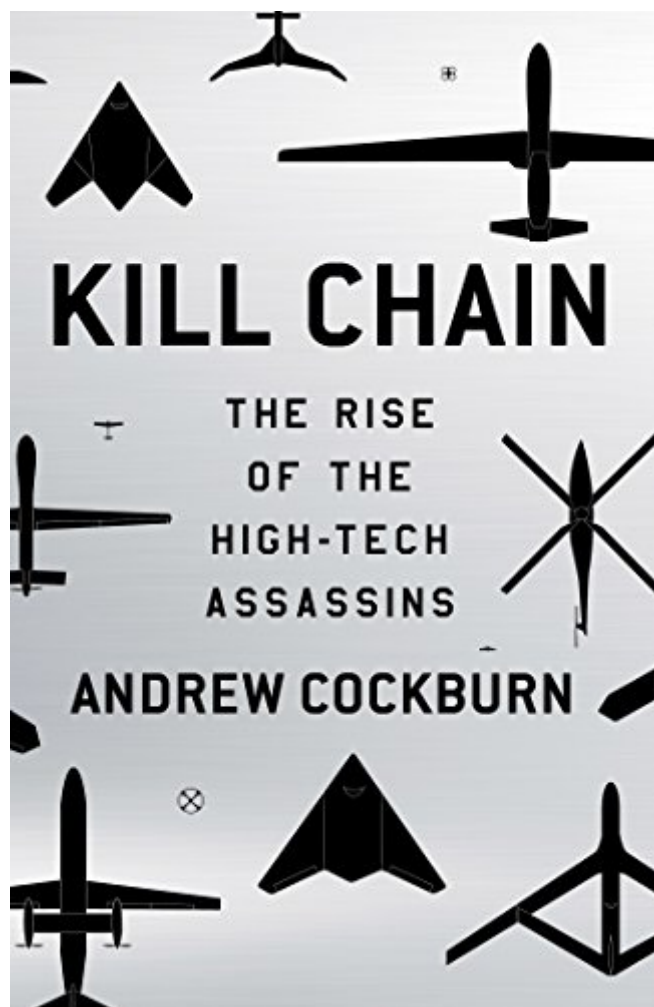


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Kill Chain: The Rise Of The High-Tech Assassins



Synopsis

An essential and page-turning narrative on the history of drone warfare by the acclaimed author of Rumsfeld, exploring how this practice emerged, who made it happen, and the real consequences of targeted killing. Assassination by drone is a subject of deep and enduring fascination. Yet few understand how and why this has become our principal way of waging war. Kill Chain uncovers the real and extraordinary story; its origins in long-buried secret programs, the breakthroughs that made UAV operations possible, the ways in which the technology works and, despite official claims, does not work. Taking the reader inside the well-guarded world of national security, the book reveals the powerful interests - military, CIA and corporate - that have led the drive to kill individuals by remote control. Most importantly of all, the book describes what has really happened when the theories underpinning the strategy -- and the multi-billion dollar contracts they spawn -- have been put to the test. Drawing on sources deep in the military and intelligence establishments, Andrew Cockburn's Kill Chain unveils the true effects, as demonstrated by bloody experience, of assassination warfare, a revelation that readers will find surprising as well as shocking.

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Customer Reviews

Caveat emptor: the author of this book is a friend of thirty-five years, so I am biased, proudly so in this case. While I know what Cockburn can do, I must admit I was literally blown away by this book. And I am no stranger to this subject, having worked as an engineer-analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the Pentagon for 28 years. What makes Cockburn's book so powerful, in my opinion, is not only his sourcing and detail (which are amazing), but the fact that he has written a book that is at once overwhelming in terms of information, yet so well written, it is accessible to the general reader. It is a page turner. He dissects the rise of drone warfare and examines its conduct in excruciating detail from the point of view of the targeteers in the CIA and the White House, to the controllers in front of video screens, to the effects on the people at the receiving end of the attack. In so doing, he shows how the ideology of drone warfare is really old wine in a new bottle: it is a natural evolution of (1) the flawed ideas underpinning the misguided theory of strategic bombing in WWII; (2) the disastrous all-knowing, all-seeing electronic battlefield (starting with McNamara's electronic line of Vietnam); and (3) the naive targeting theories underpinning the drug war and the theory of precision targeted sanctions. At the roots of all these theories is an unchanging three-part set of propositions woven together in the 1930s by evangelical instructors in the Army Air Corps Tactical School, who believed in the ideological theory of victory thru airpower alone. They constructed a seductive tautological argument, based on the fallacious assumptions of extensive a priori knowledge coupled to perfect intelligence.

I have wondered why Americans are or seem to be unaware of just how militaristic a nation we have become, even as we are encouraged to celebrate those who, as the saying has it, "serve to keep us free." Our warriors appear everywhere but, strangely, they are not seen as "warriors." Rather, they are seen almost as "civil servants," whom we are expected to "thank for [their] service." In the midst of so much warfare, this is quite an interesting state of affairs. Andrew Cockburn's "Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins" can help explain this phenomenon. The shape of warfare, or at least the shape of warfare as described by the current establishment, has changed. It is or it no longer seems to be about "guts and glory," and it can even seem to be almost "bloodless." The "warrior" almost disappears from our wars as the way we wage war becomes more and more "technological." Where we once had soldiers fighting in units and as units, we now have "special forces" conducting "raids" in the dead of night, not taking on enemy forces organized as units but rather finding and killing "high value targets," as the jargon has it. Sometimes and increasingly, we don't even need to confront these "targets" directly, as we can or think we can take them out with

drones so our "killers" are thousands of miles away from those being killed. It is hard, in these circumstances, to think of these people as either "soldiers" or "killers." The great plus of Cockburn's book is that it reminds us that this is all more illusion than reality.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the continuing development of technology for war fighting. To be honest, I began this book with the idea that drones are a highly efficient way of dealing destruction without endangering U S troops. I was an infantry platoon leader in Vietnam, so I was surprised to find the book beginning with US efforts to stop the flow of North Vietnamese soldiers and equipment down the Ho Chi Minh Trail using sensors of various kinds. The NVA took about two weeks to figure out how to use this technology to their advantage simply by faking activity and tricking the urine smelling devices into making us think there was real activity and expending thousands of dollars destroying ... well ... nothing. This was a great way to start this book. We, or our leaders and generals, get an idea in mind and never let it go - and never learn from it if it doesn't work. Two concepts may be helpful: 1) drone cameras and sensors are not as good as human senses - Cockburn compares electronic sensors to looking at the world through a soda straw because you cannot tell what else is happening. Our eyes can take in useful info that a drone cannot. One horrifying example was of a B1 Bomber attacking a gathering because from several miles above even the weapons officer (who has no window but relies 100% on computers) detected the gathering. Two minutes before this attack, two A10 Warthog pilots, flying just above the ground with full visibility, had refused to attack the gathering because they could see that it was, in fact, a wedding party and that there were several children present. The children, along with a number of adults, were killed.

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